


There are certain essential facilities that need to be provided to everyone. Therefore, these are called public facilities. Some of these are health care, sanitation, water, electricity, public transport, schools and colleges, telecommunications etc. To construct and maintain an infrastructure for them is essential. Once it is provided, its benefits can be shared by many people. As public facilities relate to people's basic needs, these are a part of the Right to Life that the Constitution guarantees for all persons living in this country. The responsibility to provide public facilities, therefore, must be that of the government. Private companies provide public facilities but at a price that only some people can afford. The government provides public facilities at an affordable price. **The idea of equality, or the equal availability, affordability and quality is one of the key issues related to public facilities.** While there is no doubt that public facilities should be made available to all, in reality we see that there is a great shortage of such facilities.

The Government's Role

The State controls nation's resources. It has to see that the **resources are conserved and multiplied by economic development.** All major decisions related to the economy are taken by the government. It tries to **distribute the country's resources among the people in a fair manner.** People need facilities both economic and social, to make them efficient. It is the duty of the government to make provisions for that. Social welfare is closely related to economic prosperity.

The welfare of people means making life simpler for people and improving the quality of life of people. A good infrastructure helps in improving the quality of life of people. Basic structure includes provision for roads, buildings, power supply, telecommunications, dams, financial institutions etc. All these are required to build the **economic infrastructure** of the country. The improvement in economic sector leads to progress in social sector. Supporting services, linked with education, health, housing and sanitation comprise **social**



infrastructure. The crucial sector identified as 'Infrastructure Building for Growth' includes highways, railways, ports, airports, telecom and power.

Movement of goods and services has been facilitated by development of means of public transport and communication. Power is needed for manufacture of goods. Transport and power thus, become lifeline which sustain the economy.

Public Transport

National Highways with a length over 65,569 kilometres are quite dynamic. They make important transport routes across the country. The four-lane Golden Quadrilateral project joining Delhi with Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata covers a total distance of 5900 km. The four lane North-south east-west corridor stretches 7300 km. Railways' 'The Dedicated Freight Corridors' in the Eastern and Western high density area were established in 2006. It would lead to **sustained development** in this region as a major link between industrial and agricultural sectors. The government has even decided to open container movement to private competition. Private sector agencies have been given permission to provide container services.

To attain international standards, the government has decided to upgrade 12 major ports. It would even improve rail-road links with major ports. Ports have been even thrown open to private participation. The government has also decided to create world-class airports to upgrade efficiency services with modern technology.

Public Transport Over Short Distances



Suburban railway in Mumbai

Mumbai's suburban railways is well-functioning public transport system. It is the densest route in the world. Extending over a distance of 300 kilometres, these local trains allow people living far away from Mumbai to find work in the city. On an average about 65 lakh passengers daily travel on these local trains.



Bus and metro train services in Delhi

Buses are the most important forms of public transport over short distance. It is the main link to the workplace for majority of the working people. With rapid urbanization, the public bus system even in the major cities has not been able to keep up with demand. As an alternative, the government has planned air-conditioned metro rail projects for Delhi and other metropolitan cities.

Other Infrastructure

Power (Electricity) : Power sector has been largely privatized for production and supply. Because of high level of electricity consumption, we still require over 90,000 Megawatt of new generation capacity by the next years. The census of India, 2001 puts rural household electrification at 44 percent leaving around 78 million household still in the dark.

Food : Government has provided fair price shops in each ward of town and cities and in each village. Mid-day meals at schools are also being provided to encourage children to come to school. The government has large godowns for storing grains to supply to fair price shops and reserving for any emergency.

Communication : There is a big rise in the telecom market after the introduction of mobile phones. There is a big infrastructure of government and private companies. India has perhaps the fifth largest telecom market in the world involving both public and private sector. It needs to further increase the infrastructure.

Health : The government needs to play an active role in providing adequate access to proper health facilities for the entire population. Though there is a network of government hospitals in cities to Primary Health Centres in villages. It has a nation-wide programme for the eradication of preventable diseases like polio.

Sanitation : A large number of people in rural and suburban areas perform their functions in the open. It pollutes the water sources like ponds, rivers, lakes and ground water. Therefore, sanitation is a must in prevention of water borne diseases. Official figures for 2001 shows that only 36 per cent population have access to sanitation (toilet facilities within the premises of residence). Sulabh, a non-government organisation, has constructed more than 7500 public toilet blocks and 1.2 million private toilets, giving access to sanitation to 10 million people. It has been working for three decades especially for the poor working class. It charges Rs.1 or 2 per person for use of latrines to cover its maintenance costs.

Education : The Indian Constitution guarantees the Right to Education for all children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. An important aspect of this Right is equity in the schooling facilities. However, the schooling in India continues to be highly unequal.

The government has opened a large number of schools, colleges and universities in the villages and cities and has been giving education free or at low fees with grants and scholarships to marginalised groups. There is need of improving the quality of education and facilities in the educational institutions.



A network of electricity transmission lines



Administering polio vaccine to a child



A city convent school



A rural school

Case Study : Water Supply

Water as Part of the Fundamental Right to Life : Water is essential for life. The Constitution of India recognises the right to water as being a part of the Right to Life under Article 21. This means that it is the right of every citizen, whether rich or poor, to have **sufficient** amounts of safe water to fulfil his/her daily needs at a price that he/she can afford. In other words, there should be **universal access** to water. Both the High Courts and the Supreme Court have held that the right to safe drinking water is a Fundamental Right and no one can pollute the drinking water resources.

India has one of the largest number of cases of water related diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera. Over 1600 Indians, most of them children below the age of five, reportedly die every day because of water related diseases. These diseases can be prevented if people are aware and have access to safe drinking water.

Is Water Available to All : Even in big cities like Chennai, municipal supply meets only about half the needs of the people of the cities, on an average. The areas in a city that are close to the storage points get more water whereas colonies further away receive less water. The



Line at a public tap



Taking water from a tanker

burden of short falls in water supply falls mostly on the poor. The middle class, when faced with water shortages, are able to cope through a variety of private means such as digging bore wells, **buying** water from tankers and using bottled water for drinking. Often the borewell water is brackish in taste, so people use it in their toilets and for washing.



Taking water from a pit

The Role of the Government : In a city you may have seen private companies supplying water through tankers or supplying drinking water in sealed bottles. They charge such a price that only some people can afford. Hence, this facility is not available to all at an affordable rate. Therefore, the government takes the responsibility to supply water at a rate **affordable** by every one. To supply water, the government has to incur costs in pumping water, carrying it over long distances, treating the water for impurities, laying down pipes for distribution, and finally, collecting and treating waste water. It meets these expenses partly from the various taxes that it collects and partly by charging a price for water. This price is set so that most people can afford a certain minimum amount of water for daily use. Besides, at places public taps are provided to get water free of charge. However, the government discourages waste of water. Therefore, it charges a higher rate for greater use of water.

In Search of Alternatives : Due to the increasing population of cities, the consumption of water has increased. Ground water levels have

dropped drastically in all these cities as a result. The government is encouraging people for **harvesting rain water** to increase the level of ground water. Where possible, water from nearby rivers and in some cases from distant rivers is brought and treated for impurities. For example, water from Ganga is being carried to Delhi through large pipes. In some cities the government has also used the services of private companies for transporting and distributing water but the government water supply department decides the rate for water tankers and gives them permission/contract to operate.

Public Facilities in Slums

The dwellers of the slums are also citizens and they have rights for public facilities too. But often there is not proper infrastructure like roads, water and electricity supply in the slums. Some people argue that these people are encroachers and they do not pay taxes. But our Constitution recognises many of the public facilities as being a part of the Right to Life. The government must see that these rights are protected so that everyone can lead a decent life. Secondly, the dwellers of the slums also pay taxes on everything they buy. For everything they pay the price which **includes** all the taxes paid at every stage— buying of raw material to production and finishing and sales.

The government can get private companies to deliver some of the public facilities. For instance, contracts for building roads are given to private contractors. Distribution of electricity in Delhi is done by two private companies. However, the government must keep a close watch on these and ensure that they fulfil their commitment to reach these facilities to all people and at affordable prices.

One of the major roles of the government is to ensure adequate public facilities for everyone. Every citizen of the country has a right to these facilities which should be provided to her/him in an equitable manner.



Life in a slum

Key Words

- » Basic needs : primary requirements of food, water, shelter, sanitation, healthcare and education necessary for survival.
- » Resources : a supply of something that a country, an organisation or a person has and can use, especially to increase their wealth.
- » Sanitation : provision of facilities for the safe disposal of human urine and faeces.
- » Fair Price Shops : government owned shops providing essential commodities at a reasonable price.
- » Port : where ships load and unload goods.
- » Universal access : when everyone has physical access to a thing and can also afford it; a tap connection at home will allow physical access to water.

SUMMARY

- ▶ There are certain essential facilities that need to be provided to everyone. Therefore, these are called public facilities.

- ▶ As public facilities relate to people's basic needs, these are a part of the Right to Life that the Constitution guarantees for all persons living in this country. The responsibility to provide public facilities, therefore, must be that of the government.
- ▶ The government tries to distribute the country's resources among the people in a fair manner.
- ▶ Roads, buildings, power supply, telecommunications, dams, financial institutions, etc. are required to build economic infrastructure of the country.
- ▶ The improvement in economic sector leads to progress in social sector.
- ▶ The crucial sector identified as 'Infrastructure Building for Growth' includes highways, railways, ports, airports, telecom and power.
- ▶ National Highways, Golden Quadrilateral, North-south, east-west corridor are the main roads in the country.
- ▶ Railways' 'The Dedicated Freight Corridors' in the Eastern and Western high-density area were established in 2006.
- ▶ Ports and airports are being upgraded.
- ▶ Other infrastructure includes power, telecommunication, health, sanitation, education and water.
- ▶ It is the right of every citizen, rich or poor, to have sufficient amount of safe water to fulfil daily needs at a price that he/she can afford.
- ▶ Even in big cities like Chennai, municipal supply meets only about half the needs of the people of the cities on an average.
- ▶ Private companies charge high rates for public facilities like water while the government makes it available at a price affordable by all.
- ▶ The government is encouraging people for harvesting rain water to increase the level of ground water.
- ▶ The government discourages waste of water. Therefore, it charges a higher rate for greater use of water.
- ▶ The dwellers of the slums are also citizens and they have rights for having public facilities too.

Exercise Time

A. Fill in the blanks :

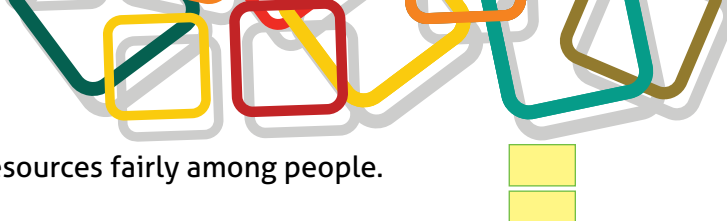
1. Public facilities relate to people's basic _____.
2. Golden Quadrilateral links Delhi with Chennai, Mumbai and _____.
3. The improvement in economic sector leads to progress in _____ sector.
4. Sufficient safe water at an _____ rate is the right of every citizen.
5. To discourage water _____ higher rate is charged for greater use of water

B. Match the Following :

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Golden Quadrilateral | a. 65,569 kilometres |
| 2. Dedicated Freight Corridors | b. Delhi |
| 3. Airconditioned Metro Railway | c. Eastern and western high-density area |
| 4. National Highways | d. Linking of four metropolitan cities |

C. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

1. People need facilities to make them more efficient.
2. Basic needs are not a part of the Right to Life.
3. Private companies charge high rates for public facilities.

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4. It is the duty of the State to distribute the country's resources fairly among people.
 5. Less rate should be charged for greater use of water.

D. Define the following :

1. Resources
2. Basic Needs
3. Universal Access

E. Answer these question briefly :

1. Why public transport and power makes the lifeline which sustains the economy ?
2. What are public facilities ?
3. What is the basic structure of the economic infrastructure of the country ?
4. What is universal access to a public facility ?
5. Why should government provide public facilities to its citizens ?
6. Describe the infrastructure of roads in India.
7. What work the NGO Sulabh has done in the field of sanitation ?
8. Write a note on 'Is water available to all ?'
9. Why should slum dwellers be given public facilities equally ?

F. Answer these questions in detail :

1. What is the Government's role in providing public facilities ?
2. Describe the infrastructure for public transport in India.
3. Why is safe drinking water essential for health ? Is water available to all ? In what ways Indian government is providing water to its citizens ?

PROJECT WORK

1. Make a report on the development and importance of infrastructure in your city/town/village. What reforms are required ?
2. Make a report 'Are the public facilities shared equally by all the people in your area ?'