Exploratory Study on Public Utility Services to Citizens, Through Common Service Centers, Is an Effective E-Governance Tool, With Special Reference to Rayagada District of Odisha

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Abstract: The advancement of technologies like internet and other web facilities have improved the interaction of citizens with the government. The Government of India has taken the initiative of reaching out people and provides all services to the citizens at his / her own locality and ensures the Governance through ICT (Information Communication Technology) and hence it is called as electronics governance or e-Governance. To provide various services the Common Service Centres (CSCs) or in Odisha it is popularly known as "Jana Sava Kendra" is opened in a PPP (Public Private Partnership) mode. Now CSCs are playing a vital role for rural development through providing various services in the rural areas which were not available before implementing e-Governance. Because of e-Governance the rural population easily accesses several services in CSCs nearest to their locality. The services i.e. G2C (Government to Consumer), B2C (Business to Consumer) and B2B (Business to Business) are successfully provided by Common Service Centres in India which are run by Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs). Along with many services there are various public utility services are also provided by the CSCs and making the CSCs, an effective e-Governance tool. So to closely understand, that how the public utility services rendered by CSCs is beneficial to the general public, the current exploratory study is initiated in the Rayagada district of Odisha. This study will help me to have one in-depth study (Rayagada District) on the above subject to know how CSCs are playing the role of rendering various Government and business services to common people in their locality and making the e-Governance initiatives successful.

Keywords: CSCs, E-governance, NeGP, Public Utility Services, VLEs, SCAs, SDC, G2C, B2C, B2B.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The Common Service Centre (CSC) is one of the mission mode projects under the Digital India initiative of the government's e-Governance program under Department of Electronics & IT (DeitY), Ministry of Communications and IT [1] CSCs have played a significant role in offering numerous e-Governance services to make it easy for people to benefit from   e-Governance.   The CSC's endeavour is to lead to digital and financial inclusion in the country. [2]CSCs are the access points for delivery of essential public utility services, social welfare schemes, healthcare, financial, education and agriculture services, apart from host of B2C services to citizens in rural and remote areas of the country. [3]CSC functions as change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and becoming the connecting point between the people and government. These centres enable people to participate actively in government welfare programs and reap their benefits. The CSCs come under the purview of CSC e-Governance Services India Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle (CSC SPV) incorporated in the year 2006 by the Government of India under the Companies Act, 1956. Then based on the assessment of CSC scheme, the Government launched the CSC 2.0 scheme in 2015 to expand the outreach of CSCs to all Gram Panchayats (GPs) across the country. Under CSC 2.0 scheme, at least one CSC will be set up in each of the 2.5 lakh GPs across the country by 2019. CSCs functioning under the existing scheme will also be strengthened and integrated with additional 1.5 lakh CSCs across the country.

The goal of the CSC Project is to empower the rural community and catalyze social change through modern technologies. With a large and heterogeneous geographical area, the private sector, if sufficiently encouraged, can play an active role in development and implementation of the CSC Project in supplementing the Governments' efforts to realize its vision for the project [4].

II.   E-GOVERNANCE, CSC & PUBLIC UTILITY SERVICES AT ODISHA IN GENERAL AND RAYAGADA DISTRICT IN SPECIFIC

Why e-Governance?

e-Governance is beneficial to the citizens, especially in developing countries(Iyer, 2015). The implementation process is in the developing phase. Benefits included faster delivery of services (Palanisamy, 2004), transparency in government decision making (Singla, 2002), accountability (World Bank 2001; Singla, 2002), real-time access to up-to-date information (Verton, 2000; Deakins & Dillon, 2002), administrative efficiency (Zipf, 2001), access to Internet technology (Bhatnagar, 2002), revenue generation (Deakins & Dillon, 2002), reduction of transaction cost and (Tulip, 2000), citizen-centered services (Sealy, 2003, Radhakumari, 2006).

[5] It is application of IT to the Government processes to bring Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) Governance (Budhiraja, 2003). It is not only just computerization of services but also reinventing the new ways of governance.

Public Utility & Utility Services:

[6] Public utility defines a private company supplying water, gas, electricity, telephone service, or the like, which is granted a monopoly by the government and then regulated by the government. **[7]** A public utility is a business that furnishes an everyday necessity to the public at large. Public utilities provide water, electricity, natural gas, telephone services and other essentials. A term public utility stands for common purpose and applied to various government organizations. The public utility services sector governs all the activities of public services through payment of utilities bill (electricity, water, telecommunication, property tax, and sales tax), certificates (Registration of birth and death, registration department, issue of caste) reservation (railways), postal and health sector etc.

CSCs & Public Utility Services

Public sector organizations have now began to understand the enormous benefits of leveraging ICTs to improve electronic government applications both internal processes and interactions with external constituencies (Chircu and Hae-Dong Lee, 2003; Lenk and Traunmueller, 2000). Public services through e-Governance offers a wide spectrum of citizen friendly services that would save time spent for co-ordination's around various departments to do their task like payment of utility bills, certificates, permits and licenses etc.

Common Service Centers, will work as part of Bharat Bill Payment Operating Unit, in villages, will now be able to collect payments for utility services, says IT minister Mr Ravi Shankar Prasad. Common Service Centers (CSCs), are the access points for various electronic services in villages, will now be able to collect recurring payments for services of utility providers such as power, water, gas and telecom etc.

[8] Dinesh Tyagi, chief executive of CSC SPV (special purpose vehicle) in the ministry of electronics and information technology said on May, 30 , 2017 that, BBPS(Bharat Bill Payment System) will be the onboard billers, aggregators and payment gateways to handle bill payments through different delivery channels. "Bill collection will increase the footfall at these CSCs; it will also lead to increased level of trust and credibility in their community. This will lead to greater employment opportunities at each CSC and VLE,"

The scenario of CSCs in India:

[9] Under CSC 2.0 scheme, at least one CSC will be set up in each of the 2.5 lakh GPs across the country by 2019. But it is a good news that till Dec 2017 the total operational CSCs in India is 2,69, 608 and still the number is growing daily as the VLEs are now showing interest to open CSCs due to growing business opportunities.

The status of CSCs in Odisha:

[10] The CSCs are meant to provide high quality and cost effective video, voice and data content, in the areas of e-Government, Education, Health, Tele-medicine, Entertainment as well as possible Government and private services. The goal of the CSC Project is to empower the rural community and catalyses social change through modern technologies.

With a large and heterogeneous geographical area, the private sector, if sufficiently encouraged, can play an active role in development and implementation of the CSC Project in supplementing the Governments' efforts to realize its vision for the project.

Odisha Government Initiatives for better implementation of e-governance:

[11] Sources said, the total spending by the government departments for providing public services on electronic platform would be around Rs 800 crore annually.

The Odisha government has made a resolution to spend two per cent of the Annual Plan budget of various departments for providing services to the citizens on the electronic platform.

"With the intention to utilize e-governance as a tool for bringing better transparency, responsiveness and accountability in governance, the government, after careful consideration, has decided that all government departments will earmark two per cent of their Annual Plan budget or one per cent of their overall budget (whichever is higher) for IT spending so as to provide services through the electronic mode", stated an IT department resolution. The decision to earmark funds is in line with the promise made in the state ICT policy-2014. The policy says that the state government will introduce e-governance in every department so that the citizens will avail most of the government services locally without any hitches.

*Location of the CSCs –*The Govt. of Odisha decided that wherever the GPs can provide space, CSCs will be located in the Panchayat Building. Wherever space is not available in Panchayat Building, the Service Center Agency(SCA) will have the discretion to locate the CSCs within the GP village.

**Electricity Bill Payment through "JANA SEVA" Centers Under NESCO**

For Collection of Electricity bills, NESCO has executed agreement with "JANA SEVA" (OCAC & OeSL) under e-Governance project. The Centers of Jana Seva will collect Electricity bills & provide valid receipt on behalf of NESCO. So, all Consumers under NESCO are requested to submit their bills through "JANA SEVA" CENTERS & avail rebate.

Odisha e-Governance Plan (OeGP):

[12] Keeping in line with the increased thrust on e-governance across the country, the state also took initiatives to computerise various departments, which started in mid 80's with a few isolated initiatives. But since year 2000 the state has taken up statewide planned initiatives, which includes policies, infrastructure and software application development specifically to create an ICT enabling environment to enable citizen centric service delivery.

15 Departments were identified to provide more than 200 services under the Mission Mode Programme (MMP) of National eGgovernance Programme. The eDistrict Project has also been included into the ambit of MMP. The state Government has initiated steps to formulate the eDistrict plans and had submitted a proposal to GoI. Further to enable access to public utility services at citizen door step, establish of 8558 nos. of Common Facility Centre has been initiated and this will roll out the much need Citizen Centric Services through these facility centres.

e-Governance Framework of Govt. of Odisha
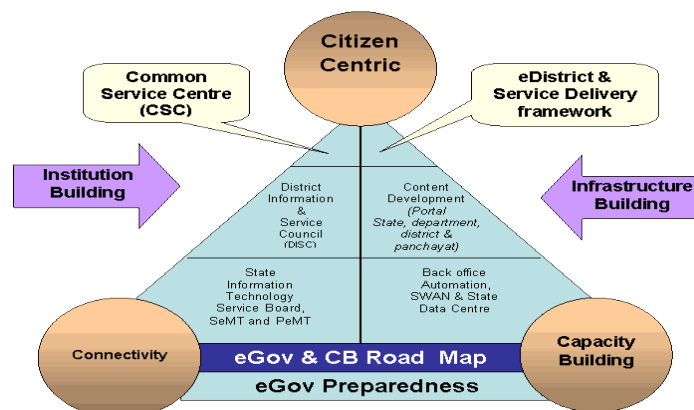
(Fig 1: e-governance Framework of Odisha Govt.)

OeSL: Odisha e-Governance Services Limited: A SPV of OCAC , Govt. of Odisha & Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL & FS)

[13] Online services are now made available directly through the websites as well as at CSCs, some of them are electricity bills, water bills , birth & death certificates etc.

[14] Mr. Madhusudan Padhi , Commissioner cum Secretary , Govt. of Odisha says "Every department is now keen to develop e-Governance initiatives for bringing their services closer to the citizens". He further said the vision of ICT policy is to develop IT/ITES/ESDM industries for inclusive growth and employment in the state of Odisha and leverage IT & ITES in governance to transform the state to a knowledge driven welfare society for improving the daily life of citizens. One of the targets of the policy is to achieve a gross ICT Revenue (including exports of software and IT Services, ESDM, Domestic consumption and Training) of USD 4 Billion (Rs. 24, 000 Crores) by 2020.

Number of CSCs in Odisha

[15] , [16] , [17] As per the CSC guidelines prepared by Govt. of India, there would be 1 (one) CSC for every 6(six) census villages. With 51,349 census villages in the state, there is a target of 8558 CSCs to be set up in Odisha as approved by Government of Odisha. Since, there are 6234 no of Gram Panchayats in the state; there would be more than one CSC in some Panchayats.

TABLE NO 1: DISTRICT WISE COMMON SERVICES CENTER (CSC) AT ODISHA (GOVT. OF INDIA SANCTIONED)

SLNO	ZONE No	DISTRICT NAME	TOTAL NO OF CSC	NAME OF THE NGO (Service Center Agency-SCA)
1	1	Mayurbhanja	658	ZOOM Developers Pvt. Ltd.
2		Balasore	492	
3		Bhadrak	219	
4		Jajpur	296	
5		Kendrapara	257	
6	2	Nayagarh	282	1) Srei Sahaj
7		Khurda	258	
8		Puri	286	
9		Cuttack	325	
10		Jagatsinghpur	215	
11	3	Anugul	318	ZOOM Developers Pvt. Ltd.
12		Keonjhar	354	
13		Dhenkanal	202	
14		Deogarh	146	
15		Sundergarh	294	
16	4	Sambalpur	220	2) Srei Sahaj
17		Jharsuguda	58	
18		Bargarh	201	
19		Bolangir	299	
20		Sonepur	160	
21		Boudh	198	
22	5	Kandhamal	424	BASIX
23		Ganjam	535	
24		Gajapati	270	
25		Raygada	445	
26	6	Malkanagiri	174	3) Srei Sahaj
27		Koraput	338	
28		Nabarangapur	150	
29		Kalahandi	373	
30		Nuapada	111	
		Total :	**8558**	

No of CSCs rolled out in Rayagada District till March, 2018

[18] , [19] As per the census data 2011 Rayagada district spreading over a area of 7073 square KMs with a population of 9,67,911 which is only 2.31 % of Odisha population. The interesting fact about the district is that the population density is only 137 per square KM. The average literacy is 49.76% out of which the male literacy is 61.04 % and female literacy is only 39.19%. Another interesting fact about the district is the rural population is 84.82% where as the urban population is only 15.18%. With the above facts to ensure that the governance must reach out the people, the only solution is penetration of more Common Service Centres. But in comparison to other part o the country the progress of CSCs is very less. The various reasons for this slow progress are also identified in this study.

TABLE NO 2: CSCS WORKING IN RAYAGADA DISTRICT AS OF MARCH 2018

Serial No	Name of the Block	No of Grama Panchayats	No of Revenue Villages	Total nos. of rolled out CSCs
1	Muniguda	16	416	28
2	Bisam Cuttack	20	308	23
3	Gunupur	18	129	28
4	Rayagada	28	294	21
5	Kolnara	15	199	14
6	Kalyansinghpur	13	254	13
7	Padmapur	13	125	22
8	Ramnaguda	12	119	18
9	Kashipur	20	449	17
10	Chandrapur	7	219	3
11	Gudari	9	159	10
	Total	*171*	*2671*	*197*

Some analysis on the data based on table no. 2

We need to assess the ground realities in Rayagada as far as proliferation of CSCs is concerned. Though Rayagada district has 2671 revenue villages, there were only 53 active CSCs after BASIX took up the work in PPP mode in 2008. As per GOI guideline, a CSC will cater to 4-5 villages in a GP. As per the data available in table no 2 the total number of sanctioned CSCs for Rayagada is 445 but as on March 2018 only 197 are rolled out so only 44.26% is achieved in the span of 10 years. At the present pace, we need at least another 12 to 13 years to cover rest of the villages.

The interior blocks like Gudari and Chandrapur have less number of CSC in comparison to other blocks . e-readiness of all the tehsils in Rayagada poses a great challenge as the digitization process is yet to be completed. But if there is a concerted effort by all the stakeholders like VLEs(Village Level Entrepreneur) , Dist Admn, SCA(service Center Agencies.), PRI (Panchayat Raj Institutions) members, VWC (Village Welfare Committee) members and general public, the present snail speed can be avoided.

III.   CONCLUSION

In India, e-governance system is still evolving and is not free from challenges as experienced in global terms. Mixed results of e-governance projects are experienced due to poor participation of important stakeholders **- the rural citizens**. In Indian sub-continent, one of the major concerns is ensuring "rural citizen interface through inclusion" and role of ICT in addressing this concern is challenging. This is because of the fact that rural India constitutes 72 percent of India's population who live in villages; 55 per cent villages don't have electricity in homes(even though the Govt. of India claims 100% villages are electrified) . The per capita income of Indian villagers is INR 12,000, while the national average is INR 25,000 [rural poverty]. Thus appreciating the role of e-governance services as "central" to their livelihoods is a difficult proposition. However, e-governance services have the desired potential to transform this centrality through demonstration of its systematize capabilities through which services related to the rural citizen's demand could be rendered. This system has remained a challenge because of ambiguous relationships among various stakeholders including government agencies who need to coordinate the information management imperatives.

The scenario is even worst in Odisha in comparison to national scenario. Further in Odisha out of all 30 districts, Rayagada is one of the backward districts as far as ICT use is concerned and the only reason found is low [20] literacy ratio (42.13% as per 2011 census) and low level of awareness too. Hence the study says there should be huge number of public awareness is required and no of CSCs need to be increased by motivating rural entrepreneur the VLEs. At the same time steps should be taken to increase the income of VLEs by introducing more and more Govt. & Private services.

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