

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna: A Harbinger of Growth for Rural India

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Abstract – The development process in India has overlooked the marginalised and far-flung communities of the country. Access to good all-weather roads is recognised as an essential feature of any inclusive development strategy. Though governments at state and central level recognise the need to include these communities and habitats within the aegis of encompassing growth process, the state governments have been stuck with paucity of funds to undertake such developmental initiatives. The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched with the aim of providing good all-weather roads to the areas lacking such roads. The following article discusses the role of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna as a conveyor of growth and development. Secondary sources of data such as government reports and published material have been used in this article.

Keywords – Infrastructure, Road, Government, Connectivity, Employment, Market.

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INTRODUCTION

Good connectivity is an essential requirement for developing any region and its people. Even after a passage of more than fifty years many hamlets India could not enjoy the fruits of development as they remained isolated from other places. Recognising the much-overlooked need for rural connectivity, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) is an ambitious scheme rolled out in 2000. This plan aimed to provide good all-weather roads between hitherto unconnected villages with others that already had all-weather roads. Lack of roads is inimical to social and economic development by curtailing opportunities for education, work, higher incomes, medical benefits and overall social interactions. Though the scheme was initially launched as a fully centrally sponsored scheme, in November 2015, following the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission the scheme was rationalised with centre and states sharing 60% and 40% of costs respectively. The essential feature of PMGSY was to provide year around usable roads for nearly 1.7 lakh small settlements.

Aims of PMGSY:

The main aim of the scheme is to provide connectivity to all villages and areas not having good connectivity. The scheme had a timeframe where the aim was to connect any area with a population of 1000 persons and above by 2003 and by 2007 to connect all clusters with a population of 500 and above persons with better roads. In case of remote areas it was aimed to join hilly, tribal and desert

areas villages with a population of 500 persons by 2003 and by 2007 to take it up to habitations with 250 persons or more.

An important and novel aspect of this scheme is the recognition of cluster of habitation as unit for decision-making instead of village, taluka or block.

Significance of PMGSY

The PMGSY scheme for rural road connectivity holds much importance for the socio-economic development of many underdeveloped parts of the country.

Good roads are important as infrastructure is a key criteria for rural development in order to enhance access to social and economic services. This will increase farm income and employment opportunities along with poverty alleviation.

Since most farm products are perishable in nature, getting them to markets at the earliest is necessary. Good, dependable roads help in the quick movement of perishable products. They provide easy and fast connectivity between the farms and market centres helping raise farmers' earnings. This is also a shot in the arm for the horticultural sector. PMGSY has made it possible for producers of perishable goods to reach out to more customers than was possible earlier.

This scheme targets the the lacuna created due to inability of state governments to provide roads to

backward and remote areas and now develop these areas.

The rural population is often forced to lose out on educational opportunities as well as better employment prospects due to logistical and travelling problems. It also is unable to enjoy the benefits of various welfare schemes of the government, health services schools, colleges etc due to the same reason. Extension of roads in to the hinterland has opened up many opportunities for these areas.

An important aspect of PMGSY is the ease generated for movement of functionaries like doctors, teachers, and agriculture extension workers to move to the villages to supply their services. Earlier these personnel did not like to leave the comfort of towns and cities and go work in the far-flung villages. But easy accessibility has encouraged them to move to rural areas which has contributed to prosperity and general well-being of the people.

Again, development of rural areas will be helpful for the industries as it allows for economies of scale and sustainable employment. The development of roads help companies open and stock up rural retail stores. A large proportion of the population resides in rural areas in India, so the opening up of the rural market is necessary for growth of industrial sector. Development of roads has helped these companies and has provided the rural population with many more options.

Phases of PMGSY

The development of PMGSY has been phase-wise in the country with specific targets for each phase. The first phase, launched in December 2000 aimed to target 1,35,436 habitations or clusters. A total of 3.68 lakh km of existing rural roads were to be upgraded to give clear market access from farms.

The PMGSY-Phase 2 started in 2013 aimed the upgradation of 50,000 km of existing rural roads. While Phase 1 was simultaneously continued, Phase 2 concentrated on the improvement of existing roads to improve rural infrastructure. Another important feature was the introduction of cost sharing between the centre and the states and union territories in the ratio of 60:40.

Achievements of PMGSY

The PMGSY covered more than 1 lakh 70 thousand habitations in the initial stage. Of these, more than 1 lakh 10 thousand or 64% of these eligible habitations actually have roads by 2016, along with projects being cleared for another 30 thousand. This can be considered a reasonable achievement.

More than 4.6 lakh km of roads have been constructed under PMGSY. This includes up

gradation of 1.6 lakh km of existing roads at the cost of Rs 1.41 lakh crore as on January 2016. An upside of central funding was that the states suffering from least connectivity were the ones that recorded the highest road construction. As seen from table 1, the less developed states were able to increase road construction which has helped these states in accelerating the growth process as a result.

Table 1: Top performing states and length of road construction under PMGSY

State	Road construction
Madhya Pradesh	63,548 km
Rajasthan	58,462 km
Uttar Pradesh	45,905 km
Bihar	35,510 km
Odisha	35,019 km

Source: National Rural Roads Development Agency, Annual Report 2015-16

The construction of road has led to improvement in productivity. Instead of isolated hamlets, with availability of roads, these get connected to larger villages creating a bigger market base with more consumers who can be addressed and served more easily than was possible when they were separated by huge distances. This provides companies with economies of scale, aides specialisation and helps in flourishing of micro-enterprises.

It has helped incorporate many islands into mainland. Places that were accessible for only a few months in a year are now integrated with the closest villages with road and due to this the villagers of that area has benefitted drastically in all aspects.

Many experts regard PMGSY as a better scheme than other employment generation schemes like MNREGA. It has been noted that improved accessibility has had more poverty reducing impact as it has been better implemented. The states Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh together accounted for nearly 45% of the total spending on PMGSY in 2014-15, whereas their corresponding combined share in MGNREGA expenditure was just 25%. The different in spending implies that compared to employment generation schemes the road construction scheme was more popularly implemented.

Challenges of PMGSY

Though the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna has exemplary objectives, there are a number of hurdles in its wake. The development of rural areas will be better achieved if the villages have a say in their own development process. But in case of PMGSY, the plans are made at the central and

state level with very few inputs from the villagers. This has often led to discontent and resentment among the villagers against top-heavy planning. Government at every level needs to coordinate for removing this.

Inadequate execution and contracting capacity is another hurdle within this scheme. Many projects have not been completed due to execution failures or faulty design. The failure of contractors to complete projects on time has led to cost escalation.

Less working season and difficult terrain particularly in Hill States prevent the appropriate execution of this project. Work can be carried out only for a few months before the rainy and winter season. This greatly hampers the working of the scheme. Also transport of construction machines and material which is not locally available is often difficult due to the terrain and it affects the work execution.

Security concerns particularly in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) areas are another problem. This is the major cause of backwardness of the naxalite areas. Even when plans are afoot to construct roads in these areas, agencies face a lot of difficulty in the insurgency prone areas.

Paucity of funds has affected the timely execution of scheme as work is often stopped due to non-payment of bills. With division of fund burden between centre and states work suffers when either agency fails to send the due amount on time. In absence of payments, contractors are forced to stop work till bills are cleared. This has also led to large amount of litigation.

Another issue is the unavailability of requisite land. In many areas, forest clearances is very difficult as these are very sensitive matter for tribal or native people as well as for environmentalist. Again, the villagers are often unwilling to give up their land for road construction leading to stoppage of work mid-way and is a source of litigation.

CONCLUSION

The Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojana is an important instrument which will help in the overall development of the country by reducing the gap of regional disparities. The initiative will help in the progress of neglected and under developed regions of the country and make them connected to the bigger areas for their development. Good connectivity amidst different clusters in and around villages and then their further connectivity with other rural and urban centres is a necessary condition for overall inclusive development process. The PMGSY addresses this very concern. However it is necessary to address the issues affecting the successful implementation of the scheme so that the backward and remote areas of the country can partake in the development process.

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