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Role of ICT in E-governance and Rural Development : An Indian Scenario

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a key role in development & Economic growth of Rural India. A large number of rural e-Governance applications, developed as pilot projects were aimed at offering easy access to citizens services and improved processing of government to citizen transactions..This paper presents a brief review of the technologies, the rural ICT projects and the issues associated with the use of ICT for rural e-governance applications.

Keywords: ICT , E –governance, Rural Development

India is 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 application implemented in the recent few years have been demonstrating the importance of information and communication technologies(ICT) in the concern areas of rural development. At present, some of the schemes introduced in rural India have improved the services immensely.

ICT as facilitator in Rural areas

- To provide services for healthcare and education
- To improve literacy for large number of population
- Provide information to farmers to improve their productivity.
- To provide multimedia services and relevant information at their doorstep.

Programs like, Mahatma Gandhi National rural Employment Gurantee Act(MGNREGA) , Online Income-Tax, Online Central Excise, Unique ID and E-office has accelerated growth of respective

areas and contributing to countries economic development. Similarly, at State level, the various rural E-governance projects , that have been providing excellent services and saving time and money of people as well as of government and are contributing their might to the socio–economic of rural India. Being ICT a significant instrument in E-governance and rural development appropriate infrastructure design is mandatory for proper functioning as follows:

- As designed of citizen centric services and dependable service delivery mechanisms.
- Selection of appropriate technologies for rural connectivity and information processing solution.
- As designed of cost effective delivery stations to build new services.
- Demonstration of transparency and efficiency to remove this trust and built confidence among the citizen on functioning of service delivery mechanisms.
- Invite private participation to reduce the burden on the central serving agency , bring in the expertise enhance the speed of implementation and offer better value propositions to the citizens.

The term e-governance focuses on the use of new ICT by governments as applied to the full range of government functions. Thus e-governance is the application of information and communication technology for delivering government services, exchange of information , communication, transaction, integration, various stands alone systems and services between government and citizens, government and business as well as back office process and interaction within the entire government frame work.

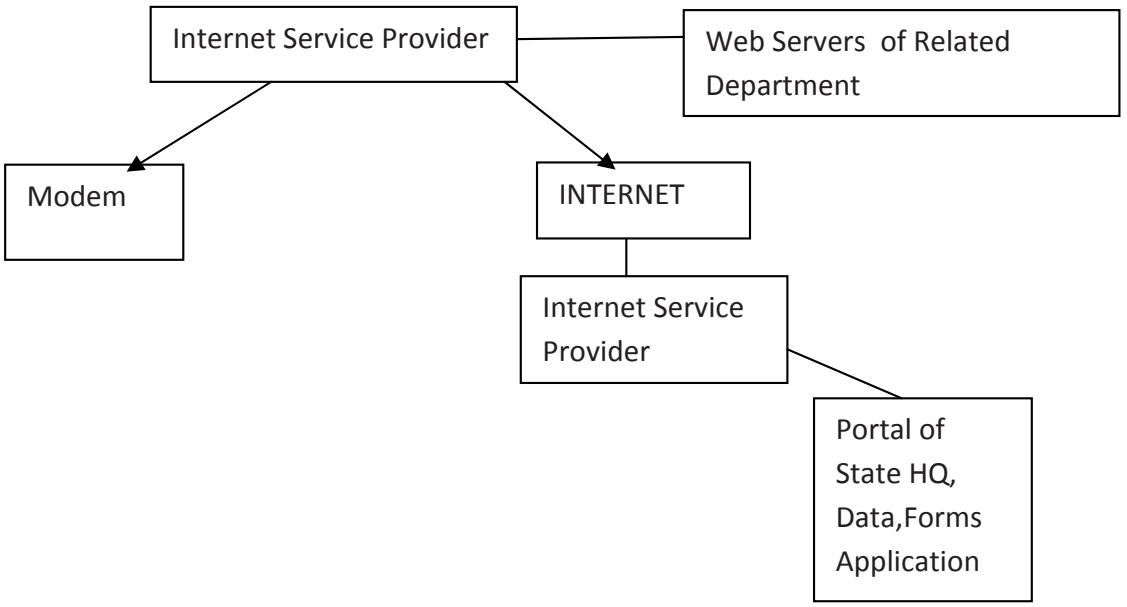
E-governance service through ICT refer to transactional services that involve local , state or national government. ICT acts in speeding up the flow of information and knowledge between government and citizen and transforming the way in which government and citizen interact. According to the united nations development program , the challenge for all countries to create and develop a system of governess , that promotes support human development. Government in many parts of the world have made huge ICT investments aimed at improving governess process.

The need for improved computer connectivity upto village level was recognised by the central government in 1998 and drafted a national IT policy recommending the states to create infrastructure to facilitate improved data communications. Adhering to national IT policy , several state government have setup or in the process of setting up the state wide area network to support the rural connectivity applications.

Availability of ICT in Rural areas

Computers have become more powerful, user friendly and less expensive. The PC revolution has brought them closer to the users to the extent that in number of cases users have designed and develop their own applications.

Several computer based companies are attempting to offer inexpensive hardware and software solutions for rural applications. These organisations developed the computer and wireless connectivity solutions with indigenous components, software and open source systems. It is hoped that large scale production of these systems would bring in appropriate cost effective technologies for rural applications.



Typical ICT Infrastructure for Rural Applications

The rural ICT solutions are normally offered through internet portals hosted on a delivery web server to provide access to the citizens through inexpensive internet medium. The information flow between the delivery server and the other department is accomplished through Intranet/LAN connectivity with servers of those departments.

Public -Private Participation

Almost all rural e-Government project champions have found it convenient to involve different private agencies for different tasks through appropriate public-private partnership contractual arrangements. These tasks include design and development of application software, population of data and content in the regional language, procurement and installation of networking and computer systems. Such arrangement seems to have helped in reducing the burden on the government, brought in the expertise, enhanced the speed of implementation and offered better value proposition to the citizens.

The basic challenges that usage of ICT for rural development faces are:

- Illiteracy amongst the vast multitude of people.
- Major power-cuts affecting the country-side ranging from 5 to 12 hours every day. Even though uninterrupted power supply systems are used; yet they prove insufficient to cope up with the power breakdowns.
- Financing difficulties encountered by the local grass root level institutions as well as by the state governments. Drastic steps are needed to inject funds for the development of the ICTs in the rural areas; increasingly by the participation of the private sector.
- Acute shortage of project leaders and guides who could ensure implementation of the ICTs at the grass root levels.
- Unfortunately most professionals want to work in the urban areas where there are ample opportunities available to them for growth as well as prosperity.

In the absence of these resources; development of ICTs in the rural areas will always be very slow.

Social awareness:

A large number of people at various levels have to be trained on the changed environment with ICT applications to meet the citizens expectations in the rural areas.

To start with , it is important to identify and prepare project champions. Functionaries attempting to design e-Government applications must have adequate experience and training to design, implement and manage ICT applications. They must be able to coordinate with number of agencies dealing with technology and citizen services. It is unlikely that the existing functionaries have exposure and adequate knowledge on all these aspects.

All functionaries of the government department need to undergo training on behavioral issues involving themselves citizens and private agencies . It is important that they are trained to accept the changed transparent environment facilitated through ICT based processing, minimizing the paper transactions and reducing the cycle time.

Conclusion:

Today urban and semi urban areas are blessed with different modes of media which has virtually changed their life style. In the rural arena, various successful e-governance initiatives, the improvement of its infrastructure and many ICT projects for development are giving hope to abolish the digital divide in India. We can only say that it is just the beginning; we have to walk miles to reach our goal but we have to continuously monitor the requirements to sustain various initiatives and project.

A large number of e-government applications developed as pilots project were aimed at offering easy access to citizens services and improved processing of government to citizen transactions. The idea that the primary and the main object of ICT in e-governance and rural development is individuals motivation to collective mobilisation for an integrated rural development.

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