



## Rural Roads

### KEYWORDS

Rural roads, maintenance, road network.

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**ABSTRACT** After recognizing the critical issue of rural roads in India, the Government of India planned to give boost to rural connectivity. This gave birth to a National Programme Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana under the Ministry of Rural Development. It was 100% centrally funded programme aiming to provide all weather connectivity to all the habitations of above 500 populations. Connectivity and mobility is the key to new opportunities. The transformation of India is rapid after the construction of rural roads. The "Transect-Walk" is a survey of the land with the village community, where the road would come up. This is unique feature was initiated by the World Bank and conducted for the first time under this project. It has brought transparency and better cooperation by the community especially where land acquisition is involved.

### INTRODUCTION

A rural area is a geographic area that is located outside any city or town. A typical rural area has low population density. Rural areas are also known as 'countryside' or a 'village' in India. Agriculture is common occupation in rural areas, apart from fishing, cottage industries, pottery, etc.

A town with maximum population of 15000 can be considered as rural in nature. Panchayats take all the decisions in these areas. A panchayat consists of five people. There are five people in the panchayat. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) defines 'rural' as follows:

- An area with a population density of up to 400 per square kilometer,
- Villages with clear surveyed boundaries but no municipal board,
- A minimum of 75% of male working population involved in agriculture and allied activities.

### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE TYPE OF RURAL SETTLEMENT

There are three factors that influence the type of settlements in India. These factors are:

- i. **Physical Factors:** Physical factors include relief, altitude, soil capability, climate, drainage, ground water level, etc. They influence the type and placement of dwelling for example, in dry regions of Rajasthan, water is a crucial factor and, therefore, houses are situated along a pond or well which guides the compactness of settlement.
- ii. **Ethnic or Cultural Factors:** These include aspects like caste, community, ethnicity and religion. In India, it is commonly seen that the main land is owned by high castes in the centre of the village and the lower castes resides on the periphery. This leads to social segregation and fragmentation of a settlement into several units.
- iii. **Historical or Defense Factors:** In the past, mostly border areas of northwestern plains were conquered or attacked frequently by outsiders. For a long time, apart from attack from outsiders, there had been continuous fight between princely states and kingdom within the country therefore; security concerns favored the evolution of nucleated settlements.

One of the underlying causes of rural poverty is poor access. Rural welfare and access are closely related to each other. Improved access improves living conditions and also reduces poverty. On the other hand, inaccessibility restricts movement of people, goods and services and hence limits the development of markets and other service centers.

Access cuts across different sectors including health, education, industries and agriculture. Due to accessibility constraints the performance of these sectors is hampered. One main strategy to improve access is to improve the quality and the extent of the road network in an area. Roads facilitate development; new roads will improve transport and this improved transport will solve access problems and better access improves living conditions and creates alternative income earning opportunities. Improved living conditions and alternative income earning opportunities will in turn induce development.

### RURAL ROADS

Rural roads are important for rural development. Roads are in fact facilitators. Roads improve mobility which in turn improves access. The improved road does not directly affect the access but it creates effect. Until and unless roads are being used they are not effective. If the roads are not used by vehicles than they do not contribute to any kind of development. It is not possible for the rural people to purchase their own vehicle once the road network is improved. They will be benefitted from the traders, transport operators, etc.

These roads play a vital role in linking rural communities to district centers, health facilities and markets. The improvement includes activities associated with new construction, upgrading and rehabilitation of roads. Roads are generally classified as feeder roads, access roads, secondary roads, rural roads. Further we can distinguish three categories of roads i.e. National roads, Provincial roads and Rural roads. Rural roads include all roads in the rural areas. These roads connect villages with other villages or district centres.

**The overall improvement of a rural road network generally includes 4 activities:**

1. Rehabilitation of deteriorated roads

2. Improving or Upgrading existing roads and tracks
3. Construction of new road links
4. Road maintenance

The function of roads differs according to the type of road. For example, National roads, establishes links between main population centers. The improvement of the national road network will indeed improve access between different population centers. Around the main roads the living conditions are going to change. More remote areas however may not benefit at all. Rural access roads will have to provide the more isolated communities with "access" to the developments taking place along the improved road. The rural roads are as important as the National roads.

If we want real benefit for local population than infrastructure should be developed, it is therefore imperative that the improvement of the main road goes hand in hand with the improvement of the access road network.

Transport is a derived activity and its importance will depend on the local demand for transport. For example, the extent to which a rural household needs to travel is dictated principally by the access it has to the facilities required to sustain daily life. The access to the fields where it grows food, the markets to trade goods, schools to educate its children, health facilities in time of illness and extension services to increase production.

Village leaders give priority to rural access roads and also concentrate on improving these roads. People living in the area of influence will benefit from improved access to markets and social institutions, from improved income opportunities, an improved supply of food and other needs at more reasonable prices that will follow the improvement of the rural road network. Families will be able to grow more and different types of crops if these rural roads make travelling and transportation easy to town markets. Improved access to roads and to cycles will definitely improve the school attendance, as it is clear from the surveys of remote areas that many pupils dropped out because they were "tired of walking". The access to rural roads will make an area more attractive to visit and this could result in more number of visits of teachers and social workers, etc to the communities. In a simple language we can say that the improved rural road network will connect the isolated areas and will bring them into the mainstream of economic activities which will contribute to their economic and social development.

The main issue to improve access is **maintenance**. These rural roads are to be maintained regularly otherwise investments in rural roads are of little. And if we fail to maintain these roads or any other type of road than the investment can be termed as disinvestment. Maintenance is always of less priority, where the resources are less. Deteriorated roads restrict people from using them and therefore it becomes useless. Deteriorated roads will raise the cost and lower the quality of transport which is a restraint on agricultural and economic development. An efficient transport network in any area will certainly stimulate rural development and proper maintenance is a must to keep the network from deteriorating.

A proper selection procedures should be followed as to which road has to be improved and should not selected randomly. People are going to use these roads. Different people have different needs. Different roads therefore will have a different impact. Before a decision is taken about the up gradation or construction of the road, it is essential to assess the future benefits of a road. If substantial benefits are anticipated then the road deserves a priority. If only limited impact is foreseen then the road does not deserve a priority.

A basic rule for any roads work program is to allocate funds to the following order:

1. To develop and implement a proper maintenance system and maintain the roads those are already in a maintainable condition.
2. To identify a core road network, rehabilitate road links which have fallen into disrepair and bring the core road network in a maintainable condition.
3. To construct new road links and extend the network.

### Maintenance

Only a fraction of the construction cost of road is required for its maintenance than also it is often not being done. One of the main reasons is that very often maintenance costs are not included in the provincial budgets as an annual expenditure but as a single time capital investment in projects. And also because of the availability of the very limited funds, the maintenance funds that might be available are used to make emergency repairs and not to routinely maintain the roads. Consequently, maintenance of the infrastructure is neither perceived nor implemented as a continuing activity. Regular maintenance on annual basis is required otherwise it is of little value.

We can enlist the priority list as:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Priority: Is to develop a proper maintenance scheme and maintain the roads that are already in maintainable condition.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Priority: Is to identify and rehabilitate a core road network which have fallen into disrepair and bring it into a maintainable condition.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Priority: Is to construct new road networks.

A basic rule is to protect previous investments. Maintain first what you've got already before adding any additional links and therefore increasing maintenance requirements.

### REFERENCE

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