Impact Assessment of Common Service Centres (Telecenters) on Citizen Services: - Findings from Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract- Under the National E- Governance Plan (NeGP) and with the aim of providing quality services to its citizens, government of India established around one hundred thousand common service centres (CSCs) across India. These Common Service Centres were established with the objective of delivering various types of services to its citizens. The services included government-to-citizen services (G2C), business-to-consumer services (B2C) and other services. Like other states in India, the scheme was extended to the state of Jammu & Kashmir as well and these CSCs were popularly referred as Khidmet Centres in the state. The objective of the present study is to find out whether any significant improvement has occurred in delivery of government-to-citizen services since these Khidmet centres came into existence in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. While making use of the secondary as well as primary data, the study finds that after the establishment of Khidmet Centres, there has been a remarkable improvement in delivery of services to citizen in terms of timeliness, transparency and cost. However the findings also suggest that these Khidmet centres have become more of a business-to-consumer than government-to-citizen delivery points.

Keywords –Common Service Centres, Khidmet Centres, Citizen Services etc

I.   INTRODUCTION

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) describes use of information and communication technologies in the delivery of government-to-citizen (G2C) services as one of the key strategies for sustainable development in the 21st century [1]. With United Nations global spending on e-governance projects reaching $216 million [2], governments throughout the world are investing heavily in e-governance with the aim of making information and services conveniently accessible to citizens. The convenience can come from the disintermediation, which can only be created by developing direct linkages between the government and its citizens. As part of the Europe 2020 strategy, Europe has set the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) as an integral part to achieve sustainable, smart and inclusive growth. The objective of the DAE is to exploit the power of information and communication technology (ICT) for business and public services to the greatest extent possible. It is envisioned that the implementation of the agenda will boost Europe's GDP by 5%, which is certainly significant. Responding to the global happenings and towards the INDIA VISION 2020 goal, on May 18th, 2006, India launched a prestigious USD10 billion national e-governance plan with a vision to "make all public services accessible to the common man in his locality through common service

delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man" [3]. However, India has unique challenges in making e-governance a reality. With just fifteen percent [4] of its population using the Internet, India ranks 218th [5] on the Global E-readiness Index. This reality certainly calls into question how a common person can benefit when the environment is not conducive to e-governance. In order to remedy this shortcoming, the government created a $10 billion initiative to establish over one hundred thousand common service centres (CSCs) across India. These centres are meant to work as frontend delivery points for many G2C and business-to-consumer (B2C) services.

The concept of tele-centres emerged as early as 1994 in the Buenos Aires Action Plan [6]. A tele-centre is meant to be a physical facility, which uses ICT as tool to access services related to social and personal development [7]. Tele-centres have delivered much in developed countries, even in the initial phases of implementation. However, these centres have faced criticism for being ineffective on the ground in the developing countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and South Africa [8] [9] [10]. Scores of studies suggest that factors like low literacy rates, poor connectivity and lack of information and training have led to