



IMPORTANCE OF E-GOVERNANCE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India is a country of villages and to improve and sustain the overall prosperity, growth and development in the global competitive regime, National E-governance plan (NEGP) seeks to lay the foundation with various projects, starting from the grass-root levels, and provide impetus for long-term e-governance within the country. In this direction rural e-Governance applications implemented in the recent few years have been demonstrating the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the concerned areas of rural development. Indeed, some of the schemes introduced in rural India have improved the government services immensely. India is a nation of villages. The rural mass in the nation comprises the core of Indian society and also represents the real India. According to the Census Data 2001, there are 638,387 villages in India that represent more than 72 per cent of the total population. So development of these rural mass is one of the key areas of consideration in the government policy formulation. Rural Development which is concerned with economic growth and social justice, improvement in the living standard of the rural people by providing adequate and quality social services and minimum basic needs becomes essential. The present strategy of rural development mainly focuses on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes of wage and self-employment etc.

Significantly, the E-Governance plays a key role in development & Economic growth of Rural India. Political, Cultural, Socio-economic Developmental & Behavioral decisions today rests on the ability to access, gather, analyze and utilize Information and Knowledge. E-Governance is the conduits that transmit information and knowledge to individual to widen their choices for Economic and social empowerment. In near future people will be carrying a handheld computer connected to the Web to get the information about the World at their fingertips. Government of India is having an ambitious objective of transforming the citizen-government interaction at all levels to by the electronic mode (e-Governance) by 2020.

In this connection, the Instances like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Warana Project in Maharashtra, Online Income Tax, Online Central Excise, Unique ID and E-office has accelerated growth of respective areas and contributing to country's economic development. Similarly, at state level the various rural E-governance projects such as SETU Project in Maharashtra etc, projects that have been providing excellent services and saving time and money of people as well as of government and are contributing their might to the socio-economic development of rural India. Being ICT a significant



instrument in E-Governance and Rural Development, appropriate infrastructure/design is mandatory for proper functioning as follows:-

- As designed of citizen centric services, and dependable service delivery mechanisms.
- Selection of appropriate (dependable, maintainable, cost effective) technologies for rural connectivity, and information processing solutions.
- As designed of cost effective delivery stations (kiosks) to build new services.
- Demonstration of transparency and efficiency to remove distrust and build confidence among the citizens on functioning of service delivery mechanisms.
- Invite private participation to reduce the burden on the central servicing agency, bring in the expertise, enhance the speed of implementation, and offer better value proposition to the citizens.

E-Governance in Rural Development Related Information

- National e-Governance Plan
- Online Land Records
- e-Governance in Rural Agricultural Development
- e-Panchayats
- e-Governance in Developmental Schemes
- e-Governance in G2G and Panchayats function
- Right to Information
- Public Grievance Lodging and Monitoring
- State government e-Governance Projects

THE CONCEPT OF E-GOVERNANCE

The term e-governance focuses on the use of new ICTs by governments as applied to the full range of government functions. Thus e-governance is the application of information and communication technology for delivering government services, exchange of information, communication, transactions, integration, various stand-alone systems, and services between government and citizens, government and business as well as back office processes and interactions within the entire government frame work. The government being the service provider it is important to motivate the employees for delivering the services through ICT. E-governance seeks to achieve Efficiency, Transparency, and Citizen's Participation. Enabling E-governance through ICT contributes to Good Governance, Trust and Accountability, Citizen's Awareness, and empowerment, Citizen's Welfare, Democracy, Nation's Economic growth. ICT is the biggest enabler of change and process reforms fade in face of what ICT has achieved in few years.



However, the E-governance services through ICT refer to transactional services that involve local, state or national government. ICTs acts in speeding up the flow of information and knowledge between government and citizens and transforming the way in which governments and citizens interact. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) the challenge for all countries is to create and develop a system of governance that promotes supports and sustains human development. Governments in many parts of the world have made huge ICT investments aimed at improving governance processes.

In India, e-Governance applications in the recent past have demonstrated their positive impact in minimizing the processing costs, increase transparency and support economic development by income generating ventures, increase in agricultural production, and improvements in health and education sectors, all of which promote the overall quality of life of rural people. ICT contributes in providing the transactional services for the rural people with the benefit of time and cost savings in obtaining the public services with efficiency and effectiveness and it also examines changes in agricultural productivity and improved quality of life due to the ICT services. In addition to the above AEPS, GPS etc. are pivotal in ICT services. The rural ICT applications attempt to offer the services of central agencies (like district administration, cooperative union, and state and central government departments) to the citizens at their village door steps. These applications utilize the ICT in offering improved and affordable connectivity and processing solutions. Several Government-Citizen (G-C) e-Government pilot projects have attempted to adopt these technologies to improve the reach, enhance the base, minimize the processing costs, increase transparency, and reduce the cycle times to half. A large number of rural E-Government applications, developed as pilot projects, were aimed at offering easy access to citizen services and improved processing of government-to-citizen transactions. The idea that the primary and the sheer object of ICT in e-governance and rural development is individual's motivation to collective mobilization for an integrated rural development.

The poverty can be adequately addressed by effective use of e-governance and ICT application in environmental management. Improved governance by using ICT can have direct impact in reducing poverty and improving the environment. ICT can contribute in a large way in making government processes more efficient and transparent by encouraging communication and information sharing among rural and marginalized people. Communities and farmer organisations can be helped through the use of ICTs to strengthen their own capacities and better represent their constituencies when negotiating input and output prices, land claims, resource rights and infrastructure projects. ICT enables rural communities to interact with other stakeholders, thus reducing social isolation. It widens the perspective of local communities in terms of national or global developments, opens up new business opportunities and allows easier contact with friends and relatives.



IMPORTANCE OF E-GOVERNANCE

The process of e-governance has already been started. The Government of India has decided to open one lakh common services centers across the country under National e-Government Plan (NeGP) in order to make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man. Now the Government of India has initiated the process to equip all Gram Panchayats with computers, or provide access to computers with broadband connectivity. All Panchayats at all levels need to be equipped with computing hardware and connectivity over the next few years. The approach would be to first use the kiosks being set up under the NeGP's Common Services Centres initiative. For the remaining Panchayats, it is proposed to engage independent service providers who would be selected on the basis of a bidding process. It has been also planned to equip all Panchayats with necessary software and skills to handle e-Governance for better delivery of services to citizens.

Subsequently, the Governments at both the central and state levels have the vision and strategies to bridge the digital divide and provide supporting infrastructure in rural areas to enhance the capacity of Panchayats. Under the Bharat Niram programme, the Government of India has emphasized connectivity and other basic facilities. The Ministry of Power has introduced a scheme that aims at providing electricity in all villages and habitations within four years, thereby providing access to electricity to all rural households. (Ministry of Power, Government of India, Bharat Nirman-Electrification) It has been also proposed to achieve a rural tele-density of 25 per cent by means of 200 million rural connections by the end of the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The Eleventh Five Year Plan has also targeted providing broadband connectivity for all secondary and higher secondary schools, all public health care centers and Gram Panchayats

E-GOVERNANCE: AVAILABILITY FOR RURAL APPLICATIONS

According to the E-Governance the information flow between the delivery server and the other departments is accomplished through Intranet/LAN connectivity with servers of those departments. Often, due to non-computerization of back-end systems, the transactions are manually exchanged and response data is keyed in manually through the nodes on the delivery server. It may be noticed that the end-to-end connectivity between the central service providers and the citizens is accomplished through a number of stages involving several agencies. These stages, the technologies and agencies involved in offering the services are presented in the Table below.

The Computers have become more powerful, user friendly and less expensive. The PC revolution has brought them closer to the users to the extent that in number cases users have designed and developed their own applications. However, till recently, it has not become easy to create local content and regional language interfaces, to facilitate their use in villages. In addition, although the



hardware costs are coming down, the total cost of ownership for rural applications is quite high. The costs of the minimum required gadgets like PC, Modem, Power stabilizer, and Printer along with the license costs of software (OS, Database, and Application as applicable) does not justify their use for offering government related information services, just on the basis of return-on-investment criterion. These equipments become obsolete too soon, and have high maintenance costs in the rural areas. At the current cost levels, to breakeven, the kiosk operators will have to find alternative revenue generation activities utilizing these equipments. We notice that in many cases such business potential does not exist and even if it existed, the kiosk owners / operators are not trained to develop new solutions.

CONCLUSION

The tools of e-governance is help in strengthening social networks, empowerment and participation, as well as fostering productive processes at the local level through the provision of employment and skills, as well as support services for micro-enterprise activities. In rural communities of developing countries, with limited capacities and resources to respond to the effects of extreme natural hazards, drought, landslides, floods, and to the impacts of these events on local social systems such as health, infrastructure, transportation, migration.

Finally, conclude e-governance is the need of the hour as people in rural areas are still deprived of basic facilities for a decent life. Common wisdom says that poverty and deprivation exist not only due to lack of resources but also persist because of inefficient and malfunctioning institutions. In the emerging knowledge society and information revolution, Panchayats should not be left in isolation. They should be provided with adequate technological resources in order to be able to play a meaningful role in the course of rural development through e-governance.

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