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Effectiveness of E-panchayat in Andhra Pradesh: A study

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Abstract

The main idea is if the administrative processes are streamlined and resources are conserved and citizens are empowered with efficient and responsive local administration at every village, then it results in development of districts, states and subsequently the entire nation. So grass root level problems were taken up for ICT application under the e-Panchayat project.

Keywords: E-panchayat, effectiveness, Andhra Pradesh

Introduction

As per the World Bank, "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." Government of India (GoI), with an intention to transform the governance landscape by ensuring participation of citizens in policy making and providing ease of access to information to the citizens, introduced the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006. The vision of the NeGP was to "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man." e- Panchayat is one of the Mission Mode Project (MMP), currently being implemented with a vision to empower and transform rural India.

As a first step towards formulating the project, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj constituted an Expert Group in June, 2007 under the Chairmanship of Dr. B.K. Gairola, Director General, NIC, Government of India. The Expert Group was entrusted with the task of assessing the IT Programmes of Ministry of Panchayati Raj and recommending cost effective solutions along with the cost implications. Adopting a consultative approach, the Committee interacted with the States/UTs to assess the existing status of computerization up to the Gram Panchayat level, including the initiatives undertaken by the State Governments. In order to understand the ground realities, the Committee conducted field visits to some of the Gram Panchayats in the selected rural areas where some IT initiatives had been undertaken. Inputs from eminent experts in the public and private sector were also taken into account as part of the consultative process. In essence, it found that while some computerization efforts had already been made at Panchayat level by States like Gujarat, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Goa, these attempts were limited as they were driven by short term goals and were unable to completely transform Panchayats due to lack of a holistic perspective. It was felt that a more comprehensive approach was required to make a cognizable impact on the functioning of the Panchayats for the benefit of the citizens. These recommendations formed the basis for the conceptualization of ePanchayatMMP.

The e-Panchayat project holds great promise for the rural masses as it aims to transform the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) into symbols of modernity, transparency and efficiency. This is a one of its kind nationwide IT initiative introduced by Ministry of Panchayati Raj that endeavours to ensure people's participation in programme decision making, implementation and delivery. The project aims to automate the functioning of the 2.45 lakh Panchayats in the country. The project addresses all aspects of Panchayats' functioning including Planning, Monitoring, Implementation, Budgeting, Accounting, Social Audit and

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delivery of citizen services like issue of certificates, licenses etc. (Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj). The Panchayats being at the interface of rural citizens and governance structure are an effective vehicle to induce mass ICT culture at the grassroots level. It is with this broad vision that MoPR formulated a scheme for ICT enablement of all the Panchayats in the country on a Mission Mode approach. The e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) is intended to address all the aspects of Panchayats' functioning from internal core functions such as Decentralized Planning, Budgeting, Accounting, Implementation and monitoring etc. to service delivery like issue of certificates, licenses etc (Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj).

Statement of the problem

The state Governments have created several Panchayat Raj institutions to ensure grass root level development. At village level the Gram Panchayats are there, these are grass root level institutions. At the intermediate level, i.e., Tehsil/Block/Mandal level there are nodal executive authorities, they coordinate the implementation of welfare schemes and services. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, there are Mandal Parishads. Similarly at the District level the common nodal administrative authority exists, in Andhra Pradesh at district level there are Zilla Parishads. Some places there are Divisions. At the state level there is state level Administration to prepare policy guidelines and ensure the smooth functioning of the Panchayat Raj institutions. How to streamline the administrative processes and avoid delays and conserve resources in the country. Is there a feasible solution for this problem. How to implement the solution in a cost effective manner. Answer to several such questions was e-Panchayat. The main idea is if the administrative processes are streamlined and resources are conserved and citizens are empowered with efficient and responsive local administration at every village, then it results in development of districts, states and subsequently the entire nation. So grass root level problems were taken up for ICT application under the e-Panchayat project.

Past Studies

Ashok Kumar and Uma Prasad Mitra (2015) ^[1] analyzed the performance of e-Panchayat MMP in Bihar. The study found that over 70% Panchayats in Bihar have become digital and are connected to the Internet. Accounts, plans and other information of Panchayats are available on the public domain. They are now gearing up to provide government services to the citizens at their doorsteps. The efforts and results have been widely recognized by the public as well as by the government. The journey has not been easy and against many odds, such as lack of buildings, manpower, computers, connectivity, electricity etc. For successful implementation of e-Panchayat, Bihar has achieved 3rd prestigious position in Nationale-Panchayat Puraskaar 2014 of Govt. of India.

Ghan Shyam Bansal and Kulshreshtha M.P. (2016) ^[2] analysed the features and benefits of Mahari Panchayat Mobile App & Web Portal in Haryana. The author opined that the Panchayat Raj functions as a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the basic unit of local administration. The system has three levels - Gram Panchayat (Village level), Block Samiti or Panchayat Samiti (Block level) and Zila Parishad (District level). 'Mahari

(My) Panchayat' comprises with a macro-level database of over 70000 elected representatives of PRIs in Haryana for enabling access to these representatives through Web Portal and Android-based Mobile App, which is freely downloadable from Google play store. Complete database contains details of elected representatives containing the details like Name, Gender, Father's Name, Photo, Caste, Address, Mobile number, Aadhar (UID), Age (DOB), Educational qualifications, Marital status and Occupation. Graphical and analytical view of all elected representatives showing age (Average age District and Statewise), Gender, Cast and qualification wise representations are the main features of the new system. According to the new system, Government can reach out to all representatives through a broadcast SMS using the database of PRIs (Haryana). Any mobile-based campaign in the interest of the general public can be run using PRIs database. This database will provide a comprehensive framework to the Government for extending various welfare schemes and monitoring thereof. Mobile App (android) "Mahari Panchayat" freely downloadable by anyone from the Google play store. Mobile App is a strong tool for accessing the details of any PRI elected representative. Sharing the outcome of Mobile App to various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Gmail, Zopya and Google+. Strong search facility in Mobile App to get the complete detail of all Sarpanches of all wards and Sarpanch in any of the Gram Panchayat in one search including the details of Gram Panchayat including Blocks and Districts.

Shashidhar an KP (2016) opined that the right application of technology is to boost productivity in all sectors of the economy, i.e., agriculture, manufacturing, services, business and governmental activities. Technology enables informed decision-making, stakeholder participation and efficient service delivery and it helps ensure transparency, accountability, and rule of law leading to inclusive good governance. The author noticed that e-Panchayat, a component of Mission Mode Projects (MMP), has been launched by the ministry of panchayat 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.

Project Conceptualization

e-Panchayat MMP is aimed at automating internal work flow processes of all the 2.45 Lakh Panchayats (approx) across the country. This will cover approximately 30 lakh elected members and several lakhs PRI functionaries. In 2009-10, in order to lay a strong foundation for e-Panchayat and to ensure that project evolved through an elaborate consultative process, Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) commissioned a comprehensive study covering all States and UTs to identify all the Information and Services Needs of the stakeholders viz. Central Ministries, State Departments, Panchayats and Citizens. Field studies were conducted in 135 Panchayats across 45 Districts covering all 34 States/UTs. 23 Central Schemes were studied and discussions were held with 11 Central Line Ministries, their State Departments, District and Block Administrations and several field level functionaries. Inputs were also taken from Gram Sabha meetings and through other focused group discussions with citizens.

After the needs assessment study, process re-engineering was suggested and a roadmap for e-enabling Panchayats across the country was developed. These reports on Information and Service Needs Assessment (ISNA), Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Detailed Project Reports (DPR) were developed for every State/UT in the country. These efforts culminated in the formulation of a National ISNA, National BPR and National DPR that set the roadmap for radically transforming decentralized local governance in the country (Source: Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj).

E-Panchayat

As per the World Bank, "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." Government of India (GoI), with an intention to transform the governance landscape by ensuring participation of citizens in policy making and providing ease of access to information to the citizens, introduced the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006. The vision of the NeGP was to "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man." e- Panchayat is one of the Mission Mode Project (MMP), currently being implemented with a vision to empower and transform rural India.

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The e-Panchayat project holds great promise for the rural masses as it aims to transform the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) into symbols of modernity, transparency and efficiency. This is a one of its kind nationwide IT initiative introduced by Ministry of Panchayati Raj that endeavours to ensure people's participation in programme decision making, implementation and delivery. The project

aims to automate the functioning of the 2.45 lakh Panchayats in the country. The project addresses all aspects of Panchayats' functioning including Planning, Monitoring, Implementation, Budgeting, Accounting, Social Audit and delivery of citizen services like issue of certificates, licenses etc. (Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, <https://www.panchayat.gov.in/background-objectives-and-project-conceptualization>).

The Panchayats being at the interface of rural citizens and governance structure are an effective vehicle to induce mass ICT culture at the grassroots level. It is with this broad vision that MoPR formulated a scheme for ICT enablement of all the Panchayats in the country on a Mission Mode approach. The e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) is intended to address all the aspects of Panchayats' functioning from internal core functions such as Decentralized Planning, Budgeting, Accounting, Implementation and monitoring etc. to service delivery like issue of certificates, licenses etc. (Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, <https://www.panchayat.gov.in/background-objectives-and-project-conceptualization>).

Objectives of E-panchayat

Hence the key objectives of e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project are to use ICT for:

- Automation of internal workflow processes of Panchayats
- Improving delivery of services to citizens
- Capacity building of Panchayat Representatives and Officials
- Social Audit
- Transparency, Accountability, Efficiency and RTI compliance of Panchayats
- Improving Governance of local self-government (E-Panchayat Mission Mode Project, Centre for Innovation in Public Systems).

Components: Components of e-Panchayat:

- Information & Service Need Assessment
- Business Process Re-engineering
- Computing Infrastructure
- Connectivity
- Capacity Building
- Content Management
- Programme & Project Management (E-Panchayat Mission Mode Project, Centre for Innovation in Public Systems).

E-Panchayat is an e-Governance initiative for the rural sector providing comprehensive software solution attempting automation of Gram Panchayat functions. The services offered are Birth & Death Registrations which include Capturing of event details, Name inclusion, Non-availability Certificates, Registration of events, Issuance of Certificates, Statistics, House Tax including Automation of Assessment, Demand Collections, Arrear Processing and Annual Demand Enhancement, Special Notices/Demand Notices, Registers/Field Books/Defaulters Trade License includes Issue of Licenses, Cancellations, Renewal, Demand Notices, Fee Collection etc. Benefits are improved citizen services, better transparency, streamlining of procedures and monitoring of revenues & services (e-Panchayat, National Informatics Centre).

Digital panchayat in Andhra Pradesh

The Commissioner Panchayati Raj and Rural Development has initiated Digital Panchayat, a Flagship G2C project, for Computerization and online issuance of citizen centric certificates. After a detailed system study by NIC, the department prioritized the applications to be automated for gram Panchayats. The application areas are Birth & Death Registrations, House Tax Demand Collections, Trade Licenses, Property valuation, mutations, water tap connection, NOC, Building permission, Layout permissions and MNREGA. These applications provide an end to end solution for all the gram panchayats in the state. The software facilitates generation of certificates, payment gateway for citizens, eSign facility for panchayat functionaries, SMS and email alerts. The Computerisation of all the 3-tiers of PRIs i.e Zilla Praja Parishad, Mandal Praja Parishad (Block) and Gram Panchayats is also in place. The citizen centric functional areas are:

The citizen services modules in e-Panchayat are

- a) Birth & Death Registration and Certification
- b) House Tax
- c) Old Age and Other Pensions
- d) Works Monitoring
- e) Financial Accounting & Book Keeping
- f) MIS
- g) Water Connection and Water Tax
- h) Assets Accounting
- i) Grievance Redressal
- j) Building and Layout Permissions
- k) Land Records Access

Conclusion

For socio-economic development at the grassroots level, the broader involvement of communities and businesses must be ensured. It automatically builds good business relationships based on transparency, mutual goodwill and purpose. NIC's e-Panchayat provides a unique opportunity to establish inter and intra shareholder partnerships at the grassroots level. Realizing this fact, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has decided to implement the e-Panchayat system in all the major Gram Panchayats in Andhra Pradesh. To take this one step further and ensure panchayat e-readiness, resources have been allocated for training, hardware procurement etc. To ensure stability, an operator has also been appointed in each e-panchayat. E-Panchayat implementation initiates the process of systematically building partnerships in each panchayat. The scope of e-panchayat success in the gram panchayat depends on the e-needs of potential partners as well as their e-readiness to the extent of connectivity available to them, access to digital culture and village-wise access to the Internet. Level members of these organizations. Rather than those who buy the hardware / outsourcing agency, the government should act as a catalyst to create a cooperative and friendly e-climate to achieve and sustain success.

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