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ICT

INNOVATION

### E – Governance for Improving Rural Livelihood

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**If the benefits of ICT are paying dividends in some pockets of India, there is no reason why, with strong will and commitment, it cannot penetrate into the rest of the country**

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#### The Opportunities

These include cost reduction and efficiency gains; quality of service delivery to businesses and customers; transparency, anti-corruption, accountability; increase the capacity of government, network and community creation; improve the quality of decision making; promote use of ICT in other sectors of the society. *Source: Ndu 2004 & dot-GOV 2008*

In India, the basic hope is that ICTs can be used in a double capacity:

- First, to enhance India's international economic position by building further on the success of the Indian software industry.
- Second, to develop programs of IT for the masses that would play a critical role in solving the unresolved problems of development that can reach large sections of the Indian population.

E-Governance is one of the most promising uses of ICT. In practice, it involves two distinguishable activities:

- First is the computerization of government functions like registrations, legal proceedings, land records, state offices, police dept., etc. and linking up the district levels with the state level.
- Second, e-governance may mean government-to-citizen and citizen-to-government connections whereby people obtain direct access to records, rules, and information about entitlements that they need or want in their daily lives, make

payments online for availing a service etc.

The benefits from the rural e-Government projects are categorized into economic and social. Typically, economic benefits are achieved through employment of the rural youth, better prices for the farmers' produce, reduction of produce loss. Social benefits are obtained through knowledge acquisition for farmers, advice on agriculture, health, weather forecasting, crop patterns, education, finance, and insurance, and citizen's enablement to be part of government decision making.

Some of the major success stories in India are as follows:

**Akashganga:** This project is being used at the Dairy Co-operative Society, Gujarat. The project uses IT to help rural milk producers by integrating all operations from procurement of milk to accounting using DISK (Dairy Information Services Kiosk). Akashganga has facilitated more than 1,00,000 villages, in 34 districts spread over 8 States covering 2,00,000 rural families in Gujarat and other states. It stores the details of the transactions with its accounting software and displays the information to the public. The project also got nominated and received awards in India and internationally. It was also recognised as best practice by United Nations ICT Development Programme ([www.akashganga.in](http://www.akashganga.in))

**eChoupal:** This was established by ITC's Agri Business Division in June 2000. It was specifically designed to tackle the challenges posed by the unique features of Indian agriculture,

characterized by fragmented farms, weak infrastructure, and the involvement of intermediaries. In order to protect agriculture farmers from opportunistic practices of intermediaries, it provides farmers with information relating to farming equipments, weather, crop, and the like. The project does not maintain any financial details of any farmer. The eChoupal kiosks in multiple languages provides farmers with the latest market information and also facilitates two-way communication by receiving valuable suggestions and opinions. The project has helped more than 4 million farmers in more than 40,000 villages through 6500 Kiosks across 8 States (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand). eChoupal gained international recognition with several awards in its kitty. ([www.echoupal.com](http://www.echoupal.com))

**TKS (Tata Kisan Sansars):** The TKSs, or farm centres, provide end-to-end solutions, right from what crops to grow to how to sell them for the maximum returns in Maharashtra. A unique concept in the Indian countryside, TKSs are changing the face of Indian agriculture and improving the quality of rural life. TKS provides farmers with services for optimum utilization of nutrients, plant protection, chemicals, water, and seeds. TKS tracks key parameters such as soil, ground water, and weather on a real time basis with the help of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and satellite mapping technologies. Retail outlets at each Kendra are set up to sell products but are not made online. ([www.tataks.com](http://www.tataks.com))

entities and in this chain government structure at various levels functions in a seamless and interoperable fashion. Partly, these changes happening in the rural areas can be attributed to implementation of e-Governance projects.

#### The Promises

The most important promises and opportunities of E-Government are increased efficiency of government services and operations; increased quality and the number of services to be offered; increase integration of government services across different ministries, focusing on those being served; help achieve targeted outcomes and broader policy objectives; contribute to government reform, especially anti-corruption and waste; build democratic interactions between government and its citizenry by increasing the ease of communication and feedback.

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**TNCDW** (Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Ltd.): The project is aimed at social and economic empowerment of women in Tamil Nadu state. TNCDW maintains a database containing the details of citizens, births and deaths, land and revenue records. The project encourages NGOs and women to conduct research on state and gender policy issues. It establishes a relationship with the citizens by encouraging them to participate in its various programs on income generation, vocational training, discussions, etc. It has formed around 3,91,927 Self Help Groups (SHG) enrolling 60,01,418 women in 31 districts and saved about Rs.2,21,112.45 lakhs both in urban and rural areas. ([www.tamilnaduwomen.org](http://www.tamilnaduwomen.org))

**Drishtee**: Drishtee is present in over 12 states including the north eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Tamil Nadu. It has also started to work in Africa along with partners. Drishtee is a revenue-generating platform for rural networking and marketing services that enable e-governance, education, and health services. The project provides online buying and selling facilities to citizens through its e-commerce and agri-business services. It maintains the database of people as it issues ration cards. The system tries to redress the grievances raised by the public and enhances customer relationship. It enables the citizen to get government information, education, employment, etc. Drishtee operates 45,000 kiosks in the northern and eastern states of

India and each kiosk is managed by a village entrepreneur and won various awards like Technology Pioneers-World Economic Forum Award, Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award, Ashoka Foundation Fellowship Award, Development Marketplace Award, Best ICT Story Award, Most Promising Social Enterprise Award, Stockholm Challenge Award. ([www.drishtee.com](http://www.drishtee.com))

**Gyandoot**: Gyandoot is an Intranet based Government to Citizen (G2C) service delivery portal commissioned in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh in January 2000. Gyandoot aims to create a cost-effective, replicable, economically self-reliant and financially viable model for taking the benefits of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the rural masses. The goal of the project was to establish community-owned, technologically innovative and sustainable information kiosks in a poverty-stricken, tribal dominated rural area of Madhya Pradesh. Kiosks have been established in the village Panchayat buildings. The entire network of 31 Kiosks covers 311 Panchayats, over 600 villages, and a population of around half a million. Gyandoot maintains financial profiles of citizens and offers services such as BPL (Below Poverty Line) list. It provides education online with user interface in local Hindi language. ([www.gyandoot.nic.in](http://www.gyandoot.nic.in))

**Jagriti E-Sewa**: Jagriti E-Sewa was inaugurated in March 2003. It touches the rural life with activities from agriculture, financial, travel, and e-Government to communication services. The

whole system can be adopted to any language in the least possible time. Jagriti is a platform for application of Information technology for the masses, with special focus on the needs of rural areas. Its activities, named as d-commerce (desi commerce), include both physical and electronic mode involvement. Besides providing guidance, information and input/output linkages to agriculture, the center runs on multiple revenue streams such as sale of cell phones, rail and has tickets, insurance, money transfer and other products and services. Door-delivery service of e-mails is also available through the Jagriti network. Jagriti is being addressed as ITe(R)S (IT Enabled Rural Services) to emphasize its "rural" outlook and focus. The project involves setting up of rural information kiosks, called Jagriti e-Sewa kendras, in nodal villages and other viable locations across Punjab. Each center is franchised to educated youth or ex-serviceman of the area and serves a population of about 30,000. One important objective of this project has been to generate direct employment to about 1,000 educated rural youth. ([www.jagriti.com](http://www.jagriti.com))

**Lokmitra**: Developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in Himachal Pradesh State, in order to make people aware of government policies and programmes, and also providing an interface to interact with various government functionaries and solicit their active and direct contribution in the process of governance. Lokmitra maintains a database with details on public, age, driver license, etc. It has

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a grievance redressal system, clarifies the doubts of citizens on various issues, has an e-mail facility to provide communication, and supports local language. It invites people to share their ideas and provides feedback to enhance its service content. People can buy and sell products online. ([www.himachal.nic.in/lokmitra.htm](http://www.himachal.nic.in/lokmitra.htm))

**Bellandur**: Developed by COMFUSOL, it is the India's first ICT enabled Gram Panchayat e-Government solution. Bellandur is situated about 20 km from Bangalore. All district offices, taluka offices, and gram panchayats are connected. Committee meetings are aired on cable television. The software handles records of property, tax collection, birth and death certificates, and other financial details. It conducts meetings for committee members, allowing villagers to interact.

**Janmitra**: Janmitra was launched in March 2002. It is an integrated e-platform that was implemented in the Jhalawar district in Rajasthan and is replicated in the state of Uttarakhand. All sections and departments of collectorate are connected through Local Area Network (LAN). The main objective of the Jan Mitra project is to provide a single-window facility to citizens to access government work, simplify various government procedures through computerization and use information and communication technologies (ICT) to establish direct communication between the administration and the people to ensure transparent, accountable and responsive governance and to make the right to information an effective tool in the hands

of the rural masses. The remote computers in tehsil and block offices are connected through dial-up facilities. The rural intranet provides e-Government, e-education, e-health, and e-commerce services to the people through Community Information Centers (CIC). ([www.rajasthan.gov.in](http://www.rajasthan.gov.in))

**eUttarakhand**: The project is aimed at bringing people of Uttarakhand state closer, with the purpose of enabling natives to share their culture, tradition, news, and other thoughts from generation to generation. The Web site allows meetings and sessions in big cities to small villages, with "general awareness meetings" in remote villages. The Uttarakhandis are expected to connect to the entire state, entire nation, and entire world. The project helps promote quality education by providing advice through career guidance sessions. ([www.euttarakhand.com](http://www.euttarakhand.com))

**Telemedicine**: Apollo Hospitals provide super specialty healthcare to millions of rural Indians through this project. Telemedicine is the use of ICT to facilitate healthcare when patients and doctors are separated by distance. Using the software Med-Integra, patients and specialists can interact visually. It presently operates more than 45 telemedicine centers in several states. More than 6,000 patients were benefited, and over 3,500 teleconsultations, covering specialties from neurosurgery to pediatric cardiology, were successfully done. ([www.telimedconsult.com](http://www.telimedconsult.com))

**Lokvani**: Lokvani was conceptualised by District

Magistrate, Sitapur in September 2004. The project is a public-private partnership program that was implemented within the Sitapur district (88% rural population and 39% literacy rate) of Uttar Pradesh state. The objective is to "connect" rural citizens to the strategy makers in a seamless way. The project incorporates "right to information" policy and offers services, such as grievances and petitions, land records, tender services, employment services, and information related to government schemes. To ensure transparency, details of developmental works, ration allotment to fair price shop dealers, money sent to Gram Sabhas etc., are made available to people. The most popular service till date has been Online Public Grievance Redressal, which has received more than 1,17,179 complaints by June 2008 of which 1,13,793 (97%) were disposed off. ([www.sitapur.nic.in/lokvan](http://www.sitapur.nic.in/lokvan))

#### Conclusions

The success of these projects demonstrates that there are a number of ways in which ICT is enhancing productivity in rural India - by enabling solution sharing between local people and communities, providing access to practical and vital information related to farming, markets etc. Model initiatives can be scaled nationally, regionally and locally, contributing to the critical mass and the threshold levels needed to ignite a virtuous cycle of development.

Rather than laying a large emphasis on ICT, projects should focus on creating sustainable systems for delivery of services to

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citizens. This has the potential of providing the citizens with services that are cheaper, more efficient and faster.

ICT is currently being used at the local level especially local bodies and municipalities as tools for bringing openness and effectiveness to local administration. Hence, if the State and National Governments insist on projects in each and every mandal of a district then rural economy would really start using the ICTs for full advantage.

ICT is not the solutions to a wider participation but only the tool, and tools are only as effective as their application in the context of overall programs. These

tools may be utilized to increase citizen participation, but there are many other factors involved which affect that utilization, and because of these factors, one cannot accurately predict future changes and consequences.

Scarcity of Web expertise and staff hours is a significant challenge to e-government. Multi-party collaborations and uses of web development tools and templates are possible solutions. In addition, the privacy and security issues are critical challenges that are universal (whether for rural or urban governments).

Numerous rural governments use e-government to provide

valuable information to citizens, but while information and downloadable documents are quite common, online transactions are yet to be implemented in most rural communities.

As the technology advances, the scope and depth of e-governance services are rapidly expanding. Rural communities are yet to realize the full benefits of e-governance, but if the benefits of ICT are paying dividends in some pockets of India, there is no reason why, with strong will and commitment, it cannot penetrate into the rest of the country. □

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