

Projects that can serve as guideposts for UNDP project development -2 : Accountability and transparency

Digital systems for effective grievance redressal: The case of *Lokvani*

Short description: *Lokvani* (<http://sitapur.nic.in/lokvani>) is an e-governance initiative that attempts to reduce citizens' travel to government offices for accessing information, entitlement processing and grievance redressal.

This initiative was conceptualised and launched in 2004, by the district administration of Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh. A society by the name *Lokvani* was constituted to implement the project autonomously and the services of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) were sought for technical know-how. Then, the district administration proceeded to launch *Lokvani* centres in 13 locations in the district. It was decided that instead of opening new kiosks, existing cyber-cafes/computer training institutes would be granted licenses to become *Lokvani* centres. This decision was taken to ensure the financial viability and the long-term sustainability of the centres. The kiosk operators were given login IDs and passwords to a website hosted on NIC's web server containing all the information pertaining to government-to-citizen interactions that the project wanted to provide through the centres. This included details of various government schemes (including beneficiary lists), government prescribed forms, details of developmental work (undertaken by local bodies), access to the digitised land records and even details of the funds released from the state government to local bodies. *Lokvani* centres were also allowed to also offer services such as Online Registration of deaths/births, caste certificates, domicile certificates etc. The centres were also permitted to charge a pre-fixed fee for each service, to support financial sustainability.

In addition, the district administration set up a grievance redressal service through the *Lokvani* centres. Under this service, citizens could file a written complaint at any *Lokvani* centre for a specified fee (usually ranging from Rs.10-15). *Lokvani* coordinators could then upload the complaints online to the *Lokvani* site (<http://sitapur.nic.in/lokvani>) by signing in with their centre-specific user name and password. It was ensured that the system did not permit the modification of a complaint, once entered. On upload, the system would generate a unique ID number for the complaint which was to be passed on by the *Lokvani* centre coordinators to the complainant. Using this ID number, the complainant could follow-up on the complaint, even through a telephone call to the centre operator. Research studies on *Lokvani* have revealed that this grievance redressal service has been extremely successful¹.

In 2005, the state government issued an order to extend *Lokvani*² to the rest of the State, and efforts for replicating the initiative in other districts are under way. 59 districts in the state have already started implementing *Lokvani* based citizen services³.

Reason for selection: The main achievement of the project is that, it has helped in removing the major barriers of costs and travel time that prevented many rural citizens from accessing their right to redressal of grievances. Secondly, the project has also facilitated the tracking of complaints by officials and complainants, and has enabled better enforcing of the public accountability of district officials as detailed below.

“[Through *Lokvani*'s Integrated Voice Response System and Short Message Service

1 See Pathak,R. (2008), “Enabling Efficient administration at the district level: A study of Lokvani project in Uttar Pradesh”, Retrieved from http://sitapur.nic.in/lokvani/allabout/Lokvani_tiss.pdf 29 July 2012. This study provides a detailed analyses of the achievements of the *Lokvani* project.

2 See GO 876/78-2-2005-8 I.T./2005 at <http://infotech.up.nic.in/hindi/anudesh/itgo.htm>

3 sitapur.nic.in/lokvani/intro_eng.doc Retrieved 29 October 2012.

components]... Officers and Complainant will be able to check Complaint status on mobile phone..... Citizens will be able to check status of Complaint, name of officer to whom the complaint is assigned, instruction by District Magistrate, deadline date given to the officer for solving the complaint on phone. Similarly officers will be able to check number of complaints pending to him. Officer can drill down any complaint for details. On the other hand, the district offices have become de-congested though the quality and pace of redress all of grievances have improved...⁴”

Contact information: Mr. Amod Kumar (Former district magistrate of Sitapur who played a key role in designing Lokvani) amodkumar71@yahoo.co.in

Information systems for transparency and public accountability : The case of the Andhra Pradesh Employment Guarantee Scheme

Short Description: The case of the Andhra Pradesh Employment Guarantee Scheme demonstrates how a digitised Management Information System(MIS) when combined with an on-ground system for public-audits, can be extremely successful in ensuring the accountability of state agencies.

The Andhra Pradesh Employment Guarantee Scheme, launched in 2006, seeks to “*provide livelihood security to (rural households in 13 districts of the state) by providing not less than 100 (one hundred) days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every rural household, whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled and manual work*”⁵, keeping in line with the provisions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

Under NREGA, any adult member of a rural household has the right to register under this scheme. On registration with the *Gram Panchayat*, s/he will be issued a Job Card and his/her name will be entered in the Job Card Register maintained by the *Panchayat* Secretary. Any Job Card holder has the right to submit an application for work under the scheme, with the *Panchayat*. It is the responsibility of the *Panchayat* to ensure that at least one member of every household who has applied for work, is provided 100 days employment in the developmental works in the village that the *Panchayat* undertakes, using the funds allotted to it under the Scheme. The scheme also prescribes the kind of developmental works that can be undertaken – broadly, it allows those works that will lead to local asset creation. Every *panchayat* also has to prepare a shelf of works that it plans to undertake the next (financial) year, by December of the previous year, and get certain prescribed approvals from district and state level agencies before such works can be taken up. Measurement books and Muster rolls are required to be maintained at the work-sites by a field assistant, and the details of the entries have to be read out to the workers, and entries on the number of work days and payment due need to be entered in the job cards of the workers. A Technical Assistant has been appointed under the scheme to check the works every alternate week, and the books maintained under the scheme are forwarded to the *Mandal*⁶ *Parishad* Development Officer, who issues appropriate wage payment orders as well as cheques for suppliers of material. The scheme also has provisions for social audit to ensure accountability at the local level.

On the basis of previous experience in implementing rural employment schemes, the Government of Andhra Pradesh recognised the roadblocks that were likely to sabotage the scheme – bogus registration of persons, inflated muster rolls with fictitious workmen, fraudulent measurement of works, under-payments, and inflated person day estimates⁷.

4 See Pathak,R. (2008), “Enabling Efficient administration at the district level: A study of Lokvani project in Uttar Pradesh”, Retrieved from http://sitapur.nic.in/lokvani/allabout/Lokvani_tiss.pdf 29 October 2012

5 See <file:///tmp/apregscheme.htm> for more details. Retrieved 29 July 2012.

6 A *Mandal* is an administrative unit that comprises of 21 Gram Panchayats, in the Andhra Pradesh context

7 See http://nrega.ap.gov.in/Nregs_Photos/Process%20Flow%20Diagrams_files/frame.htm

As the first step towards ensuring effective implementation of the scheme, the Government of Andhra Pradesh developed an end-to-end digitised MIS system (See http://nrega.ap.gov.in/Nregs/Home_eng.jsp) through which job cards, work estimates and payment orders could be issued, with the help of Tata Consultancy Services. Under this digitised MIS, "the data is collected and inputted at the Mandal [level] and consolidated at the state level. Information on each job card holder including number of days worked and total wages received is accessible through the MIS system. All the data is public and available for scrutiny. To streamline payment processes, wages are paid directly through post office accounts or bank accounts of the workers"⁸.

Recognising that digitisation cannot stop fraudulent data entry into the MIS, the Andhra Pradesh system has also established an elaborate support structure for regular social audit of village level NREGA works, with the involvement of the workers themselves⁹. This enables the comparison of the information entered into the MIS with ground level realities – thus ensuring complete transparency and accountability.

Reason for selection: The MIS, not only empowers the citizens but also enables self-governance bodies to run the employment guarantee scheme effectively – because of auto-record keeping and system generated reports, in-built checks in the MIS such as auto alert/rejection if some data entry does not adhere to scheme guidelines and so on. Additionally, the MIS also enables real-time monitoring by scheme managers at the higher levels. Finally, the juxtaposition of direct accountability measures in the MIS with on-ground data in the Andhra Pradesh model has helped to continually keep out brokers or middlemen, and prevent corruption in administrative machinery.

Contact Information: http://nrega.ap.gov.in/Nregs/ContactUs_eng.jsp

Web-convergence for transparency: The case of the RTI Central Monitoring Mechanism, Odisha

Short Description: The Information and Public Relations Department of the State Government of Odisha has created an online 'RTI¹⁰ Central Monitoring Mechanism' (<http://rtiodisha.gov.in/>) in order to provide a "single point access of all RTI related information... in an uniform manner"¹¹, in collaboration with Luminous Infoways. This is actually a web based centralised database system hosted on web server provided by NIC, Govt. of India. Every Public Authority under the State Government of Odisha has access to the system through a Public Authority account, where there is a predefined Web Content Management System for uploading the suo-moto disclosure as per Section 4 of the RTI Act, 2005. Similarly the Public Authority account has also options for maintaining and updating the various requests for information received by the Public Information Officers under Section 6 of RTI Act, 2005. The request can be received physically, transferred from other Public authority or can be received online. By using this account, every Public Authority has to adhere to the prescribed time-limit for disposal, failing which he/she is liable to be penalised. At the same time the citizen has the satisfaction in obtaining information in a timely manner. This software also generates all the registers as prescribed under the Odisha Right to Information Rules, 2005. The web portal presently enables 1500 offices to comply with their obligations under the RTI Act, 2005. It also has a provision by which citizens can post their feedback /comments on any government data that has been made public.

8 Aiyar, Y. And Samji, S. (2008) Transparency and Accountability in NREGA : A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh , AI Working Paper No.1, February 2009 . Retrieved from <http://www.accountabilityindia.in/article/working-paper/787-transparency-and-accountability-nrega-case-study-andhra-pradesh> 29 July 2012

9 Ibid

10 RTI stands for Right to Information

11 See <http://rtiorissa.gov.in/E-India> Retrieved 29 July 2012.

Reason for selection: *The 'RTI Central Monitoring Mechanism' has facilitated the fulfilment of proactive disclosure obligations by government agencies, better management of information requests by public authorities and maximised the opportunities offered by the internet for fulfilling the State's obligations under the Right to Information Act, enhancing transparency in state-citizen relationships.*

Contact Information: <http://rtiodisha.gov.in/ContactUs>