

* Study highlights online education woes

- Field study by Azim Premji University.
- "Myths of Online Education"
- In 5 states, → 26 districts
- Findings -
 - 60% of respondents enrolled in Govt. school had no access to online edu. due to
 - ↳ non-availability of smartphones
 - ↳ difficulty in using apps
 - Even worse for children with disabilities
 - 90% of parents of govt school students willing to send their children back to school.
 - Parents believe that online classes are not effective
 - Teachers too frustrated
 - ↳ no emotional connect
 - ↳ no meaningful assessment of learning
 - ↳ children unable to complete assignments

* Connecting more people

- Cabinet approved PM-WANI
- To enable public wifi data service through small retail data offices
 - ↳ just like long distance telephony was expanded through STD booths
- Aim: To connect a new wave of users
- Advantages
 - not just commercial & entertainment
 - but also education, telehealth & agri extension
 - cuts bureaucratic delays
 - eliminates licenses & fees
 - new income avenues
- TRAI outlined plan in 2017
 - ↳ noted 10% rise in net penetration led to a 1.4% ↑ in GDP.
- Public wifi
 - ↳ neglected as it was seen as competitor to data services of mobile tech firms

- Rural India

↳ low Internet penetration

↳ 27.57 subscribers per 100 population (2019)

↳ Public wifi → fastest means to achieve better penetration

↳ WANI system connects low revenue consumers

↳ opportunities for community org, libraries, edu. institutes, panchayats, small entrepreneurs

- Challenges -

- Robust service

- Protection of data integrity

- Transparency on commercial use of data

- security against cyber attacks

- Govt must ensure different players for hardware, software, apps & payment gateways to prevent monopolies

* Digital Technologies and Inequalities

— Impact of pandemic

- The novel coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies in India, even for essential services such as health and education, where access to them might be poor.
- Economic inequality has increased: people whose jobs and salaries are protected, face no economic fallout.
- Well-recognised channels of economic and social mobility — education and health — are getting rejigged in ways that make access more inequitable in an already unequal society.

— Growing inequality in access to education

- According to National Sample Survey data from 2017, only 6% rural households and 25% urban households have a computer.
- Access to Internet facilities is not universal either: 17% in rural areas and 42% in urban areas.
- Surveys by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Azim Premji Foundation, ASER and Oxfam suggest that between 27% and 60% could not access online classes for a range of reasons: lack of devices, shared devices, inability to buy "data packs", etc.
- Further, lack of stable connectivity jeopardises their evaluations.
- Besides this, many lack a learning environment at home.
- Peer learning has also suffered.

— Inequality in access to health care

- India's public spending on health is barely 1% of GDP.

* The rural economy can jump start a revival

- Rural economy

- ↳ share in GDP is ~30%
- ↳ Agri contribution in rural eco ~ $\frac{1}{3}$ rd
i.e. ~10% of GDP.
- ↳ Rest rural economy is non farm sector
i.e. livestock, fisheries, food processing etc

- Effects of pandemic on rural economy

- During first wave
 - ↳ Agri was the only major sector that reported \uparrow in GVA.
 - ↳ Provided job to returning migrants
 - ↳ Sustained rural economy.
- But in 2nd wave
 - ↳ slow economic recovery has hit the rural economy too.

- Rural economy at present -

- Many households lost livelihoods as many earning members died.
- Large spending on health
- Job losses.

- Declining incomes

- ↳ Rural non-agri wages have ↓ by 0.9% per year in last 2 years.

- ↳ Agri wages are stagnant.

- Demand declining

- ↳ shown by decline in wholesale prices of agri commodities.

- Rising inflation

- ↳ further reduced purchasing power.

- Increasing input & fertilizer costs.

- Peculiar situation where

- ↳ price of dominant agri commodities in domestic market are declining while

- ↳ consumer prices of essentials (edible oils, pulses) are rising. → contributing to inflation

- No increase in MGNREGA allocation

- Pulses removed from the free food grain scheme this year.

- No cash transfers to the vulnerable groups. unlike last year.

- For any economic revival

- ↳ Agriculture & rural economy are crucial.
- ↳ Need for speeding vaccinations in rural.
- ↳ Greater fiscal support like direct income support and also subsidies.
- ↳ Protection from rising inflation in input prices.
- ↳ More MGNREGA allocations.

@lectures - bureau