State consultation on 'Strengthening Access & Delivery of Government Schemes Information & Entitlements in Rajasthan': Role of Digital Connectivity, Content, Platforms and Solutions

(16th September, 2016)

Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur



DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT foundation

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan
a non party people's movement

Summary

Today, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has become an integral part of government structure in order to connect the public to government-related programmes and services. In the last few years, the government has made laudable efforts at bringing e-governance to the front, aiming at improving efficiency and effectiveness of public services.

However, it is imperative here to mention that most of the efforts have not been made systematically. By saying systematically we mean it lacks proper planning, vision, mission and integration in an integrated manner so that it creates a positive impact on citizens. The whole idea of harmonising digital tools and technology is to boost growth, expand opportunities, and improve service delivery at panchayat, block and state level, thereby breakdown departmental silos. For now, though e-governance reforms have been introduced, they are unevenly distributed and not truly inclusive.

These digital technologies are not working in conjunction with existing database of citizens nor are they compatible with any human or non-human errors. This is a curious situation, which has come to light when many people were denied Aadhaar cards when their finger prints could not be read by the biometric machines. Another similar situation came to the fore after the Rajasthan government installed point of sale machines (PoS) at all ration shops under India's biometrics-based unique identification project called Aadhaar. The machine requires a ration beneficiary to place a finger on it and, and it authenticates the individual's biometric information against the data stored on Aadhaar servers using real-time Internet connectivity. However, when thumb prints could not be recognised in several cases, the same people failed to receive their ration. Rajasthan is the second state after Andhra Pradesh to distribute ration in all districts through Aadhaar biometric authentication.

Since 2002, Digital Empowerment Foundation has been working at the grassroots level and has come across several such issues on a daily basis. In reality, it seems the government, when planning reform, does not anticipate such technical challenges on ground that may result in the denial of the public's basic rights.

We would, thus, like to highlight here that many of the government's technological decisions, which are meant to harness service delivery & integration of service, are not participatory enough. There is no contribution of the people who are the actual user of the technical system. Hence, to make the system work efficiently, there is an urgent need to involve people from the grassroots and go deep into personal discretion, cheating, faults, thereby deliver benefits directly to the deserving poor. In light of the same, a consultation workshop was organised with the Rajasthan government in order to understand the gaps in e-governance initiatives taken by various departments in the state. The workshop brought together different sets of people and groups such as civil society organisations, community-based organisations, academicians, social activist groups and beneficiaries. The consultation has helped us understand the digital process used by the Rajasthan government to share information and check its level of transparency and openness to public access.

Introduction - About the Consultation

The state-level consultation and dialogue with the government on "digital platforms for democratic governance" was organized by Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), Suchna Evum Rozgar Abhiyan, Institute of Development Studies and other partner groups on "Strengthening Access & Delivery of Government Schemes Information & Entitlements" on 16th Sep 2016. About 120 people participated in the workshop. In addition to government officials, DEF invited faculty members from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and citizens from a far off district, Barmer, also attended the workshop.

The consultation brought together different stakeholders from the government, civil society organisations, academics and independent practitioners working towards strengthen people's access to public programmes through the use of digital means. The consultation also focused on digital interventions for efficiency at work such as through the use of Management Information Systems (MIS) with the objective of eventually building a robust and effective Janata Information System (JIS). The consultation attempted to discuss and deliberate on the issues and challenges in access and delivery of information and entitlements, keeping in mind the geographical, infrastructural and connectivity challenges in Rajasthan. It also explored and discussed new and generic platforms in the state (such as Rajasthan Sampark and e-Mitra Kendras) to discuss their potential, current challenges as well as the means by which they could become people's institutions with a high level of citizen access and empowerment.

Objective

This is an effort to form a group/platform of civil society organisations that will engage with and reach out to the relevant officers and departments in the government of Rajasthan to conceptualise and roll out practical pro-citizen interventions of digital governance. This will strengthen the ability of beneficiaries and citizens to access their social sector entitlements, monitor (qualitatively and in monetary terms) the implementation of public services and government programmes, and register or track their grievances. This exercise has also helped in culminating with the framing of suggested minimum principles and standards in the realm of digital governance for public programmes

The Workshop

The workshop opened with an introduction session by MKSS's Nikhil Dey and DEF's Osama Manzar. They explained the rationale and objectives for conducting the workshop, which was dedicated to figuring out how to best use ICT tools and maximise the development impact.

Later, officials from Rajasthan's health, labour, education and IT departments presented their respective digital services that they use to meet public needs. The departments were evaluated on their digital interface, open data, accountability and transparency initiatives. To encourage further in-depth dialogue among the presenters and participants, an open question-answer round was

exercised after every presentation. The speakers and participants pitched in their ideas and recommendations to improve the existing platforms.

The officers involved in the development and maintenance of IT platforms that govern access, delivery and monitoring of the following public programmes, made presentations during the morning session of the workshop:

- NSAP, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment
- NFSA, Department of Food and Supply Development
- Department of Labour
- Bhamashah Swastha Beema Yojana and NHRM, Department of Health and Family Welfare
- SSA, Department of Education
- e-MITRA Kendras, Department of IT
- Rajasthan Sampark, Department of IT

The presentations from government officers of the above programmes threw light on the following issues:

- The nature and details of the data that is digitally captured, and the form in which it is currently organised
- Nature of information that is pro-actively disclosed by the department, and a template for evaluating departmental compliance with Section 4, RTI Act
- Nature of services which can be availed of through online registration
- Reports generated through data entry of programmes that are available in the public domain
- Reports and alerts generated through programmatic data entry that are available exclusively to the administration
- Demonstration of the operations of e-Kendra and Rajasthan Sampark MIS

Department: NSAP, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment

Presenter: HR Singh

Web Portal: http://www.sje.rajasthan.gov.in/

The Social Justice & Empowerment Department is primarily focused and dedicated towards education and socio-economic development of vulnerable communities in Rajasthan. The department is using ICTs to implement the best education, economic and social welfare/security schemes at ground level. The e-services provided can be used to apply and access different pension and development schemes. The department website had the following information in public domain:-

- Programmes and Schemes
- Act and Rule
- Documents and Reports
- Notifications and Order

- Contact Details
- RTI
- Downloads and Other Information

The tracking option in department's web portal updates users about the current status of their respective application. Apart from that how many applications are pending , how many application are filled in, what are the reasons of decline, how much pensions have been disbursed these information are not in public domain.

Points of Discussion:

- Arrears needs to be reflected
- No. of duplicate ids needs to be reflected
- Correction rights must be given to sanctioning officer
- PoP numbers must be part of MIS
- Shri. Singh took down all the suggestions and assured the participants that he will forward these suggestions to his seniors.



Department: NFSA, Department of Food and Supply Development

Presenter: Mahesh Kumar Gupta, RCSC, Dy. Director

Web Portal: food.raj.nic.in

The department web portal provides data on digitised ration cards and reflects POS machine trade transactions in Rajasthan. The portal is a one-stop solution for food and supply department-related information. The state stock related reports are closely mapped and consolidated on the website. It helps users in the aadhar card seeding with ration card. The user can open an account on the website and receive food stock updates on his mobile. The user can also track field activities and coordinations location from the portal database.

The department website had the following information in public domain:-

- About Department
- Programmes and Schemes

- RTI
- Consumer Right
- Contact Details
- News and Grievances
- Documents and Orders
- Act and Rules
- NFSA Beneficiary Report
- Deleted DRC's Report
- POS Transactions Report

It is seen that crucial data is not in Public domain. This is a policy level matter which needs to be discussed with appropriate level. The department has provision of Supervision Committee which is watershed development as it attune to Public Participation in Governance which though small steep but an important one.



Department: Department of Labour

Presenter: Pradeep Jha, Dy. Labour Commissioner

Web Portal:
http://labour.rajasthan.gov.in/

The labour department is leveraging ICT technology to protect and safeguard the interest of poor workers. The department's web portal is forming an enabling environment for enhancing productivity, competitiveness and labour welfare through high job creation. The web portal features a grievances redressal window for an easy conciliation of disputes between labour and management in the state. The website is user friendly and easy to register complaints.

Department: Bhamashah Swastha Beema Yojana and NHRM, Department of Health and Family Welfare

Presenter: MP Jain

Web Portal: http://www.rajswasthya.nic.in/

MP Jain Nodal Officer and two of his colleague gave information related to various schemes and services undertaken by department. Mr. Mathur gave extensive presentation on Bamaasha Swasth Bima Yojna. The primary objective of the web portal is to reach families under the National Food Security Act and provide them with a cashless health care facility. The department website conjures community engagement and offers quick financial security to people against illness. The web portal lists thousands of support packages for those who can't afford a medical treatment. It also reflects

mortality rates and blood units available in state hospitals in real time. Along with this the department has come up with 102 toll free number where member of public can report Female Death in their neighborhood. This is to check the Mother mortality rate.

Points of Discussion:

- Participants complained that most of the hospitals take charges even if the medical fees in not to be paid under the scheme (department assured that the matter would be taken care by relevant authority)

- MIS related to diseases cannot be in public domain on this account certain data cannot be published.



Presentation 5: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Department of Education

Presenter: Sanjay Kumar Sharma

Web Portal: rajrmsa.nic.in and rajssa.nic.in

The department is implementing cutting edge technology in Rajasthan's government schools for optimum utilisation of resources. The technology maps accountability, performance, and resource management in school administration. The department is also creating ICT labs for students to learn and practice science, math, and other subjects. It is an initiative to go beyond old chalk-and-talk method of teaching.

The technology has enabled students and teachers to have better teaching and learning environment in the classrooms. Now, it's easy for department to generate staff reports and monitor their profile, attendance and performance. This has simplified the process of performance evaluation as well. As per their records 8000 schools have been covered ICT classes and 303 schools have been covered under virtual classes. There is a facility of live video conferencing for Departmental meets. Under 'Shala Darpan[1]' a programme, all consolidated information about school is available online.

[1] http://rajrmsa.nic.in/ShaalaDarpan/Home/Public/ShalaDarpanSummary.aspx



Department: Department of Information Technology & Communication

Presenter: Harsh

Web portal Link: http://doitc.rajasthan.gov.in/

The department is dedicated to bringing transformation in the way citizen-centric governance is accessed. The department runs a democratic web portal called 'Rajasthan Sampark' where citizens can register their grievances. When a person lodges his/her grievances on the portal, the complaint is automatically filtered and sent to the concerned department. A unique number is generated on registering a complaint and users can use it to track their application status. The department runs a toll free number for registering complaints.

In the second half, Shri Jai Singh, Joint Secretary, Department of IT addressed the participant and summarized the discussions as follows:

- Despite all the measures to ensure accountability even including the digital means nothing is full proof but mere a step.
- Technology is not a solution but mere an instrument. No change can be effective until unless we change our attitude.
- Through presentation, he informed that 274 departments, boards and other institutions have been connected to portal called Rajashthan Sampark.
- A citizen can lodge complaint by visiting the website or taking help of E-Mitr. Once the complaint is registered a unique number will be generated and will be messaged to the persons mobile number through this number the person can track her complaint.

- The website will also show the status of her complaint at various stages. At the end of the process if the person is not satisfied her complaint will be reregistered and once again will go the usual process. One can also send remainders, if any action has not been taken so far. In this case a copy of the reminder will also go the superior officer.

- Those who are not well versed with computers can use 1800-180-6127 toll free number to lodge the complaint.

- At the end of the presentation he stressed that despite these measures one can assume that a change will come about is asking for too much but this is a small step in improving things.



Mr. Jai Singh, Joint Secretary, Department of Information and Technology

Conclusion

Each presentation made by the concerned department was followed by a discussion where CSOs and independent experts articulated the experience with organisations working at a grassroots level, and the challenges faced by beneficiaries and ordinary citizens in accessing digital platforms to monitor implementation of public programmes. Primarily some of the concerns raised included:

- Non user-friendly nature of reports, of even the limited information made available to the public

- Essential information and nodes of service delivery that were available only to the internal administration and not to the public, presence of which would have greatly enhanced the capability of beneficiaries and citizen groups to hold the administration accountable
- Difficulties faced by beneficiaries and citizens in accessing/registering for services that are now made available only through the digital medium
- Technical and operational difficulties in server capabilities that hinder access
- The vacuum that exists in some crucial areas of service delivery and access to entitlements because of the lack of an MIS or online system in these spheres. The need for an MIS for the Forest Rights Act, Mining, and for silicosis patients to track their cases.

Action Points

The consultation ended with the following resolutions endorsed by SR Abhiyan, MKSS, DEF and all other participating groups:

- A **team** of civil society organisations would work with the officers in charge of implementing and maintaining the digital interface of public programmes to **modify existing platforms** and make them more beneficial from the point of view of beneficiaries
- This team will **work with the Department of Information Technology** to periodically review work being done to improve each one of these platforms and prepare material for citizen use
- DoIT and SR Abhiyan will organise a **bi-monthly meeting** with concerned officers and CSO groups for each thematic, to make effective the interface between peoples' entitlements and facilitating their access by use of the digital medium
- DEF and SR Abhiyan would **build content for developing primers** on how to use existing digital platforms better. This could be used by the government and CSOs for better awareness generation and training purposes
- Through the process of engaging with existing digital platforms of public programmes and aligning them with the needs of beneficiaries and citizens, **build minimum standards of digital platforms** that are in line with **Section 4 of the RTI Act**. For instance it was agreed that all digital platforms should be online, transaction based, and open.

Annexures

'Use technology to your benefit'

dna correspondent @jaipurdna

A one-day workshop was organised at the Institute of Development Studies, Jhalana by the Digital Empowerment Foundation wherein more than 100 public representatives participated.

The motto of the programme was to communicate the government schemes and policies to the masses, to explain its benefits and to teach them the ways to use Information and communication technology for their benefit.

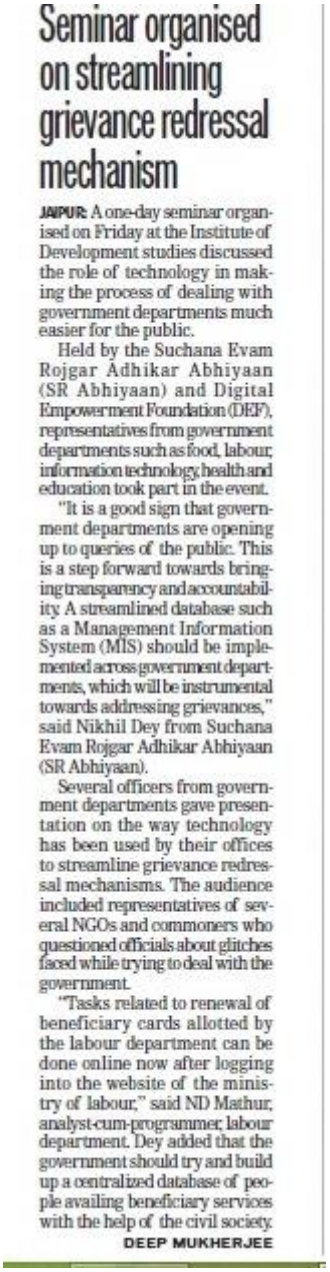
Nikhil De, social worker working with Suchana Avam Rozgar Abhiyan while addressing the gathering said, "To maintain a level of transparency between the general masses and the government, all the information available on the MIS should be made available on the public domain also." Speakers also suggested

THE WORKSHOP BY DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION SAW OVER 100 PEOPLE FROM VARIOUS FIELDS

that the E-mitra and Atal Seva Centers should not charge more money than decided by the government and the service fee list should be put up on all the centers.

HR Singh of social justice and empowerment department said, "The status of acceptance or rejection of pension schemes is available on the website. The applicant just has to put the application number and the status can be seen. In case the pensioner does not take pension for three months then the pension is stopped at the source. Also, if the pension is stopped then an application can be put to the concerned official."

Press Release in DNA Correspondent



Seminar organised on streamlining grievance redressal mechanism

JAIPUR: A one-day seminar organised on Friday at the Institute of Development studies discussed the role of technology in making the process of dealing with government departments much easier for the public.

Held by the Suchana Evam Rojgar Adhikar Abhiyaan (SR Abhiyaan) and Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), representatives from government departments such as food, labour, information technology, health and education took part in the event.

"It is a good sign that government departments are opening up to queries of the public. This is a step forward towards bringing transparency and accountability. A streamlined database such as a Management Information System (MIS) should be implemented across government departments, which will be instrumental towards addressing grievances," said Nikhil Dey from Suchana Evam Rojgar Adhikar Abhiyaan (SR Abhiyaan).

Several officers from government departments gave presentation on the way technology has been used by their offices to streamline grievance redressal mechanisms. The audience included representatives of several NGOs and commoners who questioned officials about glitches faced while trying to deal with the government.

"Tasks related to renewal of beneficiary cards allotted by the labour department can be done online now after logging into the website of the ministry of labour," said ND Mathur, analyst-cum-programmer, labour department. Dey added that the government should try and build up a centralized database of people availing beneficiary services with the help of the civil society.

DEEP MUKHERJEE

Press Release in Hindustan Times

A small exhibition of IEC/ICT items was also held near the conference hall. The exhibition gave an excellent opportunity to participants to connect, share and build network. Tana-Bana, our NGO partner in Rajasthan, showcased its gorgeous local handicraft on the occassion while participants bought intricate handicraft items like bedsheets, cushions, and bags to decorate their homes. The handmade ladies kurti, bags and diaries were an instant hit among women participants. The low-cost, solar-powered household items like torch, table lamps and digital equipment like selfie sticks and pen drives turned out to be crowd pullers.