Postal Services in Internet Era: A Study of India Post

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Abstract- In India, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has emerged during the last decade as the most powerful tool of sustainable human development. Today ICT's inherent potential for inclusive growth through empowerment of masses makes it the most sought after need of the Nation. This technology is not the end but is mean to ends like good governance and better quality of service. Recognizing the role of ICTs in lessening the development divide and bringing transparency in Governance, India Post is the unique and most appropriate organization of Central Government for leveraging ICT for empowering Aam Aadmi. This paper gives an overview of steps taken by the India Post towards modernization.

Keywords- India Post, Modernization, Information and Communication Technology etc.

I.   INTRODUCTION

For more than 150 years, the Department of Posts (DoP) has been the backbone of the country's communication and has played a crucial role in the country's socio-economic development. It touches the lives of Indian citizens in many ways: delivering mails, accepting deposits under Small Savings Schemes, providing life insurance cover under Postal Life Insurance (PLI) and Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) and providing retail services like bill collection, sale of forms, etc. The Department of Posts also acts as an agent for Government of India in discharging other services for citizens such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) wage disbursement and old age pension payments. With 1,55,015 Post Offices, the Department of Posts has the most widely distributed postal network in the world.

The IT Modernization Project of Department of Posts was approved by the Government of India in November 2012 as a Mission Mode e-governance Project with an outlay of Rs. 4,909 crore. The Project aims at transforming the Department of Posts into a totally technology driven Department. Trends such as urbanization, increased demand for financial services, increased funding by the government for the weaker sections and the rural sector, have opened up new opportunities for the Department of Posts which, in turn has necessitated development of new processes and supporting technology. The Department of Posts is also faced with twin challenges of increasing competition and continuing advances in communication technology, especially in mobile telephony and the Internet. In order to provide the best-in-class customer service, deliver new services and improve operational efficiencies, the Department of Posts has undertaken an end to end IT Modernization project to equip itself with requisite modern tools and technologies.

The IT Modernization project, intends to achieve the following:
- Wider reach to the Indian populace through more customer interaction channels.
- Better customer service.
- Growth through new lines of business
- IT enablement of business processes and support functions.

II.   OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the project are:
Modernization and computerization of all Post offices in the country including Branch Post offices in rural areas, mail offices and administrative and other offices;
- Development of scalable, integrated and modular software covering all operations of the Department of Posts such as Mail Operations, Postal Banking, Insurance, Finance and HR;
- Establishment of required IT Infrastructure including Data centre, Wide Area Network
- (WAN) based networking of the departmental post offices; and Deployment of Rural Information Communication Technology (Rural ICT) infrastructure in all 1,30,000 Rural Post Offices.
- The Department of Posts has a network of approximately 1.55 Lakhs post offices, of which 1.3 Lakh are rural post offices. The IT Modernization project will rebuild the rural postal infrastructure to create institutional last mile connectivity for service delivery of Post, IT based services including banking & insurance and Govt. schemes like MGNREGS, Social Security etc. This infrastructure will form the platform for the electronic delivery of postal, financial, insurance and Government services to the 80 Crore plus rural population through Post Offices.

III.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mahesh Potadar, et.al (2015) highlights the challenges faced by the Indian Post Office from the private courier, banks and financial institutions companies in delivering services relating to letters, mails and parcels. To study the initiatives taken by postal department in providing services, to the customers in enhancing their IT based technology. E-post has removed these barriers for working of post offices. Collection of feedback from employees and customers is the best way to review their performances.

'Role of Technology for Postal Systems and Challenges for India' by Mr. Sanjaay Mirchandani described ways to manage the postal sector business by using information technology as a key enabler. There are four pillars of strategic change and development for a postal system: empower the customers, employees, and partners through great services and solutions; broaden the use of the post office and transform it into a gateway for value added services; measure operational costs, productivity, and customer value; and improve the productivity of service deliveryand employees. Information technology supports all four of these pillars.

'Future of India Post' written by Bruhaspati Samal put forward the thought that due to vast use
of electronic media, more demanding customers, presence of Organized / Unorganized courier for mail service, Financial Institutions like banks and Insurance companies and above all the challenges of globalization, corporatization and liberalization, post should take the proper steps for his survival. He highlighted many points that taken by the India Post.

a)   **Business Development:** India post introduce several new products and services viz. Speed Post, Express Parcel Post, Business Post, Media Post, Retail Post, Direct Post, Bill Post, Bill Mail Service, Logistic Post, ePost, iMO, ePayment, World Net Express etc. which cater to the need of every citizen.

b) IT Modernization: Project Arrow concept under "Look and Feel Good" concept introduced in April 2008. Initially 45 post offices were computerized. Computer hardware was upgraded in 1847 post offices and 500 post offices were modernized under Project Arrow. During 2009-10, 2920 post offices were computerized, computer hardware was upgraded in 92 post offices and 500 post offices were modernized under Project Arrow. As on 31.03.2010 out of 25,563 departmental post offices, 14,415 post offices including those in the rural areas have been computerized. 1304 post offices have been networked through leased line so far with the national Data Center. Further 5170 post offices have been networked through broad band.

The XIth plan proposal includes computerization and networking of remaining 10841 department post offices and all the 1,29,416 branch offices. Being largest and oldest banking institution operate 240 million saving accounts and the outstanding balance under all eight national saving schemes SB, FD, RD, MIS, SCSS, PPF, NSC and KVP is Rs. 5828329.6 million.

c) **Potential Service Provider:** Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MOSP) has entrusted the job of collecting statistics for ascertaining the Rural Price Index from1183 post offices across the country with effect from October 2009. Railway Ministry and the Department of Post have signed a memorandum of understanding for providing railway ticket booking services at the post offices. Department of Post is discharging the responsibility to disburse the wages to National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) beneficiaries through post office saving bank account.

IV.   COMPUTERIZATION AND NETWORKING OF POST OFFICES

The IT Modernization project covers the entire country including the North Eastern Region. North Eastern Region consists of Assam Circle with headquarter at Guwahati, North East Circle with headquarter at Shillong covering the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura and Sikkim State of West Bengal Circle.

The key components of the project are as under:
1.   Modernization and computerization of all Post Offices in the country; Deployment of Rural Information & Communication Technology (Rural ICT) solution in all the 1,29,379 rural Branch Post Offices in the country by supplying computer hardware, solar charging devices and providing network connectivity to them;
2.   Establishment of IT Infrastructure, viz., Data Centre, Disaster Recovery Centre and Wide Area Network (WAN) based networking of all the departmental Post Offices, mail offices, accounts offices and administrative office;
3.   Development of software applications covering all operations of the Department viz., counter operations, mail processing, online tracking and tracing of the mail article, Banking, Insurance, Finance & Accounts and Human Resources management functions;
4.   Provision of multiple channels of user interaction apart from the conventional Post Office counters. These include web portal, ATMs, call center, employee help desks, SMS gateway, etc.; and
5.   Preparing postal employees and Gramin Dak Sewaks for the changes at their workplace on account of induction of technology and training

Modernization of Post Office and Upgrading the Core Areas

1. Branding – Ensure uniform brand hierarchy as well as consistency in all products and services.
2. Mail delivery – ensure same day delivery of mail received and same day dispatch of mail collected.
3. Technology - Decide on required hardware, software and connectivity to enable PO to provide all IT services including in rural areas.
4. Saving Bank – Reduce transaction time at counters, account transfer/closure and settlement of deceased claim cases.
5. Human Resources - Identify roles and job descriptions for employees and design suitable training packages to enhance operational and soft skills of staff.
6. Remittances – Delivery of money orders on the day of receipt and provision of web enabled remittance services.
7. Infrastructure -Develop standardized and consistent interior and exterior blueprint and ensure uniform implementation.
8. Office Service Level -Improve customer satisfaction along all parameters from appearance to operations.

Benefits

➢ Up gradation of technology and modernization of postal operations would continue to be a thrust
➢ area. The use of appropriate technology for speedy and reliable mail handling would benefit in the following ways.
➢ Faster and more reliable services in postal, logistics, banking, insurance and retail operations
➢ Better visibility of various articles in the mail stream and transparency in financial services such as banking, insurance etc.
➢ Multiple channels of access to the customers through post office counters, kiosks, internet, mobiles, ATMs.
➢ Better financial inclusion for the common man in the rural and semi-urban locations through mobile remittances, mobile banking, mobile insurance etc.
➢ Effective and transparent delivery of the social security and employment guarantee schemes by the Government.
➢ Availability of a national asset of IT network connecting more than 1,55,000 post offices for use by both Central and State Governments.
➢ Increasing business in rural postal network would reduce the dependency for financial support on the government.
➢ Reduction of manual and paper based processing would lead to a greener post office, improving the environmental sustainability of the postal system.
➢ Increased revenue through higher market shares in the existing products and services.

➢ Potential reduction in the transaction cost and availability of manpower for redeployment in marketing and other revenue generating capabilities.
➢ Enhanced employee satisfaction.

IT Project Services

The project aims at creating a conducive and friendly work environment both for the staff and the customers visiting the Post Offices, providing all IT enabled services through secure connectivity, improving the service quality levels in the core business areas

Government to Citizen (G2C)

a. Visibility into mail operations by effective tracking mechanism at the article level.
b. Bringing access to Financial / banking services to the doorsteps of the customers through multiple delivery channels like internet, mobile banking, ATMs, telephone.
c. Substantial improvement in the quality of service being offered to the customers especially rural customers
d. Fully integrated life insurance platform to enable efficient and cost effective service to existing and new customers including uninsured rural population.
e. Transparency in disbursements for social security schemes such as MGNREGS.
f. Efficient and timely retail post offices services.

Government to Business (G2B)

➢ End-to-end supply chain services through a technology-driven logistics network that provides transportation, warehousing, distribution and e-Logistics.
➢ E-logistics services and e-commerce.
➢ Online information related to the products and services.
➢ Capability to do web based transactions for mails, banking and insurance services.
➢ Faster money remittances and funds transfers.
➢ Online sale of third party products / services.
➢ Advertising avenues for advertisers.

Government to Government (G2G)

➢ Operational planning for all the DoP facilities through planning tools.
➢ One stop solution for financial inclusion & microfinance initiatives of government.

Government to employees (G2E)

➢ Employee productivity through better manpower planning and timely analysis of workload.
➢ Efficiencies in Inventory management and Procurement.
➢ Employee development through improvement in training administration and management.

➢ Improved & timely administrative services with centralized and accurate employee information.

V.   CONCLUSION

As the strong IT - base enables to offer a range of e-enabled services Post Offices equipped with ICT will not only play crucial role in social and financial inclusion of rural masses throughout the country but also in National Integration and empowerment of Aam Aadmi. Progressive use of computers in post offices and their connected network on a single integrated platform presents an opportunity for India Post to take state services to village level and also to retail products and services of other service providers. Most of the technology led transformation plans fail because they lack focus on processes, people and resources. India Post has adopted a holistic approach to technology led transformation understanding the importance of reengineering process, skill development and enhancement and resource planning.

VI.   REFERENCES

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