

Rural Development in India: Role of E-Governance And ICT

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Abstract : E-governance in India steadily involved from computerization of government departments to fragmented initiatives aimed at speeding up e-Governance implementation across the various arms of the government at the national, state, and local levels. The panchayats represent democratic decentralized governance in India. The lowest tier of the panchayats – the gram panchayats – were envisioned to provide opportunities to the rural grassroots for participation in the governing process from taking decisions to preparation, implementation and supervision of various development programs. To strengthen the grassroots democratic process gram sabhas (under the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act, 1992) were formed as nodal bodies for approval and sanction of work done by the gram panchayats. The gram sabha provides a platform to the villagers to meet and discuss their problems and also ensure accountability of gram panchayats. The functioning of these gram sabhas has, however, not been smooth and they have come under much criticism due to lack of regularity and transparency. There have been various suggestions and efforts to improve the participation of the grassroots in the panchayat process but conventional methods have not been very successful. The concept of e-Panchayats and the endeavour to use information and communication technologies to allow for e-Governance at the grassroots level has been gaining ground in these circumstances. The objective of this paper is to explore the use of Information and Communication technology (ICT) tools as a part of e-Governance, in the panchayats for better governance, participation and development .

IndexTerms - E-governance, E-Panchayats, ICT, Local self government, National E- Governance Plan (NEGP).

I. INTRODUCTION

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 2011, there are 640,867 villages in India that represent 68.84% 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 UN E-Government Survey 2018 has ranked India at 96th position for its performance in development and execution of information technologies, up from 107 in 2016 and 118 in 2014—a massive leap over the years. UN carried out this year's survey with the theme “gearing e-government to support transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”. The survey is aimed at serving as a development tool for countries to identify areas of strength and challenges in e-government and shape their policies and strategies.

Panchayats have been a vibrant and dynamic identity of the Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history. Experts believe that the concept of self-governance existed during Rig Vedic period (around 1200 B.C.). The system of Panchayati Raj is thus deeply rooted in our tradition. In the year 1871, Lord Mayo introduced his scheme for decentralization of administration. The scheme had a stimulating effect on the development of local self governing institutions in the rural areas. The next landmark in the development of local was Lord Ripon's resolution of 1882. In 1907 the British government set up the Royal Commission on decentralization to examine the administrative and financial relations between the federal government and the provincial governments and recommended the required changes. In actual practice, upto 1947, nothing real was implemented as the intentions of the British worked towards centralization rather than decentralization. After independence, the basic objective was to initiate developmental programmes to strengthen the socio-economic condition of the remote areas of the country. With this objective, two major programmes – the community development programme (CDP) in 1952 and the National Extension Service (NES) in 1953 were launched.

The Balwant Rai Mehta committee which was appointed in 1957, recommended that statutory elected local bodies should be formed at the village level with the necessary power, resources and authority. Following the report, the government began to work on introducing the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at the village levels so that there is wider public participation in the developmental processes and to overcome the existing shortcomings. The Sarkaria Commission, which was instituted by Rajiv Gandhi government in 1988, did not favor the idea of the Singhvi committee to confer constitutional status to the panchayati raj institutions. The late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, who strongly believed in strengthening the PRIs by guaranteeing them constitutional status. The National Front government under the Prime Ministership of VP Singh, also made an effort to provide constitutional status to the PRI system. The next congress government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao reintroduced the 73rd constitutional amendment bill in September, 1991. The bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992 and the Rajya Sabha gave its approval the very next day and the law came into effect from April 24, 1993. The law required all the states to amend their respective Panchayat legislations to conform to the central law within a year and to hold elections by April 1995.

In fact, among many systems of government, local bodies assume a special role in the democratic process. The institutions of local government are universally recognized as the ‘grass roots’ of a democratic set up. Lord Bryce regarded them not only as, "the best schools of democracy" but they are the very instruments of mobilization of local efforts and resources in the common task of nation building. Not only they cultivate and sustain the spirit of liberty, but, are meant to inculcate as sense of responsibility born

out of new dimensions of a system of rights and obligations." As Laski puts it: "Local Self -Government offers the best opportunity to the solution of their own problems."

The crux of political development in India lies in the cultivation of a public ethic, and the revitalization of secular institutions and processes conducive to people's participation. These are necessary to encourage and faster initiative, independence and enterprise on the part of the people. Local government is one way of reconciling people's desire for self-management and the social need for public control. Thus, the purpose served by the local government is valuable not only on account of the services it renders for the common welfare of the community, but also on account of the opportunity it places before the citizens to have free, intelligent and active participation in the government of their local area and thereby enhancing their creative interest, enthusiasm and local patriotism.

11 MEANING OF E-GOVERNANCE

E -Governance is defined by Word Bank as "E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/ or cost reductions. "

UNESCO defines E-Governance as "Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including citizens' articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. E-Governance may be understood as the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities. "

11I IMPORTANCE OF ICT AT GRASSROOT LEVEL

The right application of technology can boost productivity in all sectors of the economy: agriculture, manufacturing, services, business and governmental activities. Technology enables informed decision-making, stakeholder participation and efficient service delivery and can help ensure transparency, accountability, and rule of law leading to inclusive good governance. The potential impact of leading technologies is estimated to be \$550-1,000 billion annually by 2025, targeted to improve the lives of about 680 million, constituting 56 per cent of India's population lacking basic human needs.

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. A successful ICT application in e-Governance giving one-stop solutions for rural community is the need of the hour. ICT is crafted to enable the Electronic Governance through wireless communication, thus it's integrally interlinked and knitted.

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.

Global shifts towards increased deployment of IT by governments emerged in the nineties, with the advent of the world wide web (www). The technology as well as e-Governance initiatives have come a long way since then. With the increase in internet and mobile connections, the citizens are learning to exploit their new mode of access in wide ranging ways. They have started expecting more and more information and services online from governments and corporate organizations to further their civic, professional and personal lives, thus creating abundant evidences that the new e-citizenship is taking hold.

The emergence of information and communications technology has provided means for faster and better communication, efficient storage, retrieval and processing of data and exchange and utilization of information to its users, be they individuals, groups, businesses, organizations or governments. With growing computerization and increasing internet connectivity, the governments have been able of information leading to speedier and qualitatively better decision making, greater reach and accountability, better utilization of resources and overall good governance. In the case of citizens, it holds the promise of enhanced access to information and government agencies, efficient service delivery and transparency in dealings and interactions with government. Government today, is expected to be transparent in its dealings, accountable to its activities and faster to its responses.

IV OBJECTIVES AND ADVANTAGESs OF E-GOVERNANCE

The development of e-Governance includes publishing, interaction and transaction. The activities aim at broadening access to government information such as laws, regulations and data, increasing public participation in decision making , publishing through e=mail addresses of government officials and online forums, making government services more readily available to the public through e-filing of government documents , online permits.

1. Increase citizen participation in government process
2. Interaction between citizens and Government can be improved.
3. Delivery of Government services in better manner.
4. Cost reduction in availing/providing government services for both Government and Citizens.
5. Citizen empowerment by providing access to all information.
6. Service reaches to citizen rather citizen reach for service.
7. Citizen can avail all information of Government through a single window at any time and any location with a device having Internet connection.
8. Decrease corruption.
9. More efficient and convenience way of utilizing government services.
10. Eliminate human errors in the manual process.
11. Sharing information and finding to other government agencies easily and rapidly

V NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PIAN AND E-PANCHAYATS

The National e-Governance Plan was meant to make government services accessible to the citizens through common service delivery outlets. Now, e-Panchayat, a component of Mission Mode Projects (MMP), has been launched by the ministry of panchayati raj. The project envisages empowering people in villages by improving governance at the third tier of government for rural local bodies at gram panchayats, block panchayats and district panchayats. E-Panchayat aims to transform panchayat functioning holistically by applying cost effective integrated technological solutions to overcome challenges including issues such as inadequate physical infrastructure, poor human resources and poor power supply. The more complex constraints are extant grassroots political, economic, and social power structures; and gender, age, caste, communal and other sectarian divides. Many States such as Gujarat, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Goa have taken e-initiatives at the panchayat level, but a nation-driven, integrated, holistic approach is required to make a dent on the functioning of panchayats and thereby improving the livelihoods of people. The e-Panchayat programme hopes to ensure people's participation in decision-making. To improve the functioning of panchayats in the country, it is imperative that people should be involved in identifying and prioritising projects, programmes, schemes and welfare activities pertaining to them. E-Panchayat is about automating the workflow processes of all panchayats covering about 30 lakh elected people's representatives and several lakh PRI functionaries. Information and Service Needs Assessment (ISNA), Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Detailed Project Reports (DPR) for every State/UT as a whole can help radical transformation through decentralised local governance.

The Ministry of Panchayat Raj in the status report of the e-Panchayat Mission Mode stated that it "has been adopting a multi-pronged strategy to implement the provisions of Part IX of the ConstitutionOne major strategy has been to harness the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools for e-Governance in Panchayats. The objective has been to make Panchayats more efficient, transparent and symbols of modernity by leveraging ICT at the cutting edge level to ensure transparency and accountability in their functioning through disclosure of information, social audit, efficient delivery of services and improving internal processes and management of Panchayats. E-Panchayat was conceived as a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) with the primary objective of introducing and institutionalizing e-governance in Panchayats. The primary aim was to transform Panchayats into efficient units and to strengthen their business functions and processes with the ultimate goal of ensuring effective local area development and prompt and efficient service to common man.

VI FOUR PILLARS OF E- GOVERNANCE

To implement e-Governance successfully basic requirement is infrastructure. As per our NeGP, government has decided four infrastructural pillars for implementation of e-Governance.

They are listed as under :-

- State Wide Area Network (SWAN)
- State Data Centre (SDC)
- Common Service Centre (CSC)
- Service Delivery Gateway (SDG)

Government has sanctioned the State Wide Area Networks (SWANs) implementation across the country, in March, 2005 at a total expenditure of Rs.3,334 crore to be given by the Department over a period of five years. Under this Scheme, technical and financial help will be provided to the all States/Union Territories (UTs) for establishing SWANs to connect all State/UT Headquarters, District Headquarters and Block Headquarter, in a hierarchical structure with a minimum bandwidth capacity of 2 Mbps per link. State Data Centres are defined so that every state can consolidate services, applications and infrastructure to provide efficient electronic delivery of Government to Government (G2G), Government to Citizen (G2C) and Government to Business (G2B) services. State Data Centre would provide many functionalities.

Large population of India is living in rural area only. Government can develop applications providing E Governance services, Internet can be avail to every village/ nearby area using SWAN, but government cannot force each and every person living in India to use personal Internet access. This is basic reason for approving Common Services Centres. A main use of CSCs is that it

will offer services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills etc... Various Local, State and Central government had started the implementation of e-governance applications. All government systems are using different platforms and technologies for E Governance solutions, and it is very difficult to make interoperability between these heterogeneous platforms. This is the reason for implementing various Service Delivery gateways (SDG), which will work as standards based messaging switch between various heterogeneous applications and providing seamless interoperability and sharing of data across different government applications.

VII SDGs AND GRAM PANCHAYAT

The cornerstones of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnerships and the Planet. This is known as Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. India is one of the signatories to the resolution on SDGs. It has moved ahead on the nationalising of the implementation of the SDGs and initiated preparation of the Vision Document 2030 with NITI Aayog in the lead. Based on the guidance from NITI Aayog, State governments have begun the process of SDGs implementation. In addition to the State level, there is a critical need to take SDGs to the local level. Here lies the importance of local governments, especially the Gram Panchayats. The twin objectives of the Panchayati Raj system as envisaged by the Constitution of India are to ensure local economic development and social justice. The Eleventh schedule of the Constitution expects the Panchayats to play key roles in various thematic domains enlisted as 29 functions, though the specific mandates and capacities of these local governments vary from state to state.

There are also the various flagship programmes such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Make in India, Digital India, Skill India, and Jan Dhan Yojana which are at the core of the SDGs and local governments play a pivotal role in many of these programmes. The Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP) initiated after the historical recommendation of the Fourteenth Finance Commission paves the way for the Panchayats to link planning with the SDGs.

For localisation of SDGs, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has prepared a 'Draft Vision Document for Achieving SDGs. It has mapped roles of Panchayats in terms of SDGs and centrally sponsored schemes (CSS). The challenge related to Panchayats is to capacitate them for planning, fund absorption and improving service delivery towards achieving sustainable development goals. It is important that the SDG goals and targets are deconstructed with the perspective of local governments and presented to them in a way in which they can be used in local planning and implementation.

VIII CHALLENGES

There are many challenges in stepping up e-Governance in India: investments in and access to ICTs, capacity building to utilize e-Governance services, and promoting people's participation in e-democracy. It is hoped that improved access to information and services will provide economic and social development opportunities, facilitate participation and communication in policy and decision-making processes, and promote the empowerment of the marginalised groups. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has credited India with a projected economic growth of 8.1% - the fastest rate of expansion in the world after China. India is home to the largest rural-urban disparities in the world. It is a painful reality that almost 260 million people live below the poverty line. The 2010 United Nations human development report ranked India's development index at 119 out of 169 countries. India is facing a host of crisis such as the failure to improve productivity in agriculture; over a quarter million suicides among farmers from 1995 to 2010; high maternal and infant mortality rates; low status of women; gross violation of the rights of children, with the largest number of child labourers in the world; spiraling corruption and scams of every hue and kind; an era of jobless economic growth; the shadow of hunger that increasingly stalks people across the country, resulting in substantial poverty and starvation; and the neglect of the disadvantaged and marginalised masses. A number of issues, some old and some new have arisen in e-Governance application, for example:

- (i) Lack of strategies and financial plan
- (ii) The project implementation is generally vendor driven
- (iii) Lack of standardization (For example, similar projects are carried out by different state agencies using incompatible file formats and application standards)
- (iv) Reverse compatibility of application with legacy systems are missing in several projects.
- (v) The IT Infrastructures are procured before building the application or digitizing the data.
- (vi) Physical security is emphasized, whereas the Logical and application security is left to vendors in many cases.
- (vii) Lack of understanding by the departments, for the components of e-Governance applications, which can be outsourced or can be carried out in-house.

IX CONCLUSION

E-governance is getting momentous in India. E-governance has had great role in each sphere of the economy over number of years. Indian economy has been progressive one on account of good governance. Conventionally, government used to struggle to provide services to its citizens before initiatives of e-Governance. When government started launching many initiatives for e-Governance; it has become one of the emerging economies due to its potentiality of ICT. Till now, government has implemented various initiatives with different projects (Digital India, e-kranthi, etc). However, it still has some hurdles regarding e-governance, such as: digital divide between urban and rural, poverty, illiteracy, security and cost of implementation, etc. Each of these issues and challenges are posing serious concern to government. Mean while, previous and current govt. launched multiple initiatives by overcoming the above issues and challenges. Under twelve five year plan, some of the future prospects outlined and partly achieved by every government. However, government should spend more on this initiative to make it transparent, convenient, safer and citizen friendly in order to enhance people confidence into good democratic e-Governance. It seems clearly that government has done appreciable work in development of e-Governance. People are definitely getting benefits from these

services. There is a necessity that common citizen must aware of computer & internet for effective implementing of e-governance, but as per study only 40% people are computer literate. However people have communication facilities like mobile/landline phone in maximum number, therefore m-Governance may be more helpful for such purpose. Common citizen has key role in e-Governance: ICT will ensure participation of common citizen in policy making process from remote areas also. Therefore for effective implementation of e-Governance there is a great need of such political & administrative structure which may work as per basics of e-Governance and keep auditing of their work at regular intervals.

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