

Relook at the BharatNet Project

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Telecom Secretary recently asked the states to utilise the Bharat Net project's rural broadband infrastructure.
- Notably, Bharat Net has largely failed to deliver on its objective, calling for redressal of the shortfalls.

\n

\n\n

How has the progress been?

\n\n

\n

- Seven years have passed since the National Optical Fibre Network (rechristened BharatNet) project was first envisaged.
- The objective was to connect over 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through high-speed broadband.
- Already, 1.15 lakh gram panchayats have been connected.
- The physical execution of the project is scheduled to be completed by March 2019.
- However, when it comes to actual connectivity and utilisation, BharatNet has achieved little.
- This is despite thousands of crores of taxpayers' money having already been spent.

\n

\n\n

What are the shortfalls?

\n\n

- \n
- The onus of preventive and corrective maintenance of the optical fibre portion connecting gram panchayats is with BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd).
 - The responsibility of remaining network elements lay with other agencies.
 - Bharat Broadband Nigam Ltd was the special purpose vehicle created to execute the project.
 - The lack of ownership by BSNL and inability of BBNL in ensuring timely project implementation has cost the nation a great deal.
 - Though a clear utilisation target has already been set, the actual utilisation on the ground is well less than 10% of the target.
 - Poor planning, lack of monitoring and co-ordination between the two organisations lead to ineffective implementation.
 - It points to the lack of professionalism on the part of BBNL and BSNL.
- \n

\n\n

Why is BharatNet crucial?

\n\n

- \n
- Indian users are among the top consumers globally when it comes to adopting digitisation and online platforms.
 - At the centre of this transition to a digital world is the availability of a reliable and affordable data network.
 - Private telecom companies, including Reliance Jio, have announced plans to connect over 1,100 cities with optical fibre, which will cater to the urban consumers.
 - But BharatNet is critical to ensure that rural India also benefit from the digital dividend.
 - Besides this, BharatNet project is expected to -
- \n

\n\n

- \n
- i. attract billions of dollars in investments
 - \n
 - ii. help train a million youth for new-age jobs
 - \n
 - iii. facilitate delivery of e-governance, e-health, e-education, e-banking and other such services
 - \n

\n\n

What is to be done?

\n\n

- \n
- The weak performance of the project calls for a complete overhaul of the BharatNet implementation machinery.
 - \n
 - Quick decisions are essential to fundamentally alter the direction of the project.
 - \n
 - State governments must be brought on board to ensure the project gets adequate support at the district and panchayat levels.
 - \n
 - Resources and energies would have to be mobilised for gram panchayats to be reached in the shortest possible time.
 - \n
 - The industry and government need to team up on projects aimed at bolstering communications infrastructure in the country.
 - \n
 - A thorough inquiry into the effectiveness and outcomes of the money already spent is also called for.
 - \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: BusinessLine

\n