Citizen Centric Service Delivery through e-Governance Portal

- Present Scenario in India

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1. Introduction

The initiative of development of e-governance portal started more than a decade ago. Most of the state governments have developed their portals to disseminate different types of information to the citizens. But these portals are developed from the view point of the government. They are primarily focused on how the government department wants to put it forward. Citizen centricity is about shifting the focus of government around – designing the portal from the view point of the citizen and businesses. The portal should take care of the needs of the citizen and business rather than operational or other imperatives inside the government machine.

The government, both central and state, has invested a lot on the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to make their functioning better. So a citizen centric approach to service delivery is essential if the government wants to reap the benefit of its previous investment in the e-governance field. It will also help the government departments to streamline their future investments to get maximum benefit out of it. In citizen centric approach, the citizens are treated as customers, as in the case of the product or services company, while providing the services to the citizen. A citizen-centric approach enables the government to provide improved service quality, which in turn enhances the citizen satisfaction.

1.1. Why Citizen Centric Service Delivery?

Citizen centric service involves designing of services from user’s point of view rather than of the government department’s. The bureaucratic silo approach would not provide the result as expected from the computerization efforts used in the government departments. The benefits have to be directly visible and translated into economic and social gains to the citizens.

1.1.1. Pain Areas

Prior to the launch of e-governance portals, the citizens were expected to go to the service counters situated at the department premises for availing the services from a particular department. The service counters of different departments were usually scattered across the city and the citizens were expected to go from one counter to another traveling a long distances. As the number of counters was few, the waiting time for the citizens used to be very high. It was nearly impossible to know the actual process being followed inside the department to provide the service. It was also very difficult to know the status of the applications for a service submitted to any department.
1.1.2. Primary Objectives of Citizen Centric Solution

The three primary objectives of citizen centric solutions are given below:

One of the objectives of citizen centric solutions is to make the service available round the clock. If the e-Governance portals are designed in a way that it is integrated with different government department applications and provides access to the citizen and businesses, then the services can be made available through the portal at real time. This will help the citizen in reducing their waiting time at the department counter and at the same time will help them in using the services outside of their working hours.

Another objective is to provide transparent, efficient and secured delivery of service. As these services are integrated through the portal, the citizen and businesses can track the status of their service request and get all the information required to avail the service. This allows the citizen and businesses to understand the process of the government department. The portal also assists the department employees to gather required information to provide the service and in turn increases the efficiency of the department resources. The portal also allows the citizen and businesses to perform the transactions in a secured manner. In this way, the e-Governance portal increases the quality of service provided by the government departments in both central and state level.
1.2. Background of this White Paper

Government of India formulated National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) to lay the foundation for the long term growth of e-governance in the country. The vision of NeGP is

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.

(Source: http://mit.gov.in/default.aspx?id=837)

The primary focus of this program is to speed up various e-governance initiatives across the various departments of government at the national, state and local government level. NeGP is aimed at improving quality, accessibility and effectiveness of government services to citizen and businesses with the help of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Considering the nature and scale of the e-governance initiatives planned under NeGP, it became important for various state governments to initiate projects in managing and implementing the e-governance recommendation as per NeGP guidelines. Several state governments have taken initiatives to transform their service delivery process to provide better, efficient and transparent services to the citizens.

At present, 20 Central Government departments have started initiatives to implement National e-Governance Program. 35 States and Union Territories initiated this program which includes more than 350 departments across India. The estimated cost of implementation of this program is approximately rupees 23,000 Crore. The NeGP is promoted as a centralized initiative to ensure citizen centricity. It also ensured the optimal utilization of ICT infrastructure/resources throughout the country.

For the implementation of NeGP, it is important to develop the infrastructure required to provide the services to the citizen and businesses. One of most important infrastructure requirement is the connectivity. It is suggested by Department of IT, Government of India that all the states should design and implement State Wide Area Network (SWAN), which will be the backbone for the service delivery platform. All the departments would be connected through SWAN. The State e-Governance Portal will be integrated platform to provide all the services and allow the citizen to access the services through Internet. For the citizen or businesses, who are not able to access the services through Internet, Common Service Centers (CSC) would be set-up to physically access the services.
1.3. Organization of this White Paper

This white paper describes the experience of the authors while working in the e-governance projects in different states. The focus of this white paper is to draw attention to the service delivery process being followed in different states. It presents the changes brought into the system, while initiating different projects under NeGP in some of the states like Goa, Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. These state governments started their journey to migrate from traditional government processes to efficient, citizen centric service delivery method through anytime, anywhere, online services.

One of the major components of the citizen centric service delivery is the State Portal. The state e-governance portal is a one-stop access point, through which citizens can avail various informational & transactional services provided by the state government. This portal integrates all the services offered by various government departments and acts as a single platform to the citizens and businesses to access their services. These state portals help the government departments to improve the transparency and accountability of their functioning and reduce the delivery life cycles, thereby reducing the cost of providing services having compliance with governmental regulations.

This white paper presents the status of the state portals in the states where the authors were involved in their e-governance projects. The paper also analyses all these initiatives and presents a common functional requirements for these state portals.

2. Traditional Service Delivery Process

Nearly two decades ago, the state government departments started using Information Technology (IT) for improving their efficiency. Gradually they have computerized their data and developed applications to maintain the data. The computerization tried to automate existing processes by their electronic counterparts and converted the functions of the government departments into different applications. It was designed in a way to be more department centric than the citizen centric. The computerization initiation by government departments achieved gains in terms of efficiency, convenience for the departments and storage of data in digitized format. It also helped the management to have quick access of the relevant data for their decision making. This type of projects brought little difference to the citizen in terms of providing services to them as it did not reduce the time delay happened in processing of citizen requests or provide easy access to the citizen to avail the services.
These improvements in government functioning could not enhance the quality of services available to the citizen. Moreover, these computerization projects are continued to have manual interventions, longer duration for service delivery, and lack of efficiency in redressing citizen’s complaints. There is no single point of presence for the citizens to avail the government services. The fundamental requirement of redefining the public service was not achieved.

The service delivery method followed by different government departments prior to the development of e-governance portal is shown below:

The citizen needs to visit each department to avail a service provided by that department. As the number of staff available in each department is much less that required, they need to stand in long queues. They also need to travel long distance as the departments are established in different corners of the city or town. For example, if a person wants to pay electricity bill and water bill, which are regular activities for every citizen, first he has to go to the electricity department, stand in the queue, pay the bill and then travel a long distance to arrive at the water resource department, again stand in a queue and then pay the water bill. Due to this disintegrated service offering, the person spends nearly half of the day for paying these utility bills.

Though most of these departments are already automated and applications are available to accept the utility bill payments, they are not integrated to provide a single point payment facility.
3. **Present scenario in India**

Though a number of states in India initiated the process of development and implementation of citizen centric service delivery through State e-Governance Portal, this white paper only describes the current scenario of five states such as Goa, Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

3.1. **Goa**

Though Goa is one of the smallest states in India, it is among the states making significant strides in improving the administration and service delivery reforms in Government. The Government of Goa is instrumental in taking up several initiatives in providing Good Governance to all the Stakeholders including citizens, business entities, employees and others. Government of Goa has developed *e-Governance Strategy & Roadmap* to define its action plan for implementing various *e-Governance* initiatives in the state. Their commitment towards providing quality of life and to transform Goa into knowledge based economy has been reflected in several instances. Recently, Goa has taken up an innovative approach to provide Information & Communication Services to all corners of Goa through Goa Broadband Network (GBBN). IT Solutions are implemented anded in departments such as Land Records, Transport and Municipal Administration for several of their internal business processes.

One of the key initiatives taken by Goa is **Integrated Information Infrastructure Project**, which modernizes the service delivery of the various Government departments. The Government envisages that adoption of an integrated service delivery frame work is the key for success in providing online informational and transactional services to citizens and businesses. The development of Goa online portal is one key components of this frame work (http://goa.gov.in/aboutportal.htm).

The Goa online portal is a single point access for all the Government to Citizen (G2C) and Government to Business (G2B) services offered by the Government departments. The portal is a transparent and secured portal that provides an easy-to-use environment to the citizen and businesses to perform transactions like utility bill payments, application for services or getting information on government departments.
3.2. Delhi

Delhi, the capital of India, is making significant strides in improving the administration and service delivery process in Government functions. Some of the common initiatives under taken by Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) in the area of e-governance include:

- e-Governance Strategy & Roadmap.
- Citizen Relationship and Grievance Management System.
- E-Purity (Store Management Software) – the web–based store management software manages many stores of different department.
- Development of Government web portal (http://www.delhigovt.nic.in).

The Government departments also took initiative to computerize their data, which is at an advanced stage. With this the departments are ready to integrate its services with the Governmental Portal and Common Service Centers.

The major initiative of GNCTD in the field of citizen centric delivery system is their Jeevan Project, which aims to redefine public service delivery through its focus on significantly enhancing the quality of services available to the citizen. The initiative includes the design and implementation of a ‘One-Stop-Shop’ Portal for the GNCTD and development of Common Service Centers (CSC) and Jeevan Data center. The state Government intends to provide all services through the portal and CSCs. More than 500 citizen service centers would be created across the state, networked together with a well-developed transaction oriented Portal.

The Jeevan portal will also provide the facility to pay through credit card even in the CSC counters. The portal is scheduled to be launched in August 2008.
3.3. Jharkhand

The Jharkhand state has been very proactive in taking steps to implement e-Governance initiatives and thereby creating a digital culture in the state. The state is having its official Web Portals www.jharkhand.gov.in & www.jharkhand.nic.in which contains information about the state and some of the departments. Also a small data centre was established to host the applications of Departments. Some of the Kay e-Governance initiatives of the state are:

- **Pragya Kendra** – The Rural Common Service Centers. The Government envisages using the Common Service Centers (CSC) for delivery of e-Government services and will encourage other value added services such as banking, micro-credits, telemedicine, e-education, entertainment, etc. to be also delivered through the Rural CSCs.
- **Jharnet” – The State Wide Area Network** is a broad band IP based e-Governance Network to cater for Data, Voice and Video services to the government departments.

The important initiative towards improving the citizen centric service delivery is Jharkhand Online Project. The Government realizes that in order to modernize the service delivery framework, certain core and critical components, having interdependencies amongst each other, be developed in an integrated manner. These core and critical components of Jharkhand Online project are: State Data Center, Jharkhand Online Portal, Citizen Grievance Redressal System and Urban Common Service Centers.

3.4. Karnataka

The Government of Karnataka formulated a Project BangaloreOne to redefine the Citizen Services. It aims to provide integrated services to the citizens using Information and Communication Technology to enhance speed, convenience and certainty in providing citizen services.
BangaloreOne (B1) project seeks to redefine public service through its focus on the common man. The vision of the B1 Project is "to provide the citizens of Karnataka, all G2C and G2B One-Stop services and information of departments and agencies of Central, State and Local Governments in an efficient, reliable, transparent and integrated manner on a sustained basis, with certainty, through easy access to a chain of computerized Integrated Citizen Service Centers (ICSC’s) and through multiple delivery channels like Electronic Kiosks, mobile phones and the Internet”.

3.5. Andhrapradesh

The Government of Andhra Pradesh developed an online citizen services portal APOnline (www.aponline.gov.in) to provide citizen services. This portal enabled the government to bring the transparency and accountability in providing the department services to citizens. The APOnline portal is a comprehensive web-enable service portal that serves as a gateway for the department services that are being provided to the citizens. This project was major successful in Andhrapradesh in e-governance area and became role model to other states.

The other successful initiative of Andhrapradesh is launching of eSeva project that provides common service centres to citizens of Hyderabad to avail integrated services from different departments of Government of Andhra Pradesh. At present, nearly 120 citizen centric services are being provided through eSeva. The eSeva project facilitated the citizens of Andhra Pradesh to avail any service at any location and any counter. This project is integrated seamlessly with existing applications of departments and designed for high scalability. This project also became benchmark in India for providing citizen centric services.

The eSeva centres are integrated through an e-Governance portal named eSevaOnline (www.esevaonline.com). This portal allows the citizen to access all the government services without visiting the eSeva counters. The portal accepts all credit cards and it is integrated with an online payment gateway.
4. Salient Features of e-Governance Portal

The e-governance portals are designed to facilitate the citizens to access information and transactions without a glitch. Some of the important features that are considered while designing these portals are outlined below:

4.1. Citizen Centricity

To design a citizen centric e-Governance portal, it is important to identify different citizen segments that likely to use the portal and build appropriate scenarios for the use through an interactive methodology and use the same in designing the portfolio of services. The portfolio of services is divided into informational and transactional services. The formal one is easier to provide but the later one requires reengineering of the processes being used in the government departments and back-end preparedness of the department.

The portal should facilitate to provide the services through multiple delivery channels. It should provide a consistent and unified face of the Government regardless of the delivery channel used by the Citizen. The portal should be perceived as a great customer-experience by the citizens. This is possible by creating a virtuous cycle of good image ➔ great customer experience ➔ better image ➔ greater customer experience.

4.2. Plan Big – Start Small – Scale Fast

The portal should be designed such that it can rollout the services in phased manner without any problems. It should facilitate to add new services without having to change the look and feel of the portal and to maintain the consistency of the services provided through the portal.

4.3. Content is the Key

The Content is the key factor in developing an e-Governance portal. It can create a value addition to the citizens if the information is complete, up to date and relevant. The depth, the breadth and the timeliness of the content are of paramount significance. An appropriate standards-based content management tools and methodologies are used while designing the Portal. Uploading the right content to the portal is import. This is achieved by effective coordination with the government departments.
4.4. Secured Customized Access

The e-Governance portal is designed to support user registration & authentication using the PKI mechanism. The user administration service facilitates providing access to the operators to specific services, based on the authorization provided by the authority. The portal supports advanced authentication techniques such as PKI with X.509 certificates, RSA SecureID tokens, Biometrics for CSCs, Smart Cards, etc. The portal also supports dual authentication and digital signatures for advanced security measures. Some of the security features that are implemented in the e-Governance portals are:

- Secure transmission of data across CSC infrastructure and User Departments.
- Secure storage of critical items.
- Detailed session management abilities.
- Auditing and reporting facilities

The portal provides single-sign-on (SSO) facility so that once the user logged-in into the system, he can access all the information or process all the transactions that he is authorized to perform. The user profiles and their privileges are administered using an LDAP based solution. The portal enables customization of interfaces to provide relevant services to the users of the portal.

4.5. Reliable Transactions

Reliability and integrity of services are important features of an e-Governance portal as it deals with public money. The portal provides several transactional services including utility payment services, tax payments, filing of returns etc. So the portal needs to be a secured and reliable platform to provide end-to-end transactions. The e-Governance portal is designed to ensure the integrity and completeness of the transaction and all the information entered or altered are automatically updated in the department systems.

For example, irrespective of the backend department application or database platform, the portal will be able to implement the ‘two-way-commit’ mechanism to ensure that the transactions are updated at both the department database and the Portal database. Failure on either will reverse the transaction on other side and such reversed transactions shall be logged for analysis in case of any issues during reconciliations. Such ‘two-way-commit’ mechanism is implemented using automated solution, instead of manual reconciliation of the databases both the sides.
4.6. Single Point of Access

The e-Governance portal acts as single point of contact for citizens to access all the services provided by the state governments. They need not to visit websites of individual departments to get services. The department websites are integrated with the portal and all the necessary information is available at the portal. The citizen can download all applications provided by different departments and apply online. They can pay the requisite application fee through payment gateway and avail the respective services.

4.7. Use of e-Form

The e-Governance portal provides an online form for filling-up by the citizen to avail a service. The size of the e-forms created for this purpose is kept to the minimum in size so that it needs minimum bandwidth for transmitting the form to the server. The form is designed as easy-to-use and user friendly and is populated with the necessary information retrieved from the respective backend department systems. All the e-forms have appropriate field level and business validations built into it to ensure that scope for incomplete/inaccurate information is eliminated and the information is captured for all the mandatory fields in the form.

5. Conclusion

The major benefit of the service delivery through e-Governance portal is reduction of service life cycle delivery time. The citizens can now avail the services from their homes or offices and have necessary documents delivered to them. For example, payment of an electricity bill can done by sitting at home, which takes a maximum of 10 minutes, whereas in traditional systems it would have taken few hours.

The present portals being developed by various state governments are changing the state of affairs of citizen service delivery systems. It is an approach of redefining the government process for providing a service to citizen. The launch of these citizen centric e-Governance portals enabled the government to make huge impact on quality of service delivery by gaining citizen’s confidence in the government functioning. Citizens are using these portals as single point access for availing all the government services.

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