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STUDY OF ONLINE CITIZEN SERVICES IN PUNJAB

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Abstract

Government is spending huge amount of money on digitization of citizen services to provide these via e-delivery. Punjab government has done a commendable job to provide e-services to its people. In this paper, various online services provided to citizens of Punjab state of India has been studied and various measures are suggested to make it more effective. The biggest hindrance in success of e-services is ignorance and lack of awareness about the services between people. The full participation of both citizens and employees can make it truly a right tool for welfare of people.

I. Introduction:

Citizen Services should be delivered in a friendly manner to people for overall satisfaction. It is the duty of the government to deliver citizen services effectively as per the needs of people and efforts should be constantly made to improve the quality of services. Rather than traditional government office setups, providing services to people through e-mode will definitely improve the lives of citizens and eradicate the corruption, nepotism, mediator and delay in delivery of services.

Both Central and state governments are doing great efforts to provide the citizen services via e-delivery. As per India's National e-governance plan [1] many mammoth projects have been undertaken [2] like Income Tax, Passport apply, Central excise, Court Records, Pensions and banking, Aadhar Card (UIDAI project), Direct transfer of LPG subsidy by central government to give impetus to e-governance program. Every state has been entrusted with responsibility of state subjects [3] like land records, transport, Property registration, Treasurer, Municipality and Gram Panchyat (e-Panchayat), commercial taxes and police services. Central government has done an exemplary job to carry out this task and financial grants are provided to all states to carry out their part of job. Punjab government has done an appreciable job to digitize the basic citizen services. Many services are put online so that people

can avail these services at the click of mouse, without any need to stand in a queue; thereby saving time and money.

II. Online Citizen Services:

With the proliferation of broadband and mobile technology combined with IT literacy, more and more people from urban and rural areas are getting hooked onto internet. To coincide with this, many e-governance services are also offered using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure in Punjab state of India, which are described below:

- 1) Suwidha Centres: As the name suggests, facility is provided to citizens through a single window for completing many services in efficient, transparent, time-bound and friendly manner using the ICT. Many services [4] like issuance of arms license, marriage certificates, caste certificates, birth and death certificates, Freedom fighter, Domicile, Income certificates, Ration card, Affidavit etc. are provided at Suwidha centre. Suwidha Centers have been established till sub-division level under the aegis of District level Sukhmani Society since 2003 for delivery of more than 30 Services. Presently these are run in client-server model, with many districts changed to webSuwidha recently.
- 2) Gram Suwidha Kendras: Though suwidha centers have benefitted people living in cities, towns

and nearby areas. But people living in rural and remote areas has to face the inconvenience of physically visiting the suwidha centers to get services. Thereby wasting time and transportation cost. In next phase, rural kiosks has been setup [5] on BOT basis in every village to provide the same citizen services at the doorsteps of people. The main aim is to provide the services in online manner, not in line. Villagers gets highly benefit from this move, as they get required services in their village.

3) Unified Service Delivery Centers: Punjab is soon going to launch [6] Unified Citizen Service Delivery Centers (UCSDCs) providing public services to people in their respective wards and villages. Punjab will become the first state in the country to launch this service to its people in year 2015. Under supervision of Punjab e-governance society, 1750 rural and 424 urban cyber services centers would be launched to deliver more than 225 citizen services relating to various public departments. Existing Fard, Saanjh and Suvidha Kendras would be clubbed with these centers for delivery of Governance to Government (G2G) and Government to Citizen (G2C) services. Other e-governance projects like E-district [7] and State Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG) are also running to carry out back-end computerisation and digitalisation of all services in all government departments. UCSDC project will empower common people to avail information and government services hassle free with lower cost and by saving time.

4) Punjab Police Saanjh Kendras: Saanjh Kendras are one of the series of e-governance projects launched by state Government to provide 25 police related services [8] to people without visiting a police station in a friendly manner using ICT. As the name indicates, this is an effort to develop an association between people and police. 505 Saanjh Kendras (Front end) are already operational, out of which 351 are the police stations to deliver across the counter citizen services to people. On the backend, Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems project is running to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of policing. Various other projects [9] like crime investigation system, motor vehicle and Talash etc. are also used.

Each police district [10] is required to maintain a website and contact details of officers

are uploaded online. FIR filing status, details and progress made can be viewed online through its - website. Police help can be taken by calling 100 number and 181 Police Complaint Number can be used to register complaints with police on phone. Vigilance bureau officials can be contacted through email or toll free number [11].

5) E-Courts: The aim of E-courts project is to provide efficient and time-bound justice delivery services in affordable, accessible, cost effective and transparent manner to citizens. Anyone can access information related to cases in any court of India [12, 13] through multiple options such as by case number, FIR number, party name, advocate name etc. Training is provided to judicial officers and staff under phase-I of the project and necessary hardware/software has been set up in courts. Currently, phase-II of the project is running which include [14] building necessary infrastructure, video conferencing facility within jails, designing mobile apps, and sms/email alerts for hearing dates etc.

6) Public Grievances: Public Grievances Redress Portal [15, 16] has been launched to lodge the people grievances against Government department and see the action report online. People can complain about any department, various boards and corporations. Deputy CM has also made public an email address to register grievances directly with him.

7) Land Records: Punjab Land Record Society is entrusted with the tasks of computerization of land records of villages and cities by putting zamabandis (Fard) online [17]. Any land owner can view the record online and could get a certified copy of land record from farad kendras, established at each tehsil and sub-tehsil level.

Revenue Department has also computerized land registration process by implementing [18] PRISM project (Property Registration Information System Module). PRISM supports various features like on the spot valuation of property, on the spot stamp & registration fee calculations, online photo capturing of parties and witness along with Sub Registrar and saving in database, printing of

photographs of concerned parties on the backside of the stamp paper.

Property details of Urban Estates have been put online by PUDA [19] and other land development authorities in their respective websites. Various layout plans, apartment act and various other land related policies and documents are uploaded on PUDA website for public access. Starting year 2015, All deeds and land registrations in Punjab above Rs.50,000 would be made under e-stamping [20] under computerization of stamp duty advanced system (C-SDAS) project.

8) Financial Empowerment: Income tax collection and Banking operations are already made online to provide great facility to public as well as organizations. Pensions, subsidies (like LPG), scholarships to students etc. are disbursed directly and timely to concerned person (Direct Benefit Transfer) in their bank account. Once Aadhar card based system [21] is fully implemented, various government benefits, welfare schemes and other subsidies will be transferred to the person concerned resulting in speeding up payments and removing leakages. Recently launched Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana is also one of the measures to provide banking facilities to the poor, so that government benefits can reach directly into hands of people.

9) E-Taxation and billing: State subjects like Collection of Value Added Tax, CST, Entry tax, Entertainment tax, Luxury tax etc. are collected through PexTax website [22] of Punjab Government. Electronic payment of tax, filing of returns, clearance of refunds, registration of dealer and facility of online ledger etc. are provided. Various information/notifications are also uploaded online.

Billing for various public services like electricity bill has been made online/ collected on the spot. Municipal corporations in Punjab are currently in process to adopt same for Sewage and water bills.

10) Road Transport: Vahan [23] and soon to be released Sarthi [24] projects of the Punjab transport department are in place to submit online details about road vehicles and for issue of online Driving License to people respectively. E-Auction of fancy numbers for vehicles has been carried out online. Fee for High security number plates can be deposited online and appointment can be scheduled online (though in papers only and not implemented practically).

11) Admission and Recruitment Process: Admission process to various universities and colleges has been made paperless and counseling of many courses has been conducted online [25]. The fee is being collected via net banking or deposited through challan in a nearby bank. Result of exams by education boards and universities is being published online. Similarly recruitment process for various government jobs has been made online resulting in more transparency and free from hassle. Admit cards for various tests and competitive exams are uploaded online. After exam, question papers with answer keys are uploaded online, with a time limit to applicants to file objections, if any. The merit lists are uploaded on website and joining instructions are emailed to applicants.

12) Other services and upcoming: Blood bank is made online [26], so that people may contact the respective bank for required blood group. School Education department has also implemented online teacher transfer system and daily notice board [27] (dak) online. Government offices are encouraged to adopt email as preferred mode of communication [28]. File Tracking System is also implemented in Secretariat and Directorate Branches. E-procurement and Tendering [29] has been adopted for all Government works. Punjab wide area network for data management, File Tracking System, Agmarket etc. are being run under the aegis of Department of Governance Reforms [30], Punjab.

Various upcoming e-Services include online filing of RTI, payment of Property tax and other government taxes, Doctors appointment and citizen health management system, e-mamta project, online employment exchange, online service record of employees, Agriculture related services to farmers. Within a year or two, many citizen friendly services would be launched which will make life of a common man easier.

III. Suggestions:

1) E-services should be made fully online for real benefits to people. As seen in case of high security registration plates, the procedure to pay fee, collect e-receipt, and schedule the appointment for fix number plate has been made online on paper. But it has been so poorly implemented that people gets

harassed a lot. The implementation of service as per conceptual plan should be in toto.

2) Many a time people do not know the procedure to apply for a particular service. The concerned department should at least clearly state the procedure, timing, counter number, contact person, Public utility forms and list of documents required to avail a particular service on its website.

3) Government should develop a portal for recruitments and every Government department should list vacancies there only. Lot of money can be saved on advertisement in newspapers. People also got the convenience of surfing a single website for vacancies.

4) Email should be accepted as preferred mode of communication. Use of mobile as a tool for m-governance should be explored due to high penetration.

5) Collection of various taxes should be made online e.g. Property tax, House tax, water charges, fine for traffic violations etc. Large number of people will come into tax net after digitization and tracking of defaulters become very easy.

6) Integrated Municipal information system should be designed which contains info about city, elected members, staff responsible for delivering services, utility forms, Local Tenders, Jobs, Building plan approval etc. Facility to complain about defect in street lights, solid waste, garden development, sewage-water problems should be inbuilt in this system.

IV. Conclusion:

The digitization of services is a great effort to provide various services to citizens in a hassle free manner. Government can empower its citizens in a great way by providing services at their doorsteps. Punjab Government is taking very effective steps to promote e-Governance projects. The overall scene is changing. Along with e-services, Right to Information (RTI) act has made a great info digging tool in the hands of people.

But the success of these services can be realized by full participation of citizens and employees. The government employees need to change their mindset and put their best efforts in service of people. Employees need to be trained on ICT technology. Not only government employees,

but ordinary citizens should change their mindset to get services by not paying any money to agent/middleman. Corruption can be root out only by sincere participation of citizens by realizing the impact of these online services. The biggest hindrance is ignorance and lack of awareness about the services offered to rural people (even urban also). Government must popularize the various services offered online by giving ads in vernacular daily newspapers and by holding camps/talks in cities and villages to make people aware about various services provided via e-delivery. Low ICT literacy in villages is also a concern. Government has to ensure implementation of citizen services in toto as per concept plan. Otherwise people instead of getting relief from e-governance, may be harassed a lot than traditional mode of service delivery.

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