

E-District:Enabling ICT to put “People First”**Pradeep Kumar**

Research Scholar

Department of Public Administration

Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

ABSTRACT

The literature on the effectiveness of e-government in developing countries towards improving public service delivery is littered with failure stories. Notwithstanding, the failures have not stopped most governments in developing countries from increasingly turning to ICT, most notably internet based models, as the preferred channel for citizen-centred service delivery. This paper investigated e-government within the developing country context of Himachal Pradesh. I used the interpretive paradigm primarily because I wanted to increase our understanding of the phenomenon of e-government for public service delivery within the Himachal Pradesh. The investigation focused on one of the government's primary service delivery programmes. The analysis of findings suggest that e-government in Himachal Pradesh is aligned to the service delivery philosophy, and is hence making effective in delivering on the public service delivery mandate. The research highlights the need for ICT, particularly e-government in developing contexts, to firstly be aligned to the current overarching government philosophies if they are to have any effective impact on service delivery. The practical contribution of the research is a possible framework that could be used to align e-government in Himachal Pradesh to the government philosophy of service delivery. The Government of Himachal Pradesh in its novel venture in the forms of 'SUGAM CENTRES' has taken initiative to provide services concerned with government departments to the people in a hassle free, corruption free, time bound and transparent manner. E-district concept is one of the vital steps towards e-Governance Plan.

Keywords- e-governance,e-service delivery,e-District

ITRODUCTION

In an information rich environment,e-governance is essential to improve information sharing and peoples' participation. For an e-citizen, Information and Communication Technology(ICT) is one of the most democratic tools which has the potential to streamline procedures, inculcate discipline among workforce, and bring transparency, accountability and reduction of costs. Quality of the democratic process depends on the capability and integrity of the organs of the State, competence of the institutions of service delivery and extent of people's participation in the process. The capability of the citizens is also very important to be looked into this regard.

E-services literally mean delivery of government information,programmes,documents, and other services to citizens through

electronic means. It is part of e-administration which is web enabled platform of paperless, neutral communication, and work-flow management tool, developed to improve the internal workings of the government with new ICT executed information processes. This is Government to Citizen (G2C) initiative, the basic aim of which will be delivery of a large range of public services. The G2C extends the accessibility and availability of public services to the citizens and also provide choices that where to interact, from where to interact, and how to interact with the government bodies.

E-DISTRICT CONCEPT:

E-District project envisages integrated and seamless delivery of citizen services by district administration through automation of workflow, backend computerization, data digitization across participating departments.

The project aims to target high volume delivered at the District level and to undertake back-end computerization to enable the delivery of citizen services through Common Service Centres in a systematic way. It further aims to integrate multiple applications, faster processing of public cases/appeals/grievances, dissemination of information as per public requirement and redesign the processes for the core services to be delivered through the Common Service Centres.

Districts are the de facto front-end of government where most Government-to-Consumer or G2C interaction takes place. The e-District project is conceptualized to improve this experience and enhance the efficiencies of the various Departments at the district-level to enable seamless service delivery to the citizen.

Front-ends under the scheme, in the form of citizen facilitation centres, are envisioned to be built at District, Tehsil, Sub-division and Block levels. Village level front-ends would be established through Common Services Centres (VLEs) for delivery of services.

E-district provides support to the district administration to enable citizen Centric Services, which would optimally utilize the State Wide Area Network (SWAN). The e-district project is an important enhancement of the state's e-governance implementation programme, in which majority of the G2c and G2G services are delivered by district administration leveraging ICT.

The e-district is a state Mission Mode Project (MMP) initiated by the Department of Information Technology (DIT), Government of India. The Project aims to high volume services, currently not provided by any other MMP under NeGP. And undertake back-end computerization to e-enable the delivery of these services through COMMON SERVICE CENTRES and other various platforms in a sustainable manner. The key focus is on citizen-centric services as against merely computerization of the departments.

E-DISTRICT PROJECT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

An e-district pilot project has an initiative under the National e-Governance plan (NeGP) of 2005. Himachal Pradesh is one of the states of India adopted e-district project in the state. Public Service Guarantee Act, 2011 is enacted by the Government of Himachal Pradesh to provide time bound Citizen Centric Services to the Public of

the State. Currently, 20 Departments are providing 119 Services notified under the PSG Act, 2011. Out of these 119 Services, 19 are available online through e-District Portal, 14 through Lok Praman platform, 5 through Sarathi Software of Transport Department and 7 through MPP & Power Web Portal.

Further, on 20 April 2011, the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure in its meeting approved the scheme for the National Roll Out of E-district Mission Mode Project (MMP), expanding its implementation to 640 districts of the Country including the 41 districts under the Pilot Project covering a period of 4 years till 2015.

E-district MMP contains a diversified scope. Its aims at electronic delivery of all public services at the district/sub-district level, progressively. Initially ,10 Categories (five mandatory+ five state specific) of defined high volume citizen –centric public services at the district and sub-district level will be taken up for implementation. While doing so, the four pillars of e-infrastructure, that is, State Wide Area Network (SWANs), State Data Centre (SDCs), State Delivery Gateway(SSDGs) and CSCs will be leverages and no new infrastructure would be created. Later on, new services could be added depending on the requirements and felt needs.

Besides, e-district MMP envisages centralized architecture at the state level with common application software for each of the identified services for all districts of the state. The application software will be hosted in the state Data Centre. Integration across states would be enabled, through mandatory adherence to technical specifications and e-governance standards. The detailed guidelines in this regard will be issued by the Department of Information Technology (DIT) separately . Two key aspects of the schemes are Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) and creation of databases based on e-governance standards for the purposes of ensuring interoperability. Business Process Re-engineering is intended to enable process simplification and is of significant value addition to citizens.

E-DISTRICT SERVICES:

The e-district Project envisages the following for delivery of services to citizens:--

- **Certificates:** Creation and distribution of certificates for income, domicile, caste, Birth, Death etc.
- **Licences:** Arms Licenses etc.
- **Public Distribution System (PDS):** Issue of Ration Card, etc.
- **Social Welfare Schemes:** Disbursement of old-age pensions, family pensions, widow pensions, etc.
- **Complaints:** Related to unfair prices, absentee teachers, non-availability of doctor, etc.
- **RTI:** Online filing and receipt of information relating to the Right to Information Act
- **Linking with other e government projects:** Registration, Land Records, and Driving Licences, etc.
- **Information Dissemination:** About government schemes, entitlements, etc.
- **Assessment of taxes:** Property tax, and other government taxes.
- **Utility Payment:** Payments relating to electricity, water bills property taxes etc.

Various kinds of certificates, orders, etc., are being issued from the District Administration offices of Himachal Pradesh, and at the same time leveraging the other NeGP core infrastructure like SWAN and SUGAM CENTRES for service delivery.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR E-DISTRICT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:

Technical Issues

1. Interoperability: It is one of the critical issues of e-governance. Interoperation among ministries and departments is difficult, and it became hurdle for processing and sharing data. In other words, web based data how to be captured and in which format these seem to be major issues of e-governance.

2. Security: Now days, security of online transaction is becoming big issue; insurance, banking, utility bill payments, all these services done by e-governance. In fact, there is still discontent to citizens on availing government services due to lack of security.

3. Privacy: This is another key issues of e-governance any information provided by citizens should be ensured by govt. otherwise, any person or institution may misuse the valuable information.

4. Authentication: It is very important to know the right user of the services or it may be misused by private competitors. Meanwhile, the digital signature plays major role in providing authenticity. In fact, it is expensive and causes for frequent maintenance.

5. Scope of applications: The very first step in creating a good application is to define its scope very well and everything else comes later. The applications which are provided by e-Government, their scope must be known in advance for the accurate implementation of e-Governance projects.

6. Tried and tested technologies: Technology tends to get out of date very fast. Our government may not be in position to buy new servers every year. So, it is better and safer to use technologies and products which are tried and tested for longer periods of times than using the latest ones.

7. Multimodal Interaction: Multimodal interaction provides the user with multiple modes of interfacing with a system. An e-Government application can be really effective if its users can access it using different devices.

8. Geographical problems: Corporate networks reside on reliable and controlled networks. Government networks have to go into all areas which are even unfriendly to live. It is, however, costly to wire up all the villages in the country. So, e-Governance systems must have to use the wireless networks like existing cellular networks to reach the applications into remote areas irrespective of the geographical issues.

9. Lack of integrated services: Most of the egovernance services which are offered by the state or central government are not integrated. Lack of communication between

different departments of government may be its major cause. Therefore, the information that resides within one department has no or very little meaning to some other department of the government.

Economic issues

1. Cost: It is one of the economic issues, implementation of e-governance operations and maintenance of services fetch huge cost to govt.

2. Reusability: Any models developed by government, must be reusability. E-governance is being national plan, what it incorporates any software or modules should be used by other administrations.

3. Maintainability: Maintenance should be given due importance. Because, IT ministry has been continuously developing new soft ware's in order to fill the current needs of citizens. Consequently, govt. launched new projects for example, digital India.

4. Portability: The primary requisite for portable applications is independence of components from hardware and software platforms in order to help in possible reuse by administrations.

Social issues

1. Accessibility: In the era of technology, mostly number of people using internet via computers and mobile phones. In the context of India, there is still gap arising between users and nonusers; it is because of language barrier, inadequate infrastructure in rural areas, etc.

2. Usability: Users of e-district may be literate or illiterate. Any technology or software to be used as user friendly to greater extent, only then, citizens could use it as smoothly as possible.

3. Use of local languages: India's population is second next to china, over 65 % only literate citizens are there; rest of population cannot understand the English language. Therefore, govt. should make it more comfort by translating this language into their regional languages for the sake of benefit of e-services.

4. Awareness about e-governance: Number of people in the country has not been aware of it, on account of illiteracy, non-accessibility of internet in rural areas, lack of will using internet services, etc. Therefore, educated citizens, concerned institution and dept. should come forward to get rural people benefited by eservices.

5. Recognition of applications: Recognition of the e-Governance facilities by the citizens is another huge challenge. It is a challenge to have all the citizens well aware of the facilities offered by the e-government and have them to trust in it, so that citizens should be ready to accept these facilities.

CHALLENGES OF E-DISTRICT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

1. Trust: It is the emerging challenges of e-governance. Trust can be defined regarding users of new software and trust of the govt. former aspect implies that users of any type of software or technology must be confident, comfortable and trusting of it. Another very important aspect related to trust of govt. nowadays, citizens using e-governance services, trusting the innovations of e-governance to some extent. Furthermore, there might be some fraudulent activities done by any other entity for the sake of finance, valuable info and even about personal information, etc. Besides, in govt. offices, dept. valuable info sometimes left out or missed; it definitely erodes trust about e-governance among all classes' citizens of the economy

2. Digital divide: Even in the era of science and technology, there is still huge gap exists between users and nonusers of e-govt. services. In fact, in India, majority of the masses, who living below poverty line and they deprived of govt. services. In contrast, some portion of people are immensely using the e-services of government .However, this gap needs to be made narrow, then only ,the benefits of e-governance would be utilized equally.

3. Cost: One of the difficult tasks of the govt. is to spend on implementation of e-governance initiatives to which govt. has to bear huge cost. Few other developed countries UK and Singapore spending 1% of GDP and 0.8% of GDP respectively. India spending only 3% of GDP, indeed, govt. should motivate the officials, administrators and common people using services of e-governance subject to conscious use of public finance on these types of projects.

4. Privacy and Security: It is one of the critical challenges of e-governance. Financial services, medical services and personal information are to be protected with security, and then only, there will be number of people trusting of it. Therefore, implementation of e-governance projects must have security standard and protocols for safeguarding the interest of all classes of masses; otherwise, citizens will lose trust and confidentiality of e-governance.

5. Infrastructure: It is essentially required for implementation of e-governance as much as possible in India. Electricity, internet and poor adaptability of technology will retard the progress of e-governance. In the context of developing countries, there should be enough basic facilities in order to give impetus to e-governance.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES OF E-DISTRICT:

During our study we found some lacunas in strategy, design, development and implementation of e-Governance web portals. With all our data collection analysis and interpretation, we are in a position to put forward following suggestions.

- In order to reap e-Government benefits, policy makers should conduct regular evaluation to pinpoint weaknesses and provide appropriate solutions, which is not observed.
- It is suggested to provide Citizen Relationship Management Module in web portals.
- Citizen Charter should not be informative but should be interactive.

- *The web portals developed by National Informatics Centre have used same template, design and even links. Most of the information is similar for many departments and portals. It is suggested for customization of these portals as per the need and functionality of the departments.*
- *Making apolicy choice in favour of computerization. It may require huge investments for the purchase of hardware and software solutions but should still be implemented.*
- *Sincere efforts would be required to mobilize resources for this arduous job. One way to deal with the situation could be that government enters into arrangements for leasing of computers.*
- *Establishing the best optimal connectivity between various ministries and departments of government of India so that transfer of documents, papers and images could be done through Internet thereby choosing better speed as an alternative to manual effort Supplying information to citizen in their local language that they understand and are comfortable with, for example their local dialect language.*
- *Changing the mind-set of the employees who are habitual of working only in the manual mode.*
- *Making cyber laws available to the public at the earliest s so as to enable IT systems and information documents being stored in the systems have the same legal validity as the documents stored today in the form of paper.*
- *Building infrastructure of power and all weather surface transport system to abridge the digital divide between the rural and urban India. Basic infrastructure such as software environment, Web Server, Data Base Server, Internet connectivity, Firewall etc. resources are to be made available to each department so that access through it then services could be delivered fast and without fail. A significant amount of time would be saved and could be focused on main application to deliver the services.*
- *Requirement Analysis is to be done in terms of application load, number of hits per unit of time, response time, DR site, application environment and security audit of application etc.*
- *Professional manpower up to certain period of time may also be provided at the user end to start using the e-Governance services.*
- *National cloud through which the government becomes able to support applications and services must be made available. Almost all the initiatives under 'Digital India' campaign are supported through the cloud. Alternatively, Department may be facilitated to place their servers at Central Data Centre for proper environment and maintenance, this is called as Co-lection. These two solutions to store huge amount of data will boost up department initiatives with regards to service delivery. Developing the ambience for e-government: Positive environment needs to be developed to meet the vision of successful implementation of e- government projects. This environment may either be internal or external. Implementation of E-Government Projects - Then finally*

the e-government projects must be implemented. This is the final step of the conceptual framework.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF E-DISTRICT:

- 1. To deliver all kind of govt. services through electronic mode. It will make government transparent, efficient and easily accessible to citizens to get benefitted of various services by way of e-governance.*
- 2. In order to reach out the citizens from remote control areas, mobile governance to be given priority, through which ,both transactional and informational govt. services provided and providing innovation in mobile governance.*
- 3. Govt. to try so as to infuse advanced technology for executing the on-going projects to greater extent. It would keep the sustainability of multiple projects.*
- 4. To create an eco-system that promotes innovation in ICT for govt. and for applications that can benefit the citizens.*
- 5. To promote ethical use of e-governance services. In which, keeping the information of govt., private institutions safer and securing e-govt. cyber world.*

CONCLUSION

Before the e-district project was launched in Himachal Pradesh, citizens had to travel to the block or sub-divisional offices and district headquarters in order to avail simple services like certificates of income, birth, caste, death. They had to pay bribes wait indefinitely to get work done; where the system was not only costly, but also time consuming. The e-district project can therefore be looked at as an efficient tool of quick service delivery to the citizens. The e-district project makes it possible to eliminate the need of an applicant to come to public office and to wait indefinitely. Here services are efficiently completed and provided to the citizen through e-delivery. Now the application of e-district projects in Himachal Pradesh increases the efficiency of various government departments by providing seamless services to the common people easily through electronic medium.

Through implemented, in practice, the e-district project has been functioning equally well in Himachal Pradesh. Sometimes it fails to achieve its goals due to lack of awareness and sometimes due to apathy of the officials to function professionally. Access of CSCs and e-district Facilitation Centres to receive forms, applications and documents and deliver certificates, etc., to the citizenry may be the goal of the e-district project, but lack of awareness among the people, low e-literacy rate, and above all the digital divide in the mind-set of the people transforms some of the CSCs as mere centres of internet browsing and printing. In this situation the concept of establishment of a regulatory framework to deliver the various G2C services through the CSCs has not been possible in the rural and remote areas of the district, for which these are actually needed. Besides, dearth of power supply, low broadband access, shortage of

skilled manpower, resistance to change, and poor data security are some other genuine problems. However, in spite of the problems, the journey of the foundation of e-district which started with very few digital infrastructures has now reached a focal point in its width and breath to accomplish the desired destination.

REFERENCES

- Chand, Vikram k. *Public Service Delivery in India: Understanding the Reform Process*, Oxford Publication
- Singh, shivani. *Governance: Issues and Challenges*, Sage Publication
- E-District MMP, *Guidelines for National Rollout*, Department of Information Technology, June 2011.
- http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-01-21/guwahati/30650655_1_national-e-governance-delivery-bill-state-data-centre
- Michael Backus, *E-Governance in Developing Countries*, IICD Research, Brief, 2001.
- Ashok Agrwal, *E-governance: Case studies*, Hyderabad: India University Press, 2007.
- SubhashBhatnagar, *E-Government: From Vision to Implementation*, Delhi: Sage Publishers, 2004.
- MeetalSaxsena, *ICT in Rural India: E-Governance*, Hyderabad: ICFAI Press, 2008
- DipankarSinha, *Democratic Governance in India*, Delhi: Gyan Books, 2007.
- Ravi Upadhya, *E- Government: Perspective and Challenges*, Delhi: Anmol Publication, 2007.
- VikasKanungo, *Citizen Centric e-Governance in India*. ASSOCHAM world Bank Vision Document, 2004.
- C.S.R. Prabhu, *E-Governance: Concepts and Case Studies*, Delhi: Prentice- Hall of India, 2006.
- J.Satanaryana, *E-Government: The Science of the Possible*, New Delhi: commonwealth Publishers, 2005.
- The Indian Express*, Citizen- Centric Public Services, Chandigarh, 3 April 2013
- The Tribune*, Govt. Plans Cyber Kiosks for Efficient Delivery of Services, Chandigarh, 23 July 2013.

WEB SITES

- <https://www.nisg.org/case-studies-on-e-governance-in-india>.
- <https://www.nic.in/>

<http://edistrict.hp.gov.in/>

<https://nceg.gov.in/>

<https://digitizeindia.gov.in/>

<http://www.niti.gov.in/>

https://himachal.nic.in/index1.php?lang=1&dpt_id=25&level=0&linkid=4008&lid=13048

<https://himachalforms.nic.in/PSG.html>

<https://www.indg.in/e-governance/e-governance/egov-plan>

<https://himachal.nic.i/lokmitra.htm>

<https://www.transparencyindia.org>