Impact Assessment of E-Governance Intervention on Beneficiary services of MGNREGA in J&K

Mohammad Asif Naqshbandi

Assistant Professor,
School of Business Studies
Islamic University of Science and Technology, J&K, INDIA

Abstract: Enacted in 2005 Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme is considered to be one of the most significant social policy initiatives since independence in India. The main objective of the scheme is to provide enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to every household in unskilled manual work. This research study is intended to find out the impact of Information and Communication Technology interventions on the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme. For the purpose of study data was collected from beneficiaries of the scheme through a questionnaire instrument. The instrument collected data for certain set of variables of thee scheme. The data was then analysed on pre and post electronic governance intervention basis. The results clearly indicate the positive influence of electronic governance on the scheme.

Index Terms – **MGNREGA, Electronic Governance, Rural Development**

I. Introduction: - Affordable Information Technology services, aggressive increase in number of internet users and other factors lead to the making of an ecosystem wherein Electronic Governance can play a pivotal role in achieving public policy objectives (Akman et al., 2005). There has been an upward surge since last twenty years in the deployment of Electronic Governance systems with an objective of accomplishing policy objectives. Governments worldwide heavily invested in the Electronic Governance systems with encouraging results (Estevez & Janowski, 2013). Today United Nations have enlisted Electronic Governance as the key indicator for sustainable development. In India a number of initiatives were taken by the successive governments with an objective of improving the living standard of citizens. Public welfare schemes, rural development schemes and welfare programs have resulted in achieving public policy objectives to the significant extent in the country. However, growing population and limited resources posed serious challenges in terms of timeliness, transparency and deployment of the welfare programs. Inclusion of Electronic Governance for deployment and execution of welfare programs was felt as necessity. The early initiatives in this direction started to appear in the early nineties, however lack of proper infrastructure, lack of accessibility and other multiple reasons hindered in tapping the potential of Electronic Governance during early deployments.

India's quest towards the Information Technology revolution started in 1970 with the establishment of Department of Electronics (Bhatnagar, n.d.). It was later in 1977 that National Informatics Centre was established which today is responsible for deployment and execution of almost all the Electronic Governance projects across the country. In order to address the connectivity deficit for inter-governmental communication and information interchange, a satellite based connectivity platform NICNET was launched in 1987. This was followed by the establishment of District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DICNIC) with an objective to computerise all the districts of the country. India in May 2006 approved a National Electronic Governance Plan with an objective to "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality and ensure efficiency, transparency, and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man" (*About NeGP*, 2013). The plan consists of twenty seven mission mode projects and eight components (*National E-Governance Plan | Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India*, n.d.). The plan was approved on May 18, 2005 with a capital outlay of 25000 crore Indian National Rupees with the objective creating a robust, effective yet efficient public service delivery mechanism.

National Informatics Centre along with Ministry of Rural Development developed a web compatible management information system i.e. NREGASoft to address the planning & monitoring needs of MGNREGA. The robust design of NREGASoft was an outcome of long expertise gained by the National Informatics Centre due to its long association & experience of automating rural development processes and schemes at various levels. The first version of NREGASoft was launched along with the launch of the scheme. NREGASoft is a local language enabled work flow based e-Governance system and is available in offline as well as online mode to capture all the activities under NREGA at Centre/State/District/Block and Panchayat level. NREGASoft has been deployed at http://www.nrega.nic.in. Each stakeholder can access relevant information through the portal. Highly customized interface is provided to each stakeholders of NREGA, for example an illiterate worker is provided with sound based, icon based, touch screen kiosk model to enter and access information on the portal to enforce the right based framework of law, the State, Districts and Gram panchayats have local language interface while the Ministry works in English language. NREGASoft facilitates e- Governance by enabling a common man using the information technology as a facilitator. It provides information to citizen in compliance with the right to information Act (RTI Act) and makes available all the documents like Muster Rolls, registration application register, job card/employment register/muster roll issue register, muster roll receipt register which are otherwise inaccessible to public. In order to make NREGASoft easy to understand, the information system has been developed into separate modules in synchronous with the flow of the scheme process. The modules vary from worker management module to grievance redressal mechanism module.

During the current year (2018) the scheme has an enrolment of 113 million active workers(Fischer & Ali, 2018). Studies have shown that there has been the significant impact of the Mahatma Gandhi national Employment Scheme on various societal development indicators in rural India. The scheme has been able to indirectly uplift the minimum wages in India for the first time (Ranjan, 2015)Increased participation of the women in the scheme has led to the improved educational outcomes of the children (Dhananjaya & Prathibha, 2011).Studies have also proven that Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee scheme has also made a remarkable impact on the expenditure patterns among its beneficiaries and besides that has also improved intake of nutrients and accumulation of assets among the beneficiary households (LIU Zhenmin, 2018).