ICT in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Meenakshi

Abstract: In India, the notion of local self government is just as old as the civilisation. In today's time, PRIs, i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions are local governmental bodies of grass-root governance in rural India and forms the third layer of the federalism in India. These institutions of grass-root government are playing an essential role in improving the living standard of rural masses in India. In the current tech savvy scenario, the concept of e- governance and usage of Information and Communications technology (ICT) in offering services to the community have gained momentum. In order to move from governance to good governance with the help of ICT, the Government of India has initiated many projects such as National e-Governance Plan, e-Kranti, Bharat Net etc. This paper depicts the use of ICT by Panchayati Raj Institutions in providing effective public service delivery to the rural masses. Further, this paper also throws some light on various programs and applications which are designed by national and state governments to strengthening the position of PRI's in development of rural areas.

Key Words: e-governance, ICT, local government, service delivery, Digital India.

I. INTRODUCTION:

India is a country of villages. As indicated by the Census Data 2011, in India there are 6,63,811 villages that accounts for more than 68 percent of the total populace. The improvement of this growing rural populace is one of the primary reasons of concern on the part of government while making policies. The Indian government has initiated many policies, programmes and projects planned for uplifting the way of life in rural areas. In order to develop rural areas in a smooth manner the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's) has come into reality. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's) are rural local self-government institutions and establishes the third level of multi order government in India. The state government provides the required authority to Panchayati Raj Institutions which has main responsibility to promote and develop these institutions. In this process of attaining cooperative federalism in the country and to help the state governments in accomplishing their mandated obligations, the Central Government provides the required support and guidance. The seventy third amendment to the Indian constitution, 1992, established democratic decentralized institutions of grass-root government which are legally authorized to govern the rural areas. From two tiers of government i.e. Central and State governments, a new level was presented which could be comprehensively known as local government. There are 2.79 lakh local bodies in India, which include 2.53 lakh Gram Panchayats, 6716 Block Panchayats and 654 District Panchayats. There are more than 29 lakh Panchayat’s representatives in India.

The ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has gained momentum in the last two decades in the developing nations especially in India. With the expending role of ICT various e- governance programmes and applications are invented for the development of rural areas. ICT occupies a noteworthy position in the management of Panchayati Raj Institutions in various aspects like accounts, agriculture development, finances, land records, procurement etc. This paper throws some light on some landmark projects initiated to strengthen the e-governance in rural India.

Fig 1: India’s rural and urban population

II. PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND ICT:

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI’s) works as a third tier of administration that incorporates Gram Panchayats as basic unit of local level governance. Gram Panchayat is designated as the corner stone of local self-governments in India. Electronic governance make reference to the utilization of data advancements by government offices, (for example, world wide web, Intranet, Wide Area Network, and cloud computing) that can change relations with residents, organizations, and different organs of the government. ICT (Information & Communication Technology) empowers the Panchayats to flourish their participation in process of decision making, planning and governance by organizing correspondence among residents and government. Throughout the years, the union government and different state governments have been embraced an enormous number of activities to help the e-governance. Ceaseless endeavours have been made at various levels to improve public service delivery at local level. The three tier system of democratic decentralisation intends towards the participation of local people via elected representatives in policy making. The description of some landmark projects strengthening ICT at local level as below:

Revised Manuscript Received on October 05, 2019.

Meenakshi, Amity Institute of Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India. Email:saroha.meenakshi@gmail.com


2 World Bank. Definition of e-governance
To improve the administration and governance in India by ensuring people’s participation in decision making process, the union government has initiated the NeGP (National E- governance Plan) in the year 2006 with an aim – “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.” As a part of NeGP, Indian Government has introduced thirty- union, state and integrated level (local governments) in India. A Mission Mode Project (MMP) means a single project in the sphere of NeGP (National e- Governance Plan) which aims at one facet of electronic governance, for example- agriculture or land records etc. The MMP’s have clear aims, scopes and execution timetables as well as assessable results.4

C. STATE WIDE AREA NETWORKS (S.W.A.N.):

SWANs (State Wide Area Networks) are proving secure network for governmental work and connecting all States Headquarters, District Headquarters and Block headquarters, in a vertical hierarchical structure by ensuring minimum broadband connectivity of 2 Mbps per link.

![Diagram of State Wide Area Networks](Image)

**Fig 3: State Wide Area Networks**

Source: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY)

Depending upon the utilisation, every state can increase the bandwidth between state headquarters and district headquarters up to 34 Mbps and upto the bandwidth of 8 Mbps in between District headquarters and Block headquarters. S.W.A.Ns are being operational in 34 states across India.6 The States are utilizing the infrastructure of S.W.A.N. for offering the safe and secure user connectivity to different government offices in state. Implementation of S.W.A.N. is still remaining in 2 States namely, Jammu & Kashmir and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. S.W.A.N. can be implemented through two options7:

I: Public - Private Partnership (PPP model)

II: National Informatics Centre (NIC model)

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7 Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. Implementation Models of SWAN. Retrieved from: https://meity.gov.in/content/implementation-models
D. COMMON SERVICE CENTRE (CSCs):-

The CSCs are designated as the cornerstone of the NeGP (National e-Governance Plan) for introduction of the e-Governance on a large platform. Within the streams of e-governance, education, entertainment, health etc., the Common Service centres(CSC) are providing web-enabled cost effective and high quality voice, video and data content services. The CSCs are offering e-Governance support and services to the masses belonging to rural areas, which includes utility bill payments, post, various documentation, certificates etc. This model is being implemented through PPP model.8

E. CSC 2.0:

Its main objective is to set up self -sustaining network of 2.5 lakhs common Service Centres at Gram Panchayat level under Digital India campaign to provide non-discriminatory access to web enabled services to the rural population. It is implemented through E- Governance Services India Ltd (CSC SPV). This project is based on transaction and service delivery based model. It is providing a large number of e-services via a single delivery platform.9

F. SERVICE DELIVERY GATEWAYS:

The Indian Government has started NeGP (National e-Governance Plan) to avail all the governmental services to the citizens in their own vicinity at affordable prices, via public service delivery centres and to make sure efficacy, reliability and transparency of such services. In order to attain this vision, various government departments needs to integrate, collaborate and cooperate across various tiers of administrative setup. To deliver variety of e-services, a service delivery mechanism at different levels has been developed as:

A) NSDG (National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway);

B) SSDG (State e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway);

C) MSDG (Mobile e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway).

The NSDG (National E-Governance Service Delivery Gateway), SSDG (State E-Governance Service Delivery Gateways) and MSDG (Mobile e-Governance Service Delivery Gateways) are an endeavour to decrease the point

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to point level connections in between various governmental offices and offer an uniform messaging, interfacing and routing switch services via several stake-holders, for example- front to end services access providers. Back-end services providers, different government departments can generate their documents, application forms, and Data interoperable. The NSDG proposes to attain an extreme level of inter-operability between heterogeneous and autonomous units at various levels of the government. This initiative reduces the overall outlay of the projects under e-governance by scattering, optimising and rationalising the service framework.

IV. E-PANCHAYAT:

Electronic Panchayat or e-Panchayat is one among the various MMPs (Mission Mode Projects), the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) is responsible for its implementation to strengthen and transform the scene of rural areas. E-Panchayat’s goal is to provide better service delivery to citizens living in rural locations across the country. The main aim of e-panchayat is to make sure development of local area and to empower grass-root governance by availing wide range of services to citizens, Panchayat officials, elected representatives and other knowledge workers at local level. Under the e-Panchayat, PES (Panchayat Enterprise Suite) has been introduced. The PES contains twelve core common applications which are depicted in the below figure. In the current scenario, PES is working with ten core common applications but Audit Online and Geographic Information System is still under consideration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>PES Application</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>LGD (Local)</td>
<td>It provides all the information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: PES Applications Description

Bharat Net is the world’s largest rural broadband project which aim to provide broadband connectivity to all 2.7 lakh Gram panchayats in rural India. Under the Bharat Net project all panchayats will be provided high speed broadband connections in India. The government connected one lakh Gram Panchayats under phase I of Bharat Net Project. The Union Cabinet on July 19, 2017 approved a modified strategy for implementing Bharat Net under which, the remaining 1,50,000 (approximately) GPs in the country are to be provided broadband connectivity in Phase-II of the project. The Phase II of the project is under implementation, and a total of 2 lakh GPs (gram panchayats) are targeted to be completed by March 2020.

VI. E-KRANTI:

E-Kranti: Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance. In India, the e-governance has smoothly evolved from computerisation in government units to

Fig 7: Panchayat Enterprise Suite
endeavours which capture the true essence of governance, for example- citizen centric service delivery, better service inclination, transparency and reliability. But a gap in service delivery is created because of limited scope of existing MMPs, lack of latest technology such as mobile and cloud. Considering the need of the hour for transformation of e-governance and encourage good governance and mobile governance in India, the methodology and main modules of e-Kranti have been approved by the Union Cabinet in the year 2015 with the idea of “Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance”. There are forty four MMPs (Mission Mode Projects) beneath the e – Kranti programme, which are divided into Central, State and Integrated projects.¹⁴

![Fig 8: Evolution of e-governance in India](Source: Digital India)

**VII. CONCLUSION:**

From the last decade, the e-governance has transformed completely from computerisation to e-services in the country. This revolution has raised the more expectations in the mind of people living in rural areas. To empower and transform the lives in rural India there is a need of more comprehensive strategy. The system of e-Panchayat should be based on primary data rather than secondary resources. All stakeholders in PRI’s should be well informed about the new development in the area of e-governance and empowered to make best of it. In today’s time, for good governance, the e-governance is pre-condition. Hence, to strengthen the role of PRI’s and upliftment of the lives in rural India a more specific and comprehensive strategy is the need of the hour.

**AUTHORS PROFILE**

Meenakshi, is currently pursuing Ph.D. in Political Science from Amity University, Noida. She has qualified National Eligibility Test (NET) in Public Administration. She received her master’s degree in Public Administration from Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi. She has completed her graduation in Mathematics Hons. (B.Sc.) from Banasthali University, Rajasthan. Her research interest includes Decentralization, local government, Center-state relations, Fiscal decentralization, e-governance, public policy. Her recent publications include - a chapter in book namely ‘Issues in Panchayati Raj Institutions’ in Jyotika Techchandani’s edited Economic, Political and Social Issues of India. New Century Publication. ISBN: 978-81-7708-487-0. And an article ‘Local government institutions and environment management in South Asia: A case study of India and Bhutan’ is published in International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering 8(7C2), pp. 168-173 (2019). Newspaper Articles: 24th April 2019, The Impressive Times, ‘Nation celebrates democratic decentralisation’.