

E-Governance in North-East India

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Abstract

Transfer of information is considered as a basic requisite for determining the future activities of economic and social development of a region. Particularly the grass root level administration needs such facilities. The predominantly rural nature of northeast emphasizes the need to bring about a sustainable development of the rural areas and its people, in order to cope up with other developed parts of India. However, despite the best efforts, rural areas have not been able to keep pace with its urban counterpart. In order to abolish these developmental imbalances and to give due priority to development in rural areas, efforts are going on in Northeast also. This Paper highlights the efforts of some leading E-Governance institutions in promoting rural development in the Northeast region (Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura) and tried to find out an overall view, challenges and remedies concerned in this regard.

Keywords: Sustainable development; Economic development that is conducted without depletion of natural resources; E-governance-electronic governance

Introduction

Today Governments are using tools of Information and Communication Technologies to provide various services efficiently. In last few decades ICT has provided the society a vast area of network communication capabilities e.g people can communicate with each others in different countries using technologies such as internet, messaging, Voice over IP and video conferencing. The widespread social network websites also allow users from all over the world to remain in contact and communicate in different topics. Small towns and rural areas due to long distances, were left behind for availing such services; ICT makes it possible to reach in faraway places. This creates transparency and minimizes the cost of availing the services. E-Governance minimizes the time as well as corruption while availing the services. As a result this helps in improving the social and economic development. Various Government services can be easily provided to remote places at very low cost through computer and internet. Today this can be done in easier way by using local language software. In modern world it seems impossible to improve the social and economic life of rural people without implementing such e-governance programmes. E-Governance not only helps in good governance, but also improves the participation of common citizen in governance and strengthen the democracy.

During the 70's the concept of e-governance has emerged in India focussing on the development of the in-house government applications in the areas of defence, economic monitoring, planning and the deployment of Information and technology to manage data intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration etc. The process has been initiated with the establishment of National Informatics centre (NIC) in 1976. Since then NIC is instrumental in steering and carries out all the e-government and e-governance applications in centre, state, district, block and upto the grassroot level administration. The 11th report of the 2nd administrative reforms commission, entitled "promoting e-governance"-the smart way forward" established the governments position that an expansion in e-government is necessary in india. In 2006, The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) has been created by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEITY) and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) which aimed at long term growth of e-governance within the country. It is a plan of government of india through which all the government services will be available

in electronic media. This section lay down the core mechanism and infrastructures for policies and implementation of projects at centre, state and grassroot level throughout the country.

Situated in the eastern most part of India, the North-East states comprises the eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim. The total area of the region is about 2,55,168 sq. km which is characterised by river plains, hills and plateaus etc. The north eastern states mostly inhabited by a number of native tribes. Each tribe has its own distinct culture, dance, music and life style. The region is ethnically and linguistically also diversified. For the years the people of N.E region fight with problems like insurgency, unemployment and lack of infrastructure and communication etc. The predominantly rural nature of northeast emphasizes the need to bring about a sustainable development of the rural areas and its people, in order to cope up with other developed parts of India. Therefore the promotion of e-governance in NE region is handy task before government.

Discussion

In its initial periods, the induction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in governance has been more or less un-organised in northeastern region. The process was initiated by NIC (National Informatics Centre). NIC established its centre (which is known as Assam State Centre of National Informatics Centre) at Guwahati in 1986. It was aiming at developing ICT (Information and Communication Technology) based Infrastructure, ICT based information system and ICT capacity building, particularly in the rural areas of this region. From 1990 onwards, NIC began setting up district units and now NIC has its district units in 27 districts of the State. The services delivered by NIC are-

1. Data Center

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2. Domain Registration
3. ICT Training
4. Video Conferencing
5. Software Development
6. Network Services

NIC is responsible for maintenance the infrastructure, wider transparency in government functions, providing information and communication technology to support the officials of the districts and local level authorities, development and implementation of all State and district level computerisation projects, monitoring district administration sponsored projects.

NIC sponsored projects that are running in presently in Assam are [1]

1. MIS For Public Health Engineering Department, Assam.
2. Planning And Development Department - Government Of Assam.
3. Dibrugarh District Administration.
4. File Management System - Assam Government.
5. DAK Management - Kamrup Metro.
6. DAK Management - Sarba Siksha Abhijan.
7. DAK Management - Dhemaji.
8. Kamrup Mahanagar Zila.
9. E Subidha - Community Information Centre.
10. Telephone Information System.
11. Secretariat Administration Department.
12. Guwahati High Court - Case Status Enquiry.
13. ICT Solution - For Chief Secretary's Office.
14. Court Case Monitoring System.
15. Government Orders Secreteriat, Dispur.
16. MIS Helpdesk.
17. Assam Higher Secondary Education Council.
18. Geographical Information System.
19. Staff Selection Commission - Regional Office (NER).
20. Web-Gis Based Planning and Management System for NRHM Assam.
21. GIS Application for SSA (Barpeta).
22. Emergency Management Information System For Assam (EMISA).
23. Personnel Management Information System.
24. MIS For Small Tea Growers Database.
25. Rain Forest Research Institute (RFRI), Jorhat.
26. State Level Banker's Committee - Assam Arunachal Pradesh Manipur.
27. Mizoram Meghalaya Nagaland.

28. Public Grivances Portal Government of Assam.

29. MIS for e-Transactions and Other Activities.

The Computerised Rural Information Systems Projects (CRISP) of NIC is monitored by The Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.. The aim of this programme is to facilitate the monitoring and planning exercises of Department of Rural Development Agency (DRDA)s, State Rural Development Department (SRD)s and the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) in the area of poverty alleviation. It is also known as "Rural Soft" which enables data to be collected either at DRDA level or Block level, depending on the availability of computing and communication infrastructure at these levels. Adding to this Certain other programmes like - VIDHAN or Magistracy case Management system (it manages various magistracy cases and generates reports), UDYOGATNA (it is an effectual tool for monitoring the district industries centers), PRITHVI GEOGRAPHICAL SYSTEM- (all district boundaries of Assam have been digitalised), PARISHODH (computerized loan payment system), ANUSHARAWAN (computerized circle office to DC office monthly reporting system), MANAB SAMPAD (computerized personnel information management system), GRIHA-LAKSHMI (computerized public distribution system), NATHI-AWASTHITI (computerized file monitoring system-it's a file monitoring system that tracks the movement of files in various government departments), SAPATH (Affidavits Management system), etc has gained popularity [2].

Web enabled Land Records omputersation system, "Dharitree" was started as a PILOT project in Sonitpur District of Assam under NeGP and now it has been implemented in all the districts of Assam. The scheme of 'Dharitree' takes care of up-to date maintenance of land records, workflow based automated mutation system efficient online delivery of quality services (mutation, copy of various land based certificates etc.) to citizens generating various reports for faster decision making.

For more transparency in judiciary, E-court project is also being implemented in Assam. Under this project laptop and laser printers are distributed to the judicial offices in Assam. Records of cases has been maintained. An official website has been introduced. In order to help in speeding the overall workflow in the transport department "Vahan and Sarathi" project has been introduced in Assam. It has been implemented in 26 out of 27 districts. It is hoped that DTO (District Transport Office) will be facilitate in registration of vehicles, issuing of license etc.

Moreover E-Panchayats are introduced as Mission Mode Project to facilitate panchayati raj system at grassroot level. Introduction of a reticulated LPG grid system in multi-storied buildings in cities and towns helps in efficient use of energy in the state.

The Community Information Centres (CIC) established by NIC in various Blocks, are used the local people to access information, email training on computer and internet. It imparts IT training programme for students, staff of the Block Development Offices, elected representatives of 3 tire Panchayati Raj institutions and common people in rural areas. The Community Information Centres also offer services like exam results, farmers tips, tender notices, job advertisement, education notification and so on. Under the patronage of Department of Information Technology, Government of India these centres play a very vital role in rural development process. Since 2006, 219 CIC centres has been working in various Development Block offices of the State [3].

There are about 4348 Common Service Centres (CSC) at present

in Assam which promote rural livelihood through technology and financial inputs [4]. It also helps in opening of bank accounts, for people of BPL, small and marginal farmers. The CSC acts as a platform for promoting rural entrepreneurship and assists rural farmers and artisans to connect to the market

“Sanwad Kendras” are established throughout the state with a motive to ensure a reliable, time bound and transparent system that might be devoid of corruption, inconveniences, and harassment, with the help of private kiosks at a nominal fee [5].

The e-District project is an important enhancement of the state’s e-governance implementation of programme. This project is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under National e-governance plan (NeGP) founded by government of India. The government of Assam has chosen two districts Sunitpur and Goalpara for the pilot implementation of the project. E-district provides support to the district administration to enable the citizen centric services, which would optimally utilize the Assam state wide area Network (ASWAN) and state data center at Guwahati to deliver services to the stake holders.

In Meghalaya, 225 common service centers (CSC) are established in the seven districts [6]. The department of Information and Technology of Meghalaya also signed a memorandum with BASIX, a Hydra base multi services financial institution. BASIX is working as the implementing agency for CSC. In boosting the rural development programme these Common Service centers provides facilities like-

- Promoting rural livelihoods through technology and financial inputs,
- Opening of bank accounts for people of Bellow Poverty Level (BPL) and small and marginal farmers,
- The CSC is acted as a platform for promoting rural entrepreneurship and assist rural farmers and artisans to connect to the market [7].

In Tripura, again National Informatics Center plays a dominant role in rendering Information and communication Technology service to facilitated the rural development process. NIC was working in Tripura since 1989. E-Governance is also run through 29 Community Service Center which have been dealing with-

- Imparting IT training programs for students, staff of the Block Development Offices, Elected representatives of 3-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions and common people in rural areas.
- Services being offered by CICs include Computer Awareness training, E-mail/Internet, Access to Govt. Services (G2C) like Status of different govt. services, Exam Results, Farmers’ Tips, Tender Notices, Job Advertisements, Educational Notifications and so on [8].

After considering all these it can be said that today E-Governance render services to all sectors of rural development (social welfare, food civil supplies and consumer affairs, housing transport etc) [9]. In order to uplift rural administration, economy, education or healthcare in Northeast region E-Governance, proves to be a handy tool.

Problems

Though E Governance receive highest level of popularity in rural life, governments yet have not done enough to look at how Information Technology can address the needs of the poor in general and poor women in particular, towards economic and social empowerment [10].

Ground-level evidence reflects attention primarily to the urban-rural divide, and inadequate focus to the concerns of the illiterate, of marginal farmers, and women. That’s why the question of Equity comes before implementation of every E-Governance programme. Cultural Barriers most often restricts the mobility of E-Governance in rural areas.

Suggestions

- Commitment of government officials towards E-governance should be increased. It will provide a boost in rural development process.
- Governments should harnessing the potential of network based technologies to improve convenience and speed of service delivery to their citizens and businesses as well as to increase overall efficiency and effectiveness of government.
- Illiteracy should be abolished. Thus, people never possess conservative attitude and thus, they can rationally enjoy the fruits of rural development process.
- Collaboration between private sector and public sector in running the ICT business is much needed in order to tackle the rural development problems.

Conclusion

Today, Rural Development has become more holistic and all encompassing, that includes not only agriculture development but also the economic betterment of the people, a better and higher quality of life and social transformation. The efforts of E-Governance in Northeast in this respect are noteworthy.

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