Project Title:

Evolving Citizen-centric Rural e-Governance

Conducted by:

IIPA

Project Coordinator:

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Concept Brief of Project on

"Evolving Citizen Centric Rural e-governance Framework"
Executive Summary

This multi-phased project initiated by IIPA is a sincere attempt in the direction of promoting and achieving reforms in implementation of technology for service delivery to the poorest of poor in the rural areas of India. The core objective of the project is to evolve a citizen-centric design of Information Technology based governance applications for Rural Development. The outcome of the project will be a finalized e-governance framework that would provide valuable inputs to policy framework, capacity building component and to design process related to technology implementation for poverty reduction in rural areas. The project was initiated in July 2009 jointly with IIT-D and is expected to conclude in the month of February/March 2011.

Background

Apathetic response of citizens to any new technology spells its eventual doom. Significant deliberations prevail around imbibing a citizen-centric approach in design of rural e-Government initiatives. The prevalent models to explicate generic e-Governance growth cannot completely account for sustainable uptake of technologies in the rural context. As a result there is a need to separately identify issues confronting design and uptake of a rural ICT initiative in context of India for it to be completely responsive to governance needs of its citizens and to design appropriate capacity building component for training senior and middle level officers of India. To fill in this need, a multi phased project culminating into a round table has been undertaken by IIPA with IIT-D as our knowledge partners. The finalized factors that would emerge from this Project would help us to develop a citizen centric, rural e-Governance framework that is more responsive to citizens’ aspirations and contextual reality.

Objectives of the Project

1. To **delineate solutions** to these issues so as to maximize rural citizens’ value proposition in ICT/ e-Government initiatives designed for rural poor.
2. To propose a **citizen-centric rural e-governance framework**.
Research questions and Case-Studies forming premise of the Project:

1. **Has the existing ICT/e-Government initiative been accepted** by the poor and marginalized communities of the villages?
2. While designing the existing rural ICT/e-government initiatives, do the system designers of these projects take **any inputs from prevalent community knowledge systems (CKS) or from local people?**
3. While designing rural ICT/e-Government initiatives, does the **participation of villagers /poor marginalized communities** (logically classified as Naari, Karigaar, Adivasi, Kisan, Yuva) help to increase the Perceived Usefulness of Technology in the rural context?
4. Is intervention and support of **citizen representatives’ or grass root governing bodies** such as Panchayati Raj Institutes, critical for Access and Acceptance of Technology by poor people in the villages?

Case-Studies forming premise of the Project:
Some of the considered **cases**, which have been field-surveyed and form the basis of this project include:

1. **Common Service Centers (CSC)** of Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services Ltd. (ILFS) in Jajjar District of Haryana.
2. Rural Access to Services through Internet (RASI) of a consortium comprising of IIT-Chennai, MIT Media Lab, Center for International Development at Harvard, and I-Gyan Foundation in Madurai District of Tamil-Nadu.
3. **TARAhaat** by Development Alternatives in Tikkamgarh District of Madhya Pradesh.
4. **Bhoomi** by Karnataka State Department of Revenue in Raichur district and Bangalore districts of Karnataka.
5. **Akshaya** by Government of Kerala in Mallapuram and Ernakulam Districts of Kerala.
**Project Methodology**

The whole project is based on the idea of Participatory Planning and Group Consensus approach to resolve issues related to technology diffusion and technology acceptance by poor and marginalized communities of rural areas. The participants to this project are both citizen representatives and eminent experts, who are expected to deliberate in an iterative manner on concerns besetting rural e-governance initiatives. After repeated rounds of mutual negotiations and dialogue these crucial issues and their solutions would be crystallized. Final face to face brainstorming of these experts and citizens would help us to evolve a framework interlinking the finalized factors influencing design of a citizen-centric ICT based governance projects for rural areas. The future projects, designed using this hence evolved framework, are expected to establish a better connect between rural masses and decision-makers in a manner that the rural needs and local resources are adequately reflected in the rural governance processes. The whole project is proposed to be conducted in following four phases:

**Phase-1:** Citizen Consultation Round (CCR) (completed on Oct 5, 2009 by IIPA and IIT-D)

**Phase-2:** Experts Opinion Round (EOR) using Delphi Technique (process completed on Dec 3, 2009)

**Phase-3:** Officers’ Response Round (ORR)(completed on Dec 29, 2009)

**Phase-4:** Round Table on Rural e-Governance (RReG)( Initiate on )

Figure-1: Process Methodology and Outputs from each of the phases
Phase-I: CCR

- Field Survey using RMI
- CCW
- Panel Discussions
- RMI

Phase Completed; Output of Phase 1 - CCR:
1. Issues & Concerns of poor villagers for Rural e-Governance initiatives
2. Conceptual Design of Citizen Centric Rural e-Governance Framework

Phase-II: EOR

- Pilot Test of Validation Framework Initiative-VFI
- Delphi 1, 2, 3 using Validation Framework Initiative-VFI

Output of Phase II - EOR:
Validation of Constructs and Attributes of Citizen Centric Rural e-Gov framework by Delphi Experts

Phase-III: ORR

Output of Phase III ORR:
Validation of Framework for its implementation aspects

Phase-IV: RReG

Output of RReG
1. Validated Citizen-Centric Rural e-Governance Framework
2. Policy Recommendations to address issues confronting implementation of e-gov initiatives for rural poor
3. ...
A brainstorming had been held with 73 rural citizens in five parallel panel sessions viz. *Naari* Panel comprising of rural women or women self-help groups, *Yuva* Panel comprising of rural Youth, *Kisan* Panel comprising of farmers and Farm-Workers, *Adivaasi* panel representing Tribal communities, and *Karigar* Panel of rural Artisans. The participating villagers included gram sabha members, PRI functionaries, and representatives of other grassroots organizations including farmers’ unions, Self Help Groups, and field level NGOs. The views of the villagers were also captured in a pre-designed questionnaire (in Hindi) wherein they responded about the status of local governance, grassroots’ challenges, and issues confronting ICT/e-government implementation (if any) in their respective villages that they filled with the help of the assigned facilitators ('Sahayaks').

**Findings and Implications of Phase-1**

Some of the general findings related to issues confronting rural e-governance as revealed by the participating villagers of CCR were about lack of computer awareness with limited or no access to technology in their regions and about inadequate dissemination about rights and facilities provided by various Rural Development schemes. They also pointed out glaring governance issues such as absence of basic health amenities and erratic electricity supply in their respective villages. Majority of them bemoaned about the casual attitude of government officials towards implementation of any initiative leads to failure of many Rural Development schemes. The *Yuva* panel emphasized unemployment as the biggest challenge confronting the educated youth population in rural areas, which at present does not seem to be addressed by either government or by prevalent e-Governance systems, if any. The *Nari* panel grieved about lack of participation of women in decision-making processes in all domains of life, alienating them completely from use of technology and from existing e-governance initiatives. *Kisan* and *Karigar* panel separately highlighted non-relevance of content being provided in rural tele-centres. Exploitation of tribal community under the garb of market reforms/free trade or by moneylenders was raised as a serious concern by the *Adivaasi* panel for which they suggested the provision and capacity building for suitable ICT based grievance redressal mechanisms.

CCR event revealed though each region has its contextual representation in technological space but some generic implications could be drawn. For example there is a need to revive the use of community radio to disseminate local issues. An annual conduct of regional variation of ‘Citizen Consultation
Workshop’ for each State could help rural citizens to collaborate and communicate. Taking a cue from Community of Practice-COP, a bi-lingual online community for e-participation could be started for each district of the State wherein its rural citizens have access to District COP using their unique citizen ID number. This phase has helped us to refine our understanding of vital issues village communities face relating to governance and technology diffusion. These issues, both related to local governance and ICT, have been shaped into a questionnaire that is to be circulated to experts for their suggestion and opinion using Delphi technique (second phase) and Officers’ Response Round (third phase). After the completion of the first three phases, the final Round Table on Rural e-Governance is expected to be conducted in February/March 2010 using the Nominal Group Technique.

**Phase-II: Experts Opinion Round (EOR) using Delphi Technique (completed on Dec 3, 2009 by IIPA and IIT-D)**

In the second phase, final formulation of issues had been undertaken using Delphi methodology that involves accumulation of expert opinion gathered in an iterative manner using questionnaires. The carefully selected 50 experts, onwards referred as Delphi Experts, had answered three different set of questionnaires related to the research questions in three rounds. We have already completed with experts opinion round (EOR) that involves group consensus using validation framework instrument (VFI) to be sent to e-governance experts in a recursive digital, virtual mode using Delphi Technique. You would also be glad to know several international and national academics and policy makers from reputed organizations such as London School of Economics, McGill University Canada, IIMs, IITs, DiT, ILFS have kindly consented to be our Delphi experts. After each round, the Project Coordinator has provided to each of the delphi experts an anonymous summary from the previous rounds of the delphi experts’ forecasts as well as the reasons they provided for their judgments. It is presumed that in this manner, delphi experts were expected to make better-informed judgments when they can compare their own views with those of others and respond to questions in the next round. At any moment they could revise their earlier statements. This methodology enabled much greater outreach, allowing for inputs from a huge range of both national and international experts. After three rounds delphi experts’ statements had allowed for more precise comparison of views and better assessment of the research topic. The mean or median scores and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) of the final rounds determine the result.
Phase-III: Officers Response Round (ORR) (completed on Dec 29, 2009 by IIPA and IIT-D)

For ICT initiatives to respond fully to the requirements of the rural citizens, the issues raised in CCR round had been further examined in Officers’ Response Round (ORR) especially for applicability of proposed Experts’ Opinion Round (EOR) solutions for technology diffusions in villages for Indian context. The issues (of CCR round) and suggested solutions (of EOR round) were presented to senior and middle level officers of Government of India for further open-house deliberations.

Key Deliverables of Project

The key deliverables of the entire project can be summed up as:

a. **Identification of Key governance issues** that need to be addressed using ICT in rural regions.

b. **Key Action Areas** where changes are required in existing models of rural e-governance design and implementation.

c. **Suggested applications for design of more Citizen-Centric** rural e-Governance initiative.

d. **Policy Recommendations** for a more citizen-centric approach for designing rural e-governance initiative.

e. **List of Critical Success Factors** for benchmarking any e-Government initiative for rural development.

f. **Collaborative tools** to ensure participation of all the stakeholders in the processes of governance.

g. **An integrated e-Governance framework** for designing citizen-centric rural ICT/e-Government projects, which accept indigenous inputs from community at the grassroots.

Final Outputs and Outcome of the Project

The e-Governance framework, so developed could serve as a valuable input for policy making and project designing. Rural ICT/e-Government projects designed using this framework are expected to mature as bi-directional G2C2G e-Governance projects. After the completion of the activity, the proceedings of the activity would be bought out as an IIPA publication. Some of the other future advantages that the institute would garner after the successful completion of this project are listed herewith:

1. IIPA can set up a “Centre for Citizen-Friendly Rural Technologies for Poverty Reduction”.
2. IIPA can undertake a national project on “How to make Common Service Centers-CSCs more viable” under National e-Governance Plan wherein IIPA can help the States to validate citizens’ requirements of e-governance kiosks (christened Common Service Centres-CSCs) using the methodology of this project.

3. IIPA can give policy recommendations and consultancy support on rural e-Governance initiatives of the Centre and the States.

4. IIPA can launch a “PG-Diploma in e-Governance” at IIPA.

5. IIPA can offer a specialization in this area for our proposed MBA, or other Management Development Programmes, undertake specially designed training programmes for Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and refine our e-Governance stream of APPPA to make it more realistic and responsive to grassroots reality.