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Special Issue of Mahitishakti

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Information Courtesy

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Mahitishakti – The Citizen Services Portal



Mahitishakti awarded CSI-Nihilent E-Governance award 2002

On 9th March, 2003, the prestigious *Nihilent-CSI eGovernance awards for 2002* were given in Hyderabad by the Union Minister for Information Technology, Mrs. Sumitra Mahajan. The Mahiti Shakti Project was awarded the best citizen Centric Project jointly with the Setu project of Maharashtra at a glittering function which was attended by many dignitaries including the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri Chandrababu Naidu.

Ex-Collector of Panchmahals Districts, Smt. Jayanti Ravi, the Additional Collector, Shri B.N. Damor and Director (eGovernance), GIL, Ms. Neeta Shah were at the function to receive the award. The Mahiti Shakti project was started in late 1999 and has helped to empower information access by the rural citizens of the Panchmahals district. The project is implemented through about 80 information centers (Mahiti Shakti kendras), through which citizens can access information on various schemes and forms and also make online submission for various applications.

The project was supported by the state government and actively promoted by Gujarat Informatics Ltd. and the Department of science & Technology is now planning to replicate the project in other districts of the state.



Introduction to Panchmahal district

Located in the eastern part of Gujarat, Panchmahals is a backward district with a significant tribal populace. With eleven talukas, six towns and 1212 villages, the district has its headquarters at Godhra. The total population of the district as per the 2001 census is 20.24 lakhs. Collector of Panchmahals has implemented the Mahitishakti project which makes available online services, useful public information, exhaustive government information on schemes, beneficiaries and downloadable forms in about 80 Mahitishakti Kendras spread over the entire district. This has facilitated citizens of a backward district with significant tribal populous to access information pertaining to different

Citizens transactions. Today for a fee of Rs. 20, an online application for National old age pension scheme, change in ration card details, complains for hand pumps, etc. can be submitted online. Also the decision is taken without the applicants having to go to the government offices at all. This project essentially leveraged the network of existing STD PCO owners and dairy centres without availing subsidy or grants from the government. In fact the government is planning to ramp up the project across the state of Gujarat.

Backdrop

Typically, government has a high degree of interaction with the citizens, particularly in the form of schemes, Yojanas, the distribution and supply of 'forms' for availing various schemes, services and so on. Grievance redressal and monitoring of complaints pertaining to the delivery of services is another important type of C-G (Citizen-Government)

transaction. In addition, right to information is a concept fast developing with tremendous meaning and significance in a democracy like ours.

Many successful initiatives have been undertaken in the area of automating the processes within an office or in a specific office operation. These can be essentially clubbed in the "housekeeping" category. The initiatives of this kind undertaken in the state of Gujarat include :

- Land Records Computerization
- Citizen Charter – The Vadodara Model
- Gujarat Geographic Information System (GGIS) – RESECO
- Gujarat State Wide Area Network (GSWAN)



Application Context

The next significant step is to deliver the benefits of these initiatives at the doorstep of the citizen. In actuality, there is a multitude of schemes and plans prepared by the government for infrastructure development and upliftment of various segments of society, particularly scheduled castes and tribes, women etc. So the basic goals of the project were set as Right of Information, transparency, demystification of the office and above all, applying IT to grass root level to deliver to the most desirous and needy of developmental activities. By creating a conducive, convenient structure for the easy dissemination and spread of this information as also providing online real time transactions such as electronic submission and filling of forms, complaints, applications, etc at the village and taluka level, we

can attain a good level of transparency and responsiveness as also more effective utilization of the schemes by the needy ones. With the basic goals of Transparency and Right to Information, it was proposed to "empanel" STD/PCO (Subscriber Trunk Dialing/Public Call Office) booths having basic computer facilities located in different villages /towns of the district to function as centers for dissemination of information, forms and services (also known as Mahiti Shakti Kendras). Similarly, dairy and cooperative outlets having access to computers have also been empanelled as Mahiti Shakti Kendras (MSK's). An internet portal, providing these services has been developed. Static data is also provided in a CD facilitating quick, easy and low cost access to data and information, given the

bottlenecks of internet connectivity and cost of telephone calls. In this context, the Collectorate of Godhra had held discussions with the Concept Center for Electronic Governance (CCEG) of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A) in October 2000 to develop a 'proof of concept' portal for enabling Citizen to Government (C-G) and Government to Citizen (G-C) transactions using Information Technology as a medium. This proof of concept was based on a PRA exercise carried out by various NGO's in the district. Since then, there have been co-coordinated efforts from the officers of the Collectorate and other district level offices such as the District Panchayat, the Office of the Police Superintendent, the office



of the Divisional Controller of State Transport, Employment Exchange, as also state level organizations like the National Informatics Center (NIC), Remote Sensing and Communications Unit (RESECO) and Gujarat Informatics Limited (GIL). From October 2000, the project has been worked on with active involvement and co-ordination of the district administration, the CCEG, NGOs and the elected representatives as well as the STD/PCO owners and citizens. On October 4th 2001, on successful completion of the "Proof of Concepts" version of the portal developed by the CCEG, IIMA, the project was launched in 14 STD/PCOs of the district.

The New Approach

For sustainability of this project, a trust at the district level has been set up under the

chairpersonship of Collector Panchmahals with the District Superintendent of Police, District Development Officer, District Registrar of co-operative societies and District Treasury Officer as members with the project nodal officer as the member secretary.

To have a sense of involvement and to ensure sustainability, it has been decided to charge an empanelment fee of Rs.8000/- from each Mahiti Shakti Kendra (kiosk). The amount collected from the information outlets has been put into a corpus fund, the interest from which sustains the day to day running of this project. It is proposed to have as many as about 100 kiosks initially.

A detailed contract agreement has been worked out which gives the legal, enabling framework. In return for the one time empanelment fee of Rs.8000/- that the kiosks pay, they are given the following services: -

- 1) Training on use of the facility and familiarization with various forms etc.
- 2) A CD containing the forms, RESECO data and other static data.
- 3) On line and on site help (which

will be chargeable) .

4) Manual & literature in Gujarati on the access and effective utilization of the portal.

The operational part of this project is carried out by:

- The District Information Officer of National Informatics Center for overall monitoring who is also the web master for the web site.
- A data entry operator to put together forms and checklists (essentially a one time operation with updating changes as and when they occur and are reported by the concerned office). The operator also chips in whenever required to word process any data for the portal.
- The line departments have the responsibility of updating the information every quarter.

The data entry operator compiles the newsletter. The Deputy Director Information does the collection and compilation of data for the

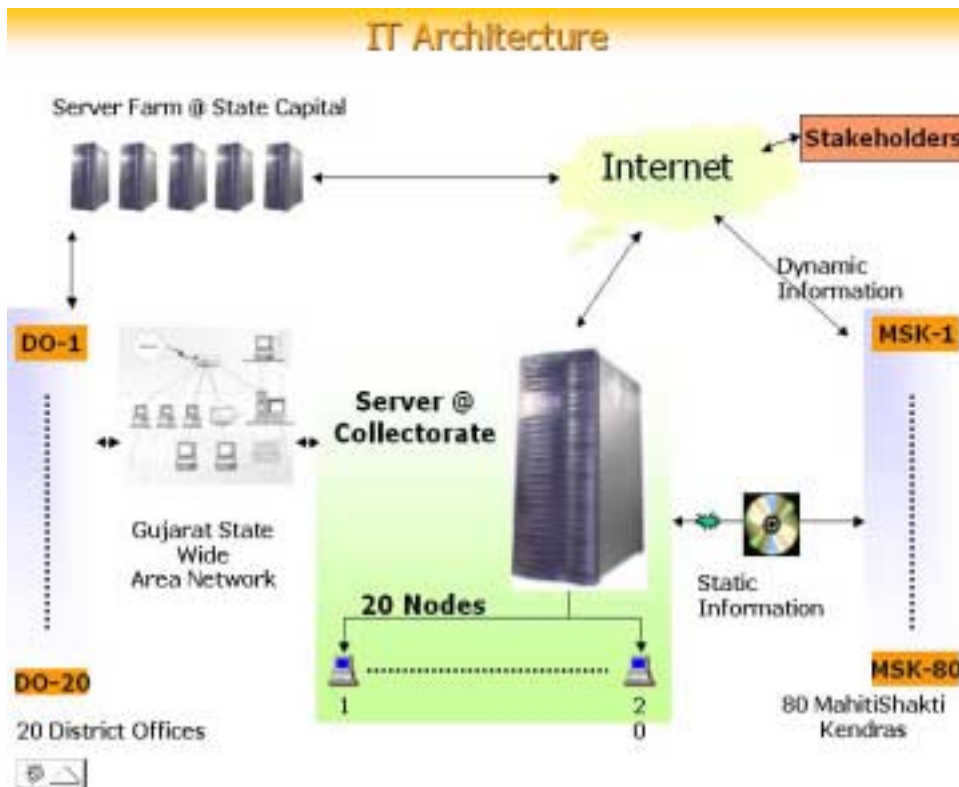
same from local specialist committees, which are already identified and formed with the voluntary help of leading citizens and professionals of Godhra.

Implementation Challenges

The guiding principle in the choice and implementation of technology for Mahitishakti is "Think globally, act locally and respond personally". With little formal training in computers, the Mahiti Shakti Kendra operators are able to easily use the application for the benefit of population at large. They act as an important bridge between the technology and its benefits, by making it easy for citizens irrespective of their age, caste, sex or education level. Some other features that have contributed to

the successful implementation are described below.

- To overcome the problem of unavailability of proper internet access, the entire portal is given in a CD to the Mahitishakti Kendra operator. The changes / enhancements to be made in the site are being implemented using simple online application.
- With the use of web-based applications, within a short period we have been able to implement successfully the task of empowering citizens with access to information easily, speeding up the processing time of application and reducing paperwork to a large extent.
- To encourage and simplify the actual use of the facility, navigation is made simple. With user-friendly GUI features like dropdown menus, the objectives





like finding relevant information easily and reducing chances of errors in use of application are achieved along with their own interests.

- Use of simple audio/video components introducing major officers interacting with citizens, actually provides a face to the otherwise acclaimed "faceless administration".
- The use of passwords for access to online applications prevents the unauthorized use of online applications. It also enables identification and tracking of Mahiti Shakti Kendra making the application. With the available database of departmental offices, the applications are diverted to respective officers, automatically.

Electronic submission also enable senior officers like the collector to monitor the status of various applications, grievances, etc.

Role of Government

The Government of Gujarat through the Revenue Department has played a very pro-active role in providing the necessary permissions from various departments to make this project happen. With the backing and support of the government, it was decided to:

- a) Enable the downloading, printing and selling of forms at a cost not exceeding the prescribed cost.
- b) Placing various data and information useful for citizens in the public domain.
- c) Permit the setting up of a district e-governance trust chaired by the district collector to monitor and review the roll out and proper sustainable implementation of the project.
- d) Collect an empanelment fee from the Mahiti Shakti Kendras (PCOs) to cover the operational costs

for maintaining and updating the portal on a sustainable basis.

- e) Most importantly, permit the online submission and subsequent processing of forms (currently, in phase-I for the National Old Age Pension Scheme(NOAPS) and Ration Card Application) through the Mahiti Shakti Kendras.



Benefits and Salient features

a) By carrying out simple process re-engineering after getting necessary permissions from government, it has been possible to reduce paper work using online applications in this project. For e.g. in the National old Age Pension Scheme, the applicant no longer has to append the proof of age, income and residence while submitting his form. He signs a declaration to this effect and the verification is done by the Talati and circle officer subsequently. Similarly, using the online grievance redressal system, he can (without any paperwork) submit his grievance and get it redressed. This is available for grievances pertaining to over 17 departments.

b) Using simple Internet access, the Mahitishakti website is available round the clock on a 24x7 basis and facilitates online filing of complaints, forms, applications, etc. It is also available from early morning to late in the night - well beyond

Government office hours - where in filing of complaints and applications such as ration card as also reply to queries on crop advise etc. can be had much beyond and before office hours.

c) Currently, for availing of these (NOAPS, ration card), the applicant has to collect the form from the concerned office (a trip which costs not less than Rs. 25 in any case), fill it with enclosures (getting some of these certificates would again entail time and money) and go back to the office and submit it (again entailing cost of travel and time). Similarly since a person is interacting physically to an office, he/she has to do it during office hours, which also means a loss of wages for the applicant for the days spent on this (considering he/she is a labourer - usually the case in Panchmahals/beneficiaries of various social and economic development schemes).

d) With the use of MSK's there is an easy access to various information. This includes information on schemes, projects for citizens as well as getting knowledge about actions taken by various departments for the benefit of citizens. It also demystifies office as MSK's serve as an extension of Government offices with better service orientation.

e) Self -sustainability is an inherent feature of the project without a major additional burden on Government.

The project has been implemented with nearly 100% Local Language interface using appropriate Internet technology. Along with the Mahiti Shakti Kendras, touch screen kiosks are placed at appropriate locations for easy access by citizens.



Objectives

The major objectives of Mahitishakti are:

- Electronic/Online form submission, transactions and information exchange, transactions (e.g. Citizen - Government)
- Immediate access to information on schemes, subsidies etc.
- Online Grievance Redressal
- Continuous Monitoring & transparent Government machinery
- Enhanced & effective citizen-to-Government interaction
- Dissemination of useful citizen centric information, transaction and services

Contents of Mahitishakti

Primarily, the plan envisions a portal providing a single window to all relevant information & services.

I. In respect of transactions of citizens with government as many as 200 forms have been made available the forms along with checklist giving details of documents to be attached with the form at the time of submission. For the district level offices which have declared the citizen's charter, all the forms and checklists have been made available as a print-out at a prescribed fee. Details of the office to which each of these application forms are to be submitted are also indicated along with the time prescribed for the disposal of the application.

II. Information pertaining to ongoing schemes like those under the DRDA (District Rural Development Agency) and DPB (District Planning Board), TASP (Tribal Area Sub Plan) as also activities like scarcity etc. on parameters pertaining to each

of these giving details like the name of the scheme, names of beneficiaries sanctioned in the last financial year, details of work undertaken, name of agency implementing the scheme and current status etc. have also been made available.

III. The Gujarat Geographic Information System (GGIS) developed by RESECO giving details of the resource availability in terms of 95 parameters of every village of the district is available on a query-based system.

IV. Starting of electronic newsletter in the portal (Mahiti Mahisagar) featuring medical help, Legal help, Science corner, Children's corner etc.

V. "Lok-Upyogi Mahiti" is a very important feature which provides useful information for citizens based on the experience, case studies and documentation of NGOs and other Agencies.



- A) Material on Irrigation from Development Support Center, an NGO specialising in that field.
- B) Material on Legal Literacy carefully prepared by the State Legal Aid Authority.
- C) Material in the local tribal dialect prepared by the BHASHA Sansthan on various features of the IPC, CrPC etc.
- D) List of over 1000 tested blood donors with details of their group , addresses and telephone numbers prepared by the initiative of LARA Foundation, Godhra.
- E) Useful information on over 30 specific crops grown in Panchmahals giving details of the seeds, fertilizers, insecticides , pesticides and organic manure etc. carefully and exclusively prepared for the portal by the GSFC (Gujarat State Fertilizer Corporation) Foundation.
- F) The Grievance Redressal Forum provides a forum for citizens to voice their specific complaints.

VI. Electronic form submission for applications such as NOAPS (National Old Age Pension Scheme) and the Ration card application. The applicant fills the form at the kiosk. The processing is carried out by the staff and the final reply is sent to the applicant by e-mail and post.

VII. We are currently working towards the use of these centers for the payment of utilities (GEB bills) which would be tried out on a pilot basis shortly.

VIII. Opinion Poll on important issues pertaining to the public

IX. Chat with the Ministers and Senior officers of the district.

X. Access to other important sites.

XI. Access to the electoral roll, beneficiaries and BPL (Below Poverty Line)List.

In addition to all the features mentioned above, the citizens will also have access to various web- sites including the GR book application of GIL.

Some Screenshots of the Portal



The Home Page



Forms of different offices



Your Opinion



Another View of the Portal

Case Study Of a National Old Age Pension Scheme Beneficiary



Bhatliben Surambhai Nayak, 65, of Gadukpur village filed an application for the old-age pension of Rs 275 on December 18, at the prodding of a fellow villager who was employed at the district collectorate. It was sanctioned on December 26. To popularise the facility, Deputy Mamlatdar Mitesh Parekh and a team of revenue officials drove 20 km to Gadukpur three weeks later and announced the sanction.

The tribals of Gadukpur could not believe Bhatliben's luck. "The poor tribals are wary of even bumping into a government employee in the market place, let alone

queuing up outside a government office," says Ibrahim Pathan, sarpanch of Gadukpur. Even today the tribals hardly ever visit the district headquarters at Godhra: Girish Joshi, the proprietor of an info-kiosk at Godhra, processes and submits their applications for ration cards and old-age pensions. "I do it online," he says. "It's only in case of any queries that I meet the officers."

Feedback of Village Head



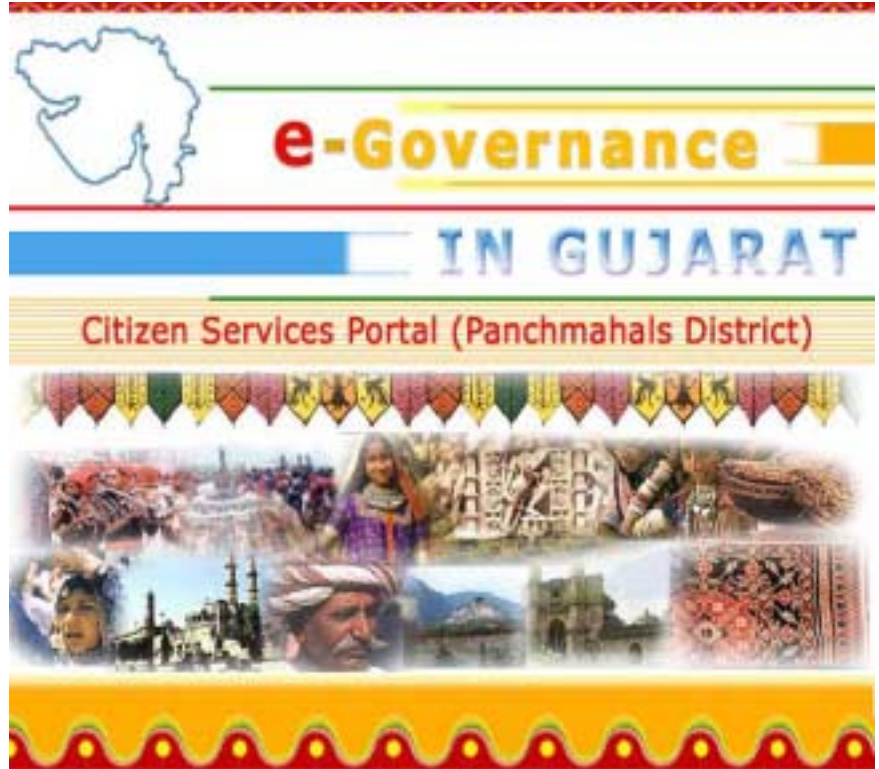
Irfan Pathan, Sarpanch,
Gudakpur

The e-governance concept has enthused the local people. In Gadukpur, as Bhatliben received her pension sanction order, each of the 320 families had a representative in

attendance. But the villagers also want to know why seven of the 13 application forms were rejected. "People expect more information now," says Pathan. He feels the district officials should ensure greater involvement of talathis, sarpanches and gram sevaks in the e-governance project. This will help popularise it among the masses. "So far whatever development is taking place is restricted to the conference rooms of the district collectorate," he says.



This project can really go a long way in providing proper information with easy accessibility in respect of various schemes and programs introduced by the government from time to time for empowering the poorest people of the district leading to their balanced growth and development. To conclude, in line with the committed IT vision of the State Government, this project would greatly enhance the speedy fulfillment of these objectives of Citizen Empowerment and Right to information.



Web Corner

Infocity

www.theinfocity.net

Citizen Convenience Centre

www.egovamc.com

Gujarat Vidhansabha

www.gujaratassembly.gov.in

Please look out for this section for URLs of Government websites

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