**E-CONTENT**

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**Topic : DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

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**PREPARED BY : AMIT KUMAR**

**DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

The new communication technologies such as the Internet, ICT, mobile phones and satellites have radically transformed the concept and nature of development as well as communication. In today’s information societies, communication networks occupy a central place. The way citizens connect with each other depends on their access and use of these technologies. These technologies enable fast exchange of information and overcome time and space barriers and have immense potential for providing effective solutions to various problems.

Many countries have evolved technology-enabled systems to make development programmes more effective. Enabling real time information about projects technologies is leading to better monitoring of projects and decision making, disbursement of benefits and targeted deliveries of goods and services to the poor. The system of grievance redressal is leading to reduction in corruption and is making development both transparent and accountable. E-governance initiatives seek to provide essential services, such as providing drinking water, healthcare, power supply and civic amenities, to the citizens in ways that are simple, speedy and inclusive. Apart from being cheap and user-friendly the use of new technologies also offers varied opportunities for two-way communication to people to voice their ideas and access relevant information. Farmers get weather or market-related information on their mobile phones, ASHA workers get alerts about monitoring pregnant women’s health, beneficiaries receive SMS when money or entitlements are transferred in their accounts, data regarding government schemes on websites is helping minimise corruption.

These concepts are giving new directions to the very idea of development communication leading to empowerment of citizens. 31 Technology and Digital Divide Development Communication It is true that the digital divide separates the ‘digital haves and have-nots’. People with higher levels of education and prosperity are able to make better use of ICT and knowledge products than those who are less privileged. The divide works as a roadblock for use of technologies for removal of poverty and inequality.

The access to digital technology goes a long way in providing benefits to the users in terms of skills, knowledge, capabilities and consequently incomes, increases the divide further. Hence, one of the biggest challenges of development communication is to work towards enabling the digital have-nots to access ICT and digital services. Differences in the availability, access and use of these technologies pose several challenges. In India, with a large section of the population not being technology literate, users need training in basic computer use as well as skills to communicate effectively on the Internet. Gender and socio-cultural differences impede the availability and use of ICTs by several community groups. Several researchers have pointed out that how ICTs are embedded and utilised within specific local contexts and needs will determine their effectiveness as instruments of social change. Further, the new technologies are also seen to be dominated by vested interests and market-driven forces that are leading to hi-tech systems becoming tools of exclusion rather than inclusion. However, despite such limitations, ICTs can and do play a major role in development communication. Apart from being used for information dissemination, technologies also have the potential to support horizontal communication processes. Technologies such as IVR systems, Mobile apps, low power technologies used by community radio and participatory video are proving to be powerful instruments in promoting people’s participation and empowerment.