Information and Communication Technology in Panchayati Raj of Bihar

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ABSTRACT

The panchayati raj represent democratic decentralized governance in India and state of Bihar. The lowest tier of the Panchayati raj. In today's time, Panchayati Raj are local governmental bodies of grass-root governance in rural Bihar and forms the third layer of the federalism in India. 73rd Panchayati Raj Act (1992) came into existence in 1993 and it cemented the way for a strong and effective decentralized administrative system in India and state of Bihar. The Indian Constitution added 11th schedule to it detailing 29 matters which are devolved to the local government . Bihar was the first state in the nation to bring in 50 % reservation for women in Panchayati raj. This was made operational through the Bihar Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam, 2006. Accordingly,elections to Panchayati raj which were held in 2006 had 50 % reservation for women and thus the total elected representatives had more women than men in the final tally.

These institutions of grass-root government are playing an necessary role in humanizing the living standard of rural peoples in Bihar. In the current tech savvy scenario, the concept of e- governance and usage of Information and Communications technology (ICT) in offering services to the community have gained momentum. In order to move from governance to good governance with the assist of ICT, the Government of India has initiated many projects such as National e-Governance Plan, e- Kranti, Bharat Net etc. This paper portray the use of ICT by Panchayati Raj in given that effective people service delivery to the rural masses. The objective of this paper is to explore the use of Information and Communication technology (ICT) tools in the panchayati raj specially at the elementary level for enhanced governance, participation and development.

Keyword: *Panchayati Raj, Participation, ICT, Bihar*

Introduction:

Panchayat Raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the elementary units of administration. It has three layer: village, block and district. The term "Panchayati raj" is relatively novel, having originated during the British administration. Raj literally means "governance or government". Mahatma Gandhi supporter Panchayati Raj, a decentralized form of Government where all village is responsible for its own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj. The 73rd constitution amendment,1992, provided with the standardized pattern of three tier local self-government institution throughout. According to the novel system, the Panchayati raj are given wider authority and responsibilities and it ushered a novel era in the meadow of local governance. The 11th of the constitution that was incorporated after the 73rd amendment identifiers 29 area over which local self-government institution lawfully have authority[1,2]. The Panchayati Raj Department (PRD) in Bihar came into existence in 2007. It mainly interacts with two ministries at the central level — the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR). PRD is considered an important department not only because of the quantum of funds that it handles but also because its activities have a direct bearing on rural development and poverty mitigation. It is also the nodal department through which attempts are made for grassroots democracy and decentralization of authority through Panchayati raj which have become the fulcrum of every progress activities. Bihar was the first state in the country to bring in 50 % reservation for women in PRIs. This was made operational through the Bihar Panchayati Raj Adhiniyam, 2006. Accordingly,elections to Panchayati raj which were held in 2006 had 50 % reservation for women and thus the total elected representatives had more women than men in the final tally. Panchayati raj at the district, block, and village levels are the Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti, and Gram Panchayat respectively and three layer structure[3]. The main aim of The Panchayati Raj was to accomplish the democratic decentralization to accelerate socio-economic progress and social justice. The enactment of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act and the consequent state – wise Panchayat Raj Acts in India and state of Bihar have brought to vanguard the importance of grassroots democratic procedures. This

transform in the Indian political system is the outcome of a growing conviction that big government cannot achieve growth and progress in a society without public's straight participation and initiative. Contextually and hypothetically too, the novel panchayati raj system has been shaped as a model of self-governance. The goal of decentralization are to implement and implement schemes and programs to meet the local requirements to mobilize public, to channelize their energies towards socio-economic rebuilding and to involve them in every the activities of the communities through the novel institutions[4].

This is the period of information and communication technology (ICT) and the use of ICT tools in diverse social, economic and administrative meadows is on the go up. Recognizing the importance of e-Governance, the Government of India and state of Bihar has introduced various administrative reform and initiate many measures at the institutional level to further its prospect. The effort is minor if we take into consideration the need for effective and viable usage of ICT apparatus at the panchayati raj, which represents the 1st level of government interaction for over 75% of the Bihari public[5]. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj in the rank report of the e-Panchayat Mission Mode affirmed that it "has been adopting a multi-pronged policy to execute the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution ……...One major policy has been to harness the potential of ICT apparatus for e-Governance in Panchayati raj. The goal has been to make Panchayati raj more efficient, transparent and symbols of modernity by leveraging ICT at the wounding edge level to ensure transparency and accountability in their working through disclosure of information, social audit, efficient delivery of services and humanizing internal procedures and management of Panchayati raj[6]. Bihar is linked by the Bihar State Wide Area Network (BSWAN). Every the blocks have access to computers and have Internet connectivity. Approximately 6,000 Common Service Centres are functioning at the village level; these are managed by Srei-Sahaj with the overall monitoring being done by Beltron. Under BRGF,the state has set-up a assisting for Panchayai raj systems and services. Each the blocks have a facility for 2-way video conferencing. At the district level, PlanPlus Software is used for decentralized planning[3]. With the advent of ICT diverse e-governance uses are devised for rural development and management of panchayati raj comprise of various aspect like finances, accounts, procurement, land records, agriculture marketing etc[7]. The information may comprise of news, circulars, reports, educational material, entertainment material and application forms etc. and can be admittances by many public in either horizontal or in sequential manner[8]. ICT has a ability to publicize any information to millions of public in minimum cost, time and efforts. The current epoch of globalization, marketization and increasing competitiveness needs that all public should be ingenious to run their livelihood enterprise. Internet facilitate public to interact with government, conduct businesses, communicate with peers, innovate, imbibe best practices into their lives and replicate their opinion[9].

Background of Panchayati Raj in Bihar:

The Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 was passed pursuant to the 73rd Constitution Amendment
Act, 1992. Subsequently the State has carried out major transforms through the instrumentality of the Bihar Panchayati Raj Ordinance, 2006. Panchayati Raj at every the three levels have been
entrusted with duties and functions in respect of each the 29 matters listed in the 11th of the Constitution. Bihar has also established Nyaya Panchayats, known as Gram Katchahries. These have jurisdictions that are larger than Gram Panchayats, but smaller than Panchayat Samitis. Bihar was the first state in the nation to bring in 50 % reservation for women in Panchayati raj. This was made operational through the Bihar Panchayat Raj Adhiniyam, 2006. Elections to the Panchayats in Bihar already held in May-June 2006. It is to be noted that reservations for women were enhanced to 50% and reservations have also been provided for the category of Extremely Backward Classes[10].

Significance of ICT in Panchayati Raj:

Effectiveness of any institution depends on the delivery machinery and the supportive rules and process acting in concord with each other, so that the institution can discharge the function and play the assigned role. For keeping in track, the institutions interrelate and exchange ideas with the stakeholders. The direct stakeholders are to be given significance, formations have to be redefined, and process and practices of governance have to be brought closer to public. Local governance should be understood from such a perspective, instead of just being seen as an agent of programme execution. ICT interference can facilitate this procedure. ICT interference assist in the procedure of progress by sharing knowledge, rising productivity, overcoming geographical boundaries and facilitating procedural openness. ICTs lead not only to enhance in supply of information with economy and reliability, but also consequently, to better decision-making and innovations. It also leads to demand for greater openness and transparency in operations. It is a powerful tool of empowerment[11].

ICTs can enhance local self-governance of Panchayati Raj in three distinct ways:

1. it builds 'efficiency benefits' in the policy cycle. By acquisition, relocate and management of complex policy information and facts it assists decision-makers in taking informed decisions;

2. it enhances the delivery of local government services; and

3. it gives a facelift to the government civil society interface by increased access to government information and facilitating conversation and people reaction on government projects and performance[12].

ICTs play an increasingly significant role in assiting policy makers and administrators to better manage the provision of public goods and services at the local level. They can increase basic infrastructure services such as water, sanitation and electricity; speed up the approval and delivery of permits, and provide timely and more relevant response to information requests. Thus, ICT has emerged as an effective tool to bring masses closer to the government. The Working Group on IT for Masses appointed by the Centre perceives ICT providing a unique and novel opportunity to address age-old problems in the area of education, health, rural development, poverty alleviation, employment, etc. and to be a major facilitator for information transparency, good governance, empowerment, participative management and grass-root democracy[13].

Participation in Panchayati Raj:
Participation in Panchayati Raj are requires access to a large diversity of information by the officials as well as the public and civil society. ICTs have the potential to give comprehensive information and raise the speed and quality of this procedure. The concept of Geographical Information System (GIS) can be applied to three major segments, namely inventory, analysis and planning. GIS consists of reliable and correct spatial and non-spatial information on land and land resources. With the help of GIS, Panchayat Resource Mapping can be done, which can assist not only in training of local plans, but also in consolidation of these plans at district level. Subject to the state laws, Panchayati Raj have the responsibility of agriculture, including agricultural extension, soil conservation, social forestry and farm forestry; every of which needs the aid of GIS and remote sensing data for efficient and effective performance. At the execution stage, application of ICT can guide to better resource mobilisation and deployment, manpower management and technical support. ICT can make quick, comprehensive and transparent impact-assessment possible, which can enable better execution of the projects and plans. Thus, ICT makes decentralized and Participation in Panchayati Raj a smooth and simple affair and assists in realising its intrinsic profits, i.e. efficiency, equality and empowerment.

Conclusion:
We have reached the conclusion that ICT can lead to digitalization of Panchayati Raj. Though digital empowerment by itself does not ensure the effectiveness of Panchayati Raj and ground work wants to be done to realize the full potential of digitalization yet having a web interface at the Panchayat level connected to every the grassroots members has tremendous relevance and utility in the local governing procedure. The aim of Panchayati Raj is to authorize peoples of each panchayat with bottom up and top down information content. The Digital panchayati Raj would enhance progress and governance public service delivery at Panchayat level through information on policy programmes and execution.
Therefore, sincere labors want to be taken by these institutions to increase knowledge, skills and capabilities through ICTs. ICT initiatives lead to larger openness and transparency in operations and empower Panchayati Raj as self-governance institutions. ICT initiatives can be valid in the districts of participatory planning, taxation, education and training, and service delivery. Further, electronic knowledge-based panchayats, that is, e-panchayats goal at equipping rural public with comprehensive and updated information and ensure transparency in governance. In other words, e-panchayats have strengthened participative democracy at the grassroots.However, applications of ICT to the Panchayati Raj have to address to convinced crucial factorsregional imbalances, resources, software progress, and high cost- to facilitate rural progress and self-governance in the nation and state of Bihar.

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