



DIGITAL PANCHAYAT – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In India 70% of the population lives in village and rural parts of the country, it becomes more necessary to utilise Digital Panchayat tools for their social, economic, administrative and governance regeneration. Recognizing the e-Governance, the Government of India (GoI) has introduced various administrative reforms and initiated many interventions under policy level and at institutional level. However, the government has been able to connect urban-centric regions of the country, but still this left with a major national-gap as far as using ICT for the nation building is concerned. Effective and viable usage of ICT tools at panchayat, which represents the first level of government interaction for over 60% of the Indian populace, is largely missing.

Keywords Digital Panchayat, ICT

INTRODUCTION

Digital India is a campaign launched by the Government of India in order to ensure the Government's services are made available to citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and by increasing Internet connectivity or by making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology. The initiative includes plans to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks. Digital India consists of three core components: the

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development of secure and stable digital infrastructure, delivering government services digitally, and universal digital literacy.

Launched on 1 July 2015 by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is both enabler and beneficiary of other key Government of India schemes, such as BharatNet, Make in India, Startup India and Standup India, industrial corridors, Bharatmala, Sagarmala, dedicated freight corridors, UDAN-RCS and E-Kranti.

The digital platform aims to bring out the local voices by empowering the local communities to showcase and share local social, cultural and economic practices, stories and challenges. Moreover, the web-platform would act as a repository of local content for national and global audience and vice versa with a bottom-up content thrust. Additionally, the portal would act as a multipurpose information and communication platform to showcase local content, culture, best practices, advocate local issues, e-Commerce to the Panchayat Villages. Digital Panchayat is a platform for panchayat representatives to connect with rest of the world.

Digital Panchayat

Digital Panchayat is a functional and dynamic digital platform and working station designed and created for each and every Panchayat in India, powered by Internet. The objective is to facilitate and improve Panchayat functioning on day-to-day basis, through two way flow of information and content. The goal is to realise various development objectives at grassroots level. Digital Panchayat programme is a national initiative of Digital Empowerment Foundation and National Internet Exchange of India (Dept of IT, Govt. of India)

Objectives of Digital Panchayat:

Digital Panchayat' is about empowering and developing the grassroots communities at the panchayat levels through creation of virtual community at each panchayat level through an interactive and collaborative web portal, the portal run, managed and sustained by the local community through regular information and content management from a bottom-up as well as top-down channels.

- Villages to be part of the global citizenship and link with nonresident individuals to connect with their land of domicile
- Creation of basic ground to go for full-fledged rural governance, two-way information channel, advocate for village panchayat level data centre and gateway of e-Democracy



- Development of Digital Panchayat toolkit, which includes text book on “ICT tools” and curriculum for capacity building of Panchayat functionaries in ICT & digital media
- Enrichment of national level .IN domain of www by having all 2,50,000 Panchayats online
- Develop a very comprehensive Campaign/Outreach Booklet for all the participants, which would broadly serve the purpose of “empowering the participants through pictorial diagrams, Caselets, examples, Internet goods, and list of benefits that would be directly related to each panchayat and the important steps to have their own domains and websites, in their own languages”;
- Create a campaign website under this partnership and populate the website with all relevant information of campaign, meetings, workshops, and outcome report, including enlisting the participating individuals and Panchayats and other agencies including audio and video content feedback aggregated at the time of the events;
- Create a modus operandi of series campaign and multiplier effect after the meet/workshop so that the awareness campaign could be carry forward by the Sarpanches and Zila Parishads and the NGOs
- Increase ICT and internet awareness at panchayat level
- Village level digital content collection, collation, and aggregation
- Firsthand experience for panchayat people to be part of digital world
- Virtual identity for each panchayat on World Wide Web
- Giving an experience of transparent Panchayat level programme
- Chance for citizens to directly and publicly lodge complaints
- Chance and hope for district, state and central level administration and governance to see what is happening on the ground
- Facilitate e-Gov platform with G2C, B2C services, etc;

Why Digital Panchayat (DP)?

In India, 70% of the population resides in rural areas and villages. There has been a large digital gap between the urban-centric part and the rural part of India. So, it becomes more necessary to utilise ICT tools for social, economic, administrative and governance regeneration. Recognising the e-Governance, the Government of India has introduced various reforms and initiated many interventions under policy level like the IT Act of 2000, the 2004 National Broadband policy and so on and at an institutional level like the MCA 21 initiative (Ministry of Company Affairs), National E-Governance Plan (NeGP) are fine examples. However, the government has been able to connect urban-centric regions of the nation, but still has left with a major national-gap as far as using ICT for the nation building is concerned. Effective and viable usage of ICT tools at panchayat, which represents the first level of government interaction for over 60% of the Indian populace, is largely missing. More than 6, 35,000 villages represented by 2, 50,000 Panchayats and more than 3, 00,000



Panchayat functionaries lack governance for development and information sharing platform to reach out to its maximum citizens whom the panchayats are accountable to. With this background, the National Internet Exchange of India (NiXI) and the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) initiated and rolled forward the concept of 'Digital Panchayat (DP)' programme across the nation. The objective of the project was to set an example to the government and other stakeholders how web-presence of panchayats can create enormous enthusiasm for ICT & Internet and it would break the barrier of digital divide. Basically, the concept of DP webs around a web based dynamic digital interface created for each and every Panchayat in India, giving information about particular panchayat in a two-way flow of content. The objective is to facilitate and improve panchayat functioning on day-to-day basis, through two way flow of information and content.

Paperless Indian villages? They might be a reality soon.

This after the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's (MeitY) Common Service Centre and the Panchayati Raj ministry inked an MoU for the complete digitisation of India's 2.5 lakh plus gram panchayats.

Common Service Centre e-Governance Services is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) under MeitY is primarily focused towards the development and delivery of e-governance services to India's rural heartlands.

Under the MoU, the SPV will work with the Panchayati Raj ministry to convert all gram panchayats into 'digital panchayats', supporting the gram panchayats in executing data digitisation and ensuring speedy delivery of all panchayat-level services.

"This MoU will also act as a catalyst in promoting rural BPOs in every gram panchayat, of which there are over 2.5 lakh," MeitY said.

The MoU will also ensure that CSCs maintain records of all gram panchayats in digital format, besides supporting gram panchayats in conducting various surveys. CSCs will also work as digital literacy centres for all elected representatives of gram panchayats.

"We will automate and digitise day to day work at gram panchayats, engage e-panchayat applications and other central and state government applications to create a true digital panchayat," added Dr Dinesh Tyagi, CEO, CSC SPV.

According to him, the collaboration will see CSCs working as a point of contact for integration, implementation and delivery of services from other ministries and department from the central and state government.



As per official figures, there are approximately 2,50,000 Panchayats in India mapped by the National Informatics Centre and Ministry of Panchayati Raj on the ministry website under the project called e-Panchayat. However, it is difficult to find any information about single panchayat

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan is being executed by PMGDisha with an outlay of Rs 2,351.38 crore with the objective of making 6 crore rural households digitally literate by March 2020. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (abbreviated as PMGDishais an initiative under Digital India program, approved by The Union Cabinet chaired by the PM Narendra Modi. The main objective of the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan is to make 6 crore people in rural areas across India digitally literate, reaching around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household.

e-Panchayat Project

The vast majority of India's population lives in the villages and the Panchayats (village level governance units also known as Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)) represent the face of the governance for these villagers. To improve the quality of governance of these PRIs including 0.235 million Gram Panchayats, 6094 Block Panchayats and 633 Zilla Panchayats, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Government of India (GOI) has initiated the e-governance scheme known as ePanchayats

- Villages to be part of the global citizenship and link with non-resident individuals to connect with their land of domicile.
- Encourage village panchayat level data centre and e-democracy.
- Creation of fully fledged rural governance, two way information channel.
- Capacity building of Panchayat functionaries in ICT & digital media.
- Increase ICT and internet awareness at panchayat level.
- Village level digital content collection, collation and aggregation.
- Firsthand experience of panchayat people to be part of digital world and virtual identity of each panchayat on World Wide Web.
- Giving an experience of transparent panchayat level programme
- Chance for citizens to directly and publicly lodge complaints.
- Chance and hope for district, state and central level administration and governance to see what is happening at ground.
- Facilitate e-Gov platform with Government to Citizens (G2C), Business to Consumer (B2C) services etc.



CONCLUSION

There are more than 6,35,000 villages, which are represented by 2,50,000 panchayats (local councils) and more than 3,00,000 panchayat functionaries (councilors), which is an enormous number to represent over 70 per cent of population of India that lives in rural parts of the country. There is practically no such governance system in these constituencies for development and information sharing platform to reach out to its maximum citizens whom the panchayats are accountable to. However, more than 99 per cent of these panchayats are devoid of ICT connected world of knowledge and information.

In order to address these issues, Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), which is actively involved in disseminating information and empowering rural and grassroots level communities by utilising the power of ICT tools and digital media, found it necessary to tap panchayats and equip them with ICT and Internet tools to create a virtual presence and identity.

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