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New Delhi, Feb 21 (IANS) The Central government, under the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission, is encouraging formation of "cluster villages" so as to enable them to get facilities available in urban areas.

The mission, which got off the ground on February 21, 2016, has in its wing 300 such village clusters, according to officials of the Rural Development Ministry.

"The aim is to create at least 1,000 such clusters," said an official on the fourth anniversary of the launch of the mission.

"The objective of the mission is to make available city-like facilities in villages, which should now join the development competition. As most of our population lives in villages, there is need for "smart villages" alongside "smart cities"," said the official.

The government is working on a development model that has villages as its soul with facilities on lines of cities. The government has set aside Rs 21,000 crore for the project, said the official.

He said the facilities proposed to be available in such cluster villages would include 24-hour water supply, trash management, public transport, small and medium industries, citizen service centre, digital literacy, improved healthcare, sports infrastructure and skill development centres.

The official cited many instances of the government initiative. One such example is 19 villages in Andhra Pradesh's Vizianagaram district.

The 19 villages faced severe drinking water shortage. In Konda Lakshmiapuram village -- located hardly a km from the block headquarters -- there were only six handpumps. The government facilitated linking of these villages and with an expenditure of Rs 16 crore helped set up a 10,000-litre water tank besides other development projects. "Most villages in the area now have tap water supply," the official said.

--IANS

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