

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

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Available online at: www.ijcseonline.org

Accepted: 15/Jun/2018, Published: 30/Jun/2018

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

the failure of many projects in developing countries. Approved in 2006, the CSC scheme had a project outlay of 57420 million rupees in a period of four years (16490 from the government and 40930 from private entities). The government share will be a joint contribution of central and state governments [11].

Common service centres were rolled out in India as public-private partnership establishments with a three-tier structure comprised of the following three tier structure.

- I) VLE :- A village-level entrepreneur who is properly trained and selected to run a common service centre which would be established in the cluster of 5-6 villages
- II) SCA:- A service centre agency responsible for overall management of VLEs in a particular state
- III) SDA:- The State Development Agency is responsible for the overall functioning of the scheme and supervises SCAs

The primary objective of setting up common service centres is to offer services to citizens at their doorsteps. The services can broadly be categorized into Government to citizen, Business to consumer and other services. The services as envisioned in the original policy document to be provided to people through the medium of CSC are as under

- I) Government-to-citizen services (G2C)
 - a) Ration card registration
 - b) Nationality certificate
 - c) Caste certificate
 - d) Annual income certificate
 - e) Death/birth certificate
 - f) Land/property records
 - g) Passport services
 - h) UID (Aadhar)
 - i) Online RTI
- II) Business-to-consumer services (B2C)
 - a) Payment of bills (electricity, telephone, mobile, Internet)
 - b) Booking railway and airline tickets
 - c) E-commerce services
 - d) Long-distance video calls
 - e) Opening of bank accounts
 - f) DTP, Internet Browsing
- III) Other Services
 - a) Financial inclusion
 - b) Online education and course content
 - c) Agricultural services

Figures reveal that more than 133,000 common services centres have been rolled out [12] with an average of more than 46,000 transactions per day [13]. This statistic indicates that India has more working tele-centres than the rest of the world. Studies have shown that the primary difficulties faced by common service centres are connectivity issues and lack of G2C services. Lack of literacy and appropriate training among VLEs has also appeared as a major glitch in the functioning of common service centres.

It has also been observed that some states in India have been proactive and supportive of the scheme while in some cases the scheme is barely effective on ground due to lack of support from the local governments. In certain instances the SCA has made innovations in the scheme that have resulted in an overwhelming response from target users. Kerala and Gujarat have emerged as the states where the scheme has served its intended purpose to a larger extent [14].

Branded as Khidmet centres in Jammu and Kashmir, out of 1,109 planned centres, around 977 have been rolled out [12]. In February 2009, Jammu and Kashmir Bank was designated as the service centre agency (SCA) for the scheme in the state. This designation was made taking into consideration the bank's strong footprint in the state. March 2015 recorded a total of 7,170 transactions completed through Khidmet centres.

Jammu and Kashmir is a state, which has been enlisted as a "least achiever" in the National Council of Applied Economic Research's (NCAER) report on e-readiness. With a population of over ten million, Jammu and Kashmir has twenty-two districts. The state has peculiar characteristics, which make e-governance necessary. The capital cities changing continuously, making it difficult for citizens to easily maintain linkages with some government processes. The last decade has shown certain initiatives by the state government to roll out e-governance services; however, the pace is slow. Furthermore, maintenance issues in Khidmet centres in the valley have been challenging in winters because of hostile weather conditions. These Khidmet centres in Jammu and Kashmir lack credibility due to the lack of G2C services. The root cause of the problem lies with the fact that most state services have not been reengineered to be e-governance driven at the backend. This situation has resulted in a condition wherein the Khidmet centres have become B2C more so than G2C delivery centres.

The paper is divided into 5 sections. Section 1 gives a brief introduction of the concept and its evolution through various international, national, regional and local bodies. Section 2 outlines the various objectives of the study while as section 3 deals with the adopted methodology for the

study including the methods for data collection and interpretation. Section 4 gives a detailed account of the findings while as section 5 focusses on opportunities and challenges. Section 6 concludes the research work with future directions.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of the current study is to examine whether any impact has been made on citizen services since the inception of common service centres in Jammu and Kashmir. The study also evaluates the challenges and opportunities of the scheme in the states. These goals are achieved by answering the following research questions:

- i) Has any improvement occurred in citizen services since the inception of common service centres in Jammu and Kashmir?
- ii) What are the challenges and opportunities of the scheme with respect to its implementation and execution in Jammu and Kashmir?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The impact of common services centres on citizen services was measured various services like Electricity bill payment, Passport application, Bank account opening, payment/recharge of cellular phone bills and electoral services. This was accomplished by measuring the impact on the basis of pre and post CSC intervention in terms of following indicators which include a) Timeliness, Cost, Transparency and Quality of service (QoS)

Data from two hundred stratified random samples was collected through schedules from visitors of 100 common service centers from both Jammu and Kashmir. Figures reveal that the respondents belonged to different

Table 1:- Table showing the results obtained for measuring the impact on the basis of pre and post CSC intervention for various services.

a) Payment of Electricity Bills

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Before CSC</i>	<i>After CSC</i>	<i>Change</i>
Number of trips made for the service	1.4	2.7	1.3
Average travel cost per one trip	20	5.6	-14.4
Waiting time per trip	33	5.4	-27.6
Other costs involved in availing service	10	0	-10
Total time taken to avail service	1	3	2
QoS measured on five-point scale	2	4	2

b) Passport Issuance

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Before CSC</i>	<i>After CSC</i>	<i>Change</i>
Number of trips made for the service	5.3	3	-2.3
Average travel cost per one trip	87	31.7	-55.3
Waiting time per trip	63	44.5	-18.5

classes in terms of literacy, age and income. The impact on each of these services was measured on the basis of the following responses provided by respondents:

- i) Number of trips made for the service
- ii) Average travel cost per one trip
- iii) Waiting time per one trip
- iv) Other costs involved in availing service
- v) Total time taken to avail service
- vi) Quality of service measured on five-point scale

The study was further extended by comparing the services offered in Jammu and Kashmir on the ground level with the services as envisioned in the original policy document. This comparison helped in gaining an idea of how successfully the scheme has met its objectives.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

It is evident that the services offered through Khidmet centres in Jammu and Kashmir are largely Business to consumer (B2C) oriented. Services pertaining to the central government are being delivered through their respective national portals and the state services are yet to be re-engineered so that they can be delivered through electronic platform. In such instances Khidmet centres are functioning as mere browsing centres with almost no central government services offered exclusively through them.

After measuring the impact on the basis of pre and post Common service centre (CSC) intervention, figures clearly indicate a reasonable effect on the services facilitated through common service centres. Following table depict the results calculated after analysis of data.

Other costs involved in availing service	209	135	-74
Total time taken to avail service	5.3	4.5	-0.8
QoS measured on five-point scale	3	5	2

c) Opening of Bank Account

Indicator	Before CSC	After CSC	Change
Number of trips made for the service	4	2	-2
Average travel cost per one trip	27	5.7	-21.3
Waiting time per trip	43	12.3	-30.7
Other costs involved in availing service	46.7	23	-23.7
Total time taken to avail service	3	3	0
QoS measured on five-point scale	2	4	2

d) Payment of Mobile Bills/Recharge

Indicator	Before CSC	After CSC	Change
Number of trips made for the service	1	1	0
Average travel cost per one trip	6	3.2	-2.8
Waiting time per trip	23	7.2	-15.8
Other costs involved in availing service	5	0	-5
Total time taken to avail service	30	12.5	-17.5
QoS measured on five-point scale	2	3.5	1.5

e) Electoral Services

Indicator	Before CSC	After CSC	Change
Number of trips made for the service.	5	4.5	-0.5
Average travel cost per one trip	17	9	-8
Waiting time per trip	23	13.6	-9.4
Other costs involved in availing service	38	26	-12
Total time taken to avail service.	7	5.7	-1.3
QoS measured on five-point scale	2	4	2

Table 2: Services Offered in Jammu and Kashmir Compared to Scheme Envisioned in Original Document

Type of Service	Service to be Offered as Envisioned	Offered in Jammu and Kashmir
G2C (Government-to-Citizen Services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ration card registration • Nationality certificate • Caste certificate • Annual income certificate • Death/birth certificate • Land/property records • Passport services • UID (Aadhar) • Online RTI • Electoral services 	No No No No No No Yes No Few cases only Partial

<i>B2C (Business-to-Consumer Services)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment of bills (electricity, telephone, mobile, Internet) • Booking railway and airline tickets • E-commerce services • Long-distance video calls • Opening of bank accounts • DTP, printing, Internet browsing 	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes
<i>Other Services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial inclusion • Online education and course content • Agricultural services 	Yes Yes No

V. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

VI.

- i) The greatest opportunity of Khidmet centres in Jammu and Kashmir is that most of the potential in terms of G2C services are yet to be accessed. If provided, Khidmet centres will emerge as the backbone of e-governance services in the state.
- ii) The increasing tele-density in the state and the policy of non-reservation of some G2C services for common service centres may result in customer base reductions.
- iii) The Jammu and Kashmir government will require an exhaustive reengineering of most of the government processes to make them e-governance feasible.
- iv) Since Kashmir Valley is known for its indigenous products ranging from horticulture to Kashmir arts, a great opportunity for common service centres to offer web-hosting services for small- to large-scale companies in the state to sell their products online and reach out to customers directly.
- v) The hijacking of common service centres by B2C services due to absence of G2C services must be prevented.
- vi) Recent years have revealed that the mechanisms for the allocation of funds is not effective, as the scheme has suffered from delayed funding mechanisms.
- vii) Common service centres in Kashmir Valley in particular are facing connectivity issues, especially during winter. A challenge exists with the service centre agency providing affordable connectivity alternatives for common service centres.
- viii) Besides B2C and G2C services, other areas such as online education, share market services and agriculture services remain untapped.
- ix) The low income of village-level entrepreneurs may result in forcing these people to seek alternative sources of income.
- x) If the common service centres become the single-window contact for governance services, it will result

in the considerable progress of the state in terms of improving its position on the National corruption index.

VII. CONCLUSION

There has been a significant impact on the citizen services since intervention of common service centers on the parameters of time, cost and ease of service however the absence of G2C services appears to be the greatest glitch in the usability of common service centres in Jammu and Kashmir. The absence of government-to-citizen services has led to a situation in which Khidmet centres have evolved more as B2C than G2C delivery points. The main cause of the absence of G2C services is that governance services at the backend are not electronically governed and require the exhaustive reengineering of the process.

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