

Impact of Indian Rural Road Program on Rural Development

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Abstract:

Rural roads are key component of rural development. They affect the rural population in various ways. An estimated 35% of inhabited areas in the country are without all-weather roads. With 80% of the India's poor living in the rural areas, rural roads are significantly important. It eases the accessibility of the rural population to essential services like education and healthcare. These roads not only improve access to near by and far off labour market but also affects the agricultural productivity. Rural roads provide access to economic and social goods and services, with a fair chance of generating increased agricultural income and productive employment (both farm and non-farm) opportunities.

Key Words: Rural roads, Rural development, Social Impact, Agriculture, Rural transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Rural development is of significant importance in both the developed and the developing nations. It showcases comprehensive rural area development with target to aggrandize the quality of life for rural residents. It encompasses the growth of communities resources as well as their agricultural and related industries, cottage and village crafts, socioeconomic infrastructure, services and amenities. Rural development necessitates major social and economic change. To achieve the total development of the rural areas, the rural road development program plays a pivotal role in bridging the rural – urban divide. Access to basic amenities, employment possibilities are few benefits of the rural road program. The impact of the overall growth of an economy has far reaching effect at village level and the growth of villages can contribute to the growth of the economy.

Initiated in the year 2000, claiming ; “ poor road connectivity is the biggest hurdle in the faster rural development”, the Indian government's rural road development program, popularly known as Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) has since built 179736 roads with a network of 761811 kms. connecting over 156399 villages to date¹. Although the existing research is largely supportive of the claim: Rural road construction is associated with increase in farm and non-farm economic growth as well as poverty reduction but there are few challenges and adverse effects arising from the development also.

2. IMPORTANCE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

With 70% of the Indian population living in the rural area², rural development remains pivotal to the nations overall development. With one third of the rural population living below the poverty line and two third of the population engaged in agriculture or related activity for their living, rural development is critical for the overall growth of the country as well as the majority of the rural population.

In order to improve the quality of life in the rural regions of the country, the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, is majorly focusing on health, education, hygiene, housing and roads.

¹Official website of PMGSY

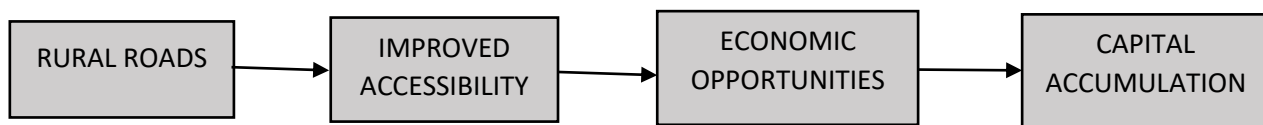
²Census of India 2011

To date the various rural development programs undertaken by the Government of India are as follows:

- Training to Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) – 1979
- Kutir Jyoti Yojana – 1988-89
- National Social Assistance Program (NSAP) – 1995
- Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) – 2000
- Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) – 2000
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan – 2000-2001
- Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) – 2001
- Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) – 2004
- National Rural Health Mission – 2005
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) – 2006
- Village Grain Bank Scheme – 2006
- AamAadmiBima Yojana – 2007
- Prime Minister Rural Development Fellows Scheme – 2011
- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana / National Rural Livelihood Mission (Aajeevika) – 2011
- Roshni – Skill Development Scheme for Tribals – 2013
- Swach Bharat Mission – 2014
- DeenDayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana – 2014
- SansadAadarsh Gram Yojana – 2014
- Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Grameen (PMAY-G) – 2016
- National Rurban Mission (NRuM) – 2016
- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan – 2018

3. IMPACT OF RURAL ROAD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:

Over the past 24 years, PMGSY has significantly impacted rural areas. The improved accessibility has initiated shift from farm to non-farm employment, even outside the habitation. PMGSY roads also improved the farm to market connectivity and also has substantial impact on capital accumulation both human and wealth, in rural India.



According to the World Bank Report published on the Impact Assessment of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (2021), the following are the major impacts of the scheme:

- Better transportation facilities provide the means to connect isolated rural areas to the market, crucial social and economic services for their personal and occupation related travels.
- Improved rural connectivity has given long term and sustained boost in the living standards of the rural people.
- Improved access to the school and health services. Studies have shown an average of extra 1 year of schooling at Primary level and a major 30% reduction in the home deliveries apart from accessibility to other health benefits.
- Availability of better housing, sanitation and drinking water.

Some other notable impacts of the improved connectivity of the rural areas can be listed as below:

- Capital Appreciation (Increase in Land value)
- Change in people's aspirations.
- Migration of labour to the near by cities, resulting in higher village wages of labour.
- Ease of availability of materials and items, ranging from food, drinks to the contemporary construction materials.
- Upgradation of housing style to the contemporary urban styles; which leads to another sensitive issue of villages losing their vernacular character.
- Land and resource exploitation. Example can be seen in village Kevadia (Origin of the holy river Kshipra), a village about 6 kms. from Indore city where the majority of fields have been excavated to supply the murram and aggregate to the construction industry of the city.



Satellite Imagery Showing Limited Mining of the fields in 2011

Source : Google Earth Pro



Satellite Imagery Showing Extensive Mining of the fields in 2024

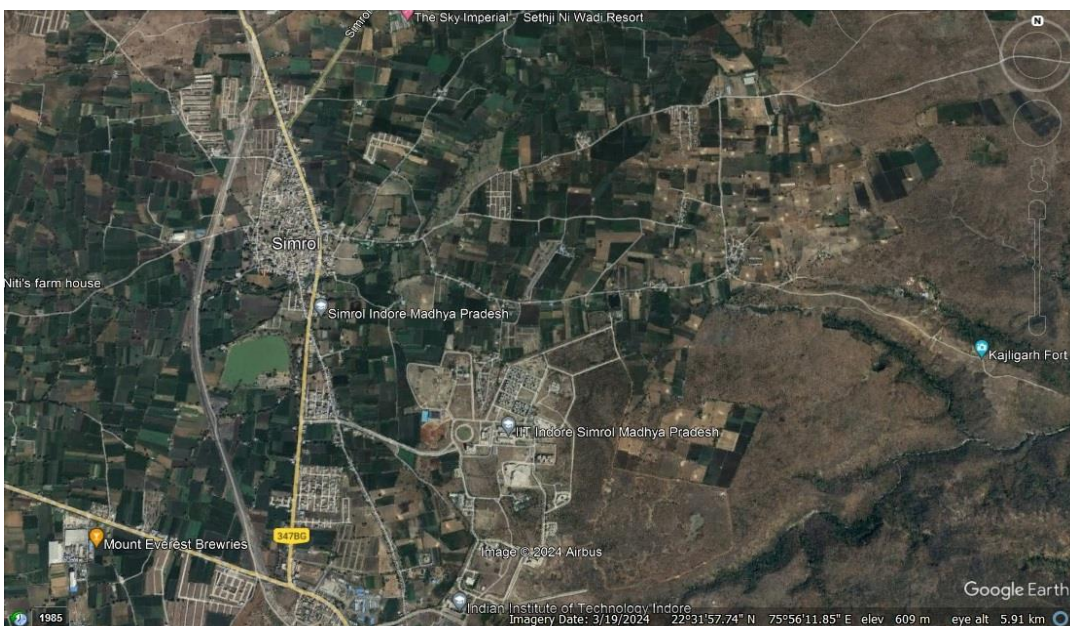
Source : Google Earth Pro

- Due to the increasing land prices and higher aspirations of the rural population near major cities, there is a significant decrease in the agricultural land to make way for the various residential, institutional and warehousing projects. Example can be seen at village Simrol, a village about 15 kms from Indore city. Over the past decade there is a considerable depletion of farming land to accommodate various residential projects and the new IIT campus of Indore.



Satellite imagery showing the village Simrol surrounded by fertile fields and dense forest near the valley in 2011

Source : Google Earth Pro



Satellite imagery showing the increase in expanse of the village, flanked by various residential projects and the IIT, Indore campus, in the year 2024

Source : Google Earth Pro

- Deforestation to compensate for the decrease in the agricultural or cultivated land.

- Increase in country side recreation spots.
- Village homestays have become a major tourism activity in the villages having preserved their vernacular character.
- Increase in migration of labour and youth for better education or job opportunities.

4. CONCLUSION:

Although the impacts of the rural road development scheme vary depending on the local economy and other geographical conditions, many positive effects of rural roads on income and poverty are visible due to increased connectivity. Not only the rural road program prompted children to stay in the school longer but also made availability of better health care facilities. But on the other hand, according to the statistical evidence, now agriculture is not the primary source of income / employment in the rural areas. As claimed, these roads have tremendous impact on economic opportunities in the rural areas but the main economic benefit of these rural roads may be the accessibility of new urban employment opportunities to the rural workers.

Rural roads offer stimulus to the socio-economic activities of the rural population leading to the evident development but there exists a lacuna in studies which link the impact of rural roads program to change of land use, cropping pattern and viability. Although the rural roads are proven poverty reducers but do not reduce poverty on their own. They catalyse the development process by providing access to better services and exposure.

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