

Development of a Community Information Service: The Citizen-Centric E-Governance in Rajasthan special reference to Tribal District Dungarpur - Rajasthan(India)

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Abstract

Tribal area of Rajasthan state, Dungarpur district is continuously stepping forward towards ICT enabled governance. All the ICT enabled governance applications like E-mitra / CSC, E-sugam, Land record computerization i.e. Apna Khata are doing good and the usage of these applications is increasing very rapidly in urban area of dungarpur but when it comes to the rural part of this district the story is different in different blocks. Government is trying to provide more access to govt. services through various e-governance projects but there are some challenges in providing E-governance in this district that are because of the geographical problems, electricity and internet connectivity problems, low literacy rate etc. Major finding of our study are low awareness in rural area, high satisfaction level of users, low usages, E-governance projects are still not reaching to the poor, there are several local intermediaries, women participation is low and many other. We conclude that much of the potential benefits of E-government are not being realized.

Keywords:

E-governance, Dungarpur, Poor, Citizen, E-Mitra, CSC.

Introduction

There are many studies on E-governance projects and they define E-governance in different ways. I think E-governance is not just the 'Use of Information and Communication Technology in Governance' or 'Service delivery over Internet' or 'Digital access to government services' but E-Governance also includes the participation of public and the poor people. It creates the new interface for citizens to interact with government. It also provides the choices of places from where they want to avail govt. services. So in my views E-governance is **'Public participation in governance to increase the efficiency, accountability, transparency, convenience and value addition in service delivery by interacting with government through electronic platform'**.

World Bank (www.worldbank.org) defines (Asia Oceania Electronic Marketplace Association report): "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.”

Increased transparency, less corruption, better delivery of government services, greater government responsiveness and accountability, and empowerment of citizens—especially poor ones—are commonly cited among the possible benefits of electronic government (e-government) (World Bank).

In Dungarpur district, most of rural tribal people are BPL. The young generation is moving towards education and thus the most important E-governance services in this district are:

- E-mitra/CSC (Billing, Digital Certificates)
- Land Record Computerization / Apna Khata (Land Records)
- E-sugam (Single window for various purposes)

Present Scenario of E-Mitra/CSCs in Dungarpur

Low Awareness

In Dungarpur, the awareness level of public is low. In urban area of dungarpur 73% people are aware about E-mitras. But the awareness level goes down to about 47% in rural areas of dungarpur. If we divide the study into literate and illiterate people then the awareness level comes out to be 79% in educated people but it comes down to about 28% in illiterate people of dungarpur. Higher percentage of the rural people are farmers and they are illiterate so it is very tough for CSC kiosk holders to survive in this scenario and the story of CSCs says it all. There are total 141 CSCs in dungarpur but only 50 are operational. Some of them are new so they are in their development phase but about 50 CSCs are not operational/deactivated because of low revenue generation. Rural people are not aware about these CSCs and thus they were running in loss and finally they are closed. Further the awareness level downs as distance increases from CSC. According to our study the awareness level downs to 24% from 47% percent in 2.5 Kilometres from CSC and it comes down to 7% after 3.5 Kilometres. Awareness level is very high in young generation about 75% of age group 16-30 are aware about these services but it comes down to 45% in 35-45 age group and then it comes down to 15% in 45 above age group. Awareness level in rich people is about 79% but in poor it comes down to about 30%. Kiosk holders are also responsible for this low awareness. We found that about 33% kiosks do not have posters and service delivery information's at E-Mitras centres.

Distance is a problem

In Dungarpur, in some villages the density of population is high at one place but many villages are decentralized means they are divided into small habitations and the scenario is like 2-3 houses at one place and then 2-3 houses at some distance and also the houses are located at hilly areas so here the distance is another problem. It's not easy to aware these people about services. And as we have discussed earlier the awareness level falls very rapidly as distance increases. Some CSCs are not operational due to electricity and internet problems that also increase the distance to avail services and thus it creates a negative impact on customer.

Electricity and Connectivity problem

Most of the CSCs are facing the problems of electricity and internet connectivity problems. We found that 33% of CSCs were not operational due to electricity or internet problems and about 40% CSCs do not have any broadband connectivity they are working with their data cards. The speed of data cards is not very fast that ultimately results in low efficiency. Due to electricity problems the kiosk holders have to work manually and then they have to feed it on website while electricity is available and that increases the work load on kiosk holders and also it creates a doubt in mind of customer whether their work will be done or not and ultimately he moves somewhere else. Further, it creates a negative effect on customer that the kiosk is not a good place to avail services and that decreases the customers of kiosks. Another big problem is internet. In rural areas the connectivity is very low that decreases the efficiency and customer has to wait for about half an hour or more to get his work done that tests the patience of customer and creates a negative impact on customer. So we found that the customers ask to the kiosk holder first about the availability of the internet by mobile and then they come to the CSC.

Intermediary Agents

Here in Dungarpur, The network of agents(intermediates) is very active. From village level to the district level we found agents playing a leading role in E-governance also. First take the scenario of a village. We asked from a student pursuing his B.Ed. about the status of CSC in his village. He told us that the young people go to CSC for electricity bill or certificates but all the senior citizens or women go to one agent in the village for billing purpose. He takes 5 rupees extra on each bill and then he submits that to the CSC. The main reason behind this situation is the low literacy and problems in adoption of new technology. We found that there are about 27% citizens who are aware about CSCs but still using intermediary. Now if we talk about urban areas, here the scenario is different because a high percentage of literacy and awareness. If rural CSCs are not operations due to some problems, all the rural citizens come to urban places of dungarpur i.e. Dunagrpur and Sagwara(Only these two municipal towns). All the major colleges and schools are also located in these areas only so it increases the number of students in the areas. Most of the urban citizens are aware about the E-Mitras and they like these centers more than govt. offices for billing purpose because of convenience and time savings. These all situations lead to the inception of intermediates.

High Satisfaction Level

Although there are many problems related to E-Mitras and CSCs but we found that 87% users are satisfied with this E-governance initiative of government. 97% users say that government should increase the investment in these types of E-governance applications. 74% users found it more convenient to avail services through these E-Mitras and CSCs. 83% users says that it saves their time. 95% user says that it increases the accountability of officials. Here we found that all the 90% users think that it increases the transparency but only 77% thinks that it will decrease the corruption.

BPL Participation

Poor people is still not participating in E-governance and not getting the right benefit through these E-Mitras and CSCs. As we have already written that the awareness level is very low in poor. The tribal farmers in this area are totally dependent on agriculture

and other government running schemes like MGNAREGA etc. They are illiterate and that leads to low awareness about government initiatives. We found that only 19 out of 60 poor citizens were aware about these E-Mitras but only 7 used it and 14 out of 19 people were also of age group 15-30. Most of the poor citizens of age group 35 and above are not aware about these service providers. When we told them about these CSCs, they wanted to know more about these CSCs. They told us that they had no information about service delivery through these CSCs and they thought these CSCs are computer teachers who teaches computer to the students. They also said that we have to wait for hours in queues for billing purpose when some representative of govt. department comes to their village to collect bills. They were very happy after getting information about CSCs.

Women Participation

Most of the CSCs in Dungarpur district are owned by women. The women participation in E-governance in Dungarpur is low but it is increasing as we have found that about 35% customers in urban E-mitras were women but 13% out of 35% were there with either their father or husband. 33% out of 35% women were using the E-Mitras for their digital certificates or form filling. All the 35% women were educated. 2% women came for some billing purpose. 28% out of 35% women were of age group 16-25 so we can say that the women participation is increasing. If we talk about rural area we found only just 9 women on 20 CSCs that we have visited. All of them were there to fill the form and were of age group 18-27. If we talk about poor women then we found that none out of 21 poor women were aware about these E-Mitra/CSCs. 31% literate women in rural areas are aware about computerized service delivery but only 4% of them are using these applications. The major reason behind this is the distance and the social problems.

Other Problems

There are many other problems in implementation of E-Mitras/CSCs in Dungarpur area. Many CSCs have closed the services of electricity billing. We found that 13 out of 20 CSCs visited have closed this service that creates confusion in customer's mind about the services provided by E-Mitra/CSCs and he never comes again to avail these closed services and he moves somewhere else to avail these services. There are many social problems in this tribal area. We found CSCs that are facing problems related to public relations. If customer has good relations with some other CSC holder he usually go to that CSC only whether it is convenient for him or not. This problem leads to the low revenue generation and ultimately non-functional CSC.

Conclusion

In pursuance of the definition of e-Governance public participation is very important to make any initiative successful. Govt. of India and Govt. of Rajasthan have implemented various e-Governance schemes. In the rural area of Dungarpur none of them is effective besides CSCs. Villages are not centralized at one place, they are scattered so it is very difficult to spread awareness at grass root level.

According to our study, Dungarpur is continuously moving forward in the Information and Communication Technology enabled governance. The awareness level of young generation clearly proved this. Kiosk holders face problems related to connectivity and electricity that decreases the efficiency. The

unavailability of electricity and internet also creates confusion in citizens whether they should go to CSCs or not. The participation of BPL people is still very low. The reason behind this low participation is low literacy rate and less awareness. There are many social problems that also shun the poor. The awareness in young females is increasing and that is a good sign for country and this district. We have seen many educated women at CSCs who were filling their application forms for some examinations. The intermediaries are still very active. The major reason behind this scenario is the perception of public. Every one wants a fast and effortless service, this mentality leads them to the agents. The satisfaction level is very high among the users that show the positive impact of e-Governance. Increased transparency, accountability and speed of service delivery clearly demonstrate this. The interaction between govt. and citizens is increasing through these CSCs and that ultimately leads to the improvement of image of government.

So day by day public participation is increasing and we conclude that Dungarpur is marching towards better governance through electronic service delivery.

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