

## **Study of ICT Related Problems in Panchayat Raj System in Dhule District**

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**Abstract:** *Panchayat Raj System is backbone of rural India. India has its own well defined National e-Governance Plan. Various initiatives are taken by government for use of Information and Communication Technology ( ICT ) in Panchayat Raj System at National and State level. At present Computer systems are used at all three levels of Panchayat Raj System, still there are certain problems faced by staff in effective use of ICT for smooth functioning. Various types of problems are faced by staff using ICT like training of ICT for staff, lacking availability of uninterrupted power supply, technical support in case of software, hardware and networking related problem, Internet connectivity, speed of Internet, poor configuration of Computer systems, knowledge of Computer and Internet etc. The study is conducted for Panchayat Raj System of Dhule District in Maharashtra.*

**Keywords:** ICT, e-Governances, Panchayat Raj System

### **Introduction**

Panchayat Raj System has its separate ministry and considerable ICT implementation is done by ministry for stakeholders of Panchayat Raj System. Panchayat have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history. Gandhiji, the father of the nation, in 1946 had aptly remarked that the Indian Independence must begin at the bottom and every village ought to be a Republic or Panchayat having powers. Gandhiji's dream has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction.

**The 3 Tier Structure of Panchayat Raj is as follows –**

### **Zila Parishad**

This is the uppermost body of the Panchayati Raj System. The members of Zila Parishad are elected directly by the people. However the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons are elected by the elected members indirectly. Elected members of Zila Parishad are determined by the State Government at the rate of one member for every 25000 populations or part thereof subject to a minimum of 10 members. The members of Lok - Sabha, Members of State Legislative Assembly representing a part or whole of the District and the members of council of States where they are registered as voters and chairpersons of Panchayat Samiti of the District will also be the

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members of Zila Parishad. Additional Deputy Commissioner has been designated as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), whereas District Panchayat Officer is the Secretary of Zila Parishad.

### **Panchayat Samiti**

Intermediate body of the three-tier Panchayati Raj in the State is called Panchayat Samiti. This institution is co-terminus with the development blocks. Members of Panchayat Samities are elected directly, whereas the Chair-Persons and Vice-Chairperson are elected indirectly by the elected members. The numbers of elected members of Panchayat Samiti are determined by the Govt. at the rate of one member for every 3500 population or part thereof subject to a minimum of 15 members. There is no separate office of Panchayat Samitis but office of the block development officer functions as the Samiti office. Block Development Officer (BDO) has been designated as Executive Officer-cum-Secretary of the Panchayat Samitis.

### **Gram Panchayat**

Gram Panchayats is Bottom in this System, Generally Gram Panchayat are constituted for a village or group of villages having population ranging from 1000 to 5000. In Scheduled and other far flung areas Gram Panchayats are also constituted for the population of less than 1000. The numbers of members of Gram Panchayat are determined on the basis of population which ranges from 5 to 13 excluding Pradhan. Pradhan and members of Gram Panchayats are elected directly by the voters of the Panchayat area whereas Up-Pradhan is elected amongst the members of Gram Panchayats.

### **Review of Literature**

A book chapter “Panchayats in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century : ICT Enabled Panchayati Raj”<sup>1</sup> states that, by 1990, NICNET had been implemented at a cost of Rs 65 billion connecting district computers to state and central level computers through a satellite communication network. Software application development was done centrally for about 15 standardized applications for each district. It was expected that in these applications databases would be created at the district level from which data could be retrieved for central planning. NIC provided two computer professionals to each district to implement the software. In a separate program called Computerized Rural Information Systems Project (CRISP), the rural development ministry and NIC collaborated to develop software for planning and monitoring of IRDP. In the CRISP program, there were a few elements of decentralization.

National e-Governance Division, DIT,GOI<sup>2</sup> in its draft paper on ‘Mobile Governance Framework’ states that, Governments around the world have long recognized the need and potential of ICTs to make government services available to all the residents. As a result, e-Governance has emerged as a popular phenomenon to deliver government services around the world. However, e-Governance in an implementation sense is restricted primarily to the use of computer based internet access to deliver services. In countries where the penetration of computers and internet is relatively low, such as in India, there is an apprehension that the reach of e-Governance may be limited.

Ramachandran<sup>3</sup> of expert group in report, ‘Planning at the grass root level-An Action Programme for The Eleventh Five Year Plan’ writes that, IT ought to be positioned as a tool that enhances the quality of decision making at the Gram Panchayat level. Several simple processes, such as giving a standard identity number to the family, could help in linking up one database with another, thus adding greater value to it. Ideally speaking, each gram panchayat should be

free to allocate resources in accordance with the assessed needs. However, at this stage of our development, the local planning exercise has to take into account the diversity of sources of funds. The attempts should be to put them to best possible use.

T. R. Raghunandan<sup>4</sup> in article 'Rural Infrastructure, Panchayati Raj, and Governance' states that, Constitutional provisions relating to the establishment, powers, and responsibilities of the panchayats were introduced through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in 1993. Under Article 243B of the constitution there shall be constituted in every state, panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels in accordance with the provisions of Part IX. In states with a population not exceeding twenty lack, panchayats at the intermediate level may not be constituted. Article 243C empowers states to make provisions through law for the composition of panchayats, subject to the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution.

Panchayati Raj Department Government of Orissa<sup>5</sup> in its report states that, The Broad objective of e-Governance is application of Information Technology in the functioning of the Government and aims at simple & morale governance, accountability, responsiveness with enhanced transparency. Using computer and information sharing for achieving transparency in Rural Development Program, instructions have been issued under the signature of the Chief Secretary vide this department letter no.8917 dated 5.11.2003. E-Governance, which makes public services inexpensive, responsive and truly transparent, has been inviting attention from polity, bureaucracy and business alike.

ICTD<sup>6</sup> of UNDP and DIT, GOI in its report preamble writes that, ICTD is launched in 2003, the ICTD Project is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Program; the National Institute for Smart Government; and the Department of Information Technology, Government of India. The ICTD Project's mission is to showcase information and communications technologies as a powerful social enabler: in order to alleviate poverty, improve service delivery; enhance women's participation; and promote transparency and accountability in governance. Under the ICTD Project, multiple pilots have been successfully undertaken in different parts of India.

Government of Maharashtra<sup>7</sup> in Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2007-08 says that, The State Government is developing public Information Technology (IT) parks indifferent areas of the State through City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) and Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation(MIDC). Accordingly, 33 Government/public IT parks and 245 private IT parks are being developed. These IT Parks are expected to generate 11.54 lakh employment opportunities with private investment of Rs. 15,005 crore.

R. K. Maiti<sup>8</sup> in paper 'e-Governance with PPP mode -Common Services Centers', writes about National e-Governance plan in his presentation that, The Plan seeks to lay the foundation and provide the impetus for long-term growth of e-Governance within the country. The plan seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms, set up the core infrastructure and policies and implements a number of Mission Mode Projects at the center, state and integrated service levels to create a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance. E-Governance is a growing initiative leading the move towards electronic and on-line governance.

## Methodology

**The objective of the study is – To understand ICT related problems and its significance faced by staff of Panchayat Raj System in Dhule District.**

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### Data Collection

Primary data is collected from key respondents of Panchayat Raj system namely – Officers and Staff of Panchayat Raj offices at district, taluka and village level. Random sampling method is used. The data is collected with structured questionnaire method.

### Findings

1. Government's initiatives for e - Governance for Panchayat Raj System need improvement.
2. As per officers of Panchayat Raj System - Dhule District is benefited with ICT implementation in Panchayat Raj System.
3. 42.4% staff members say that less than 50% office staff in their office can perform Computer / Internet Operations.
4. Quality of computers ( processor, RAM etc.) in panchayat raj system needs improvement.
5. Internet speed needs to be more efficient for staff users of Panchayat Raj System.
6. Alternate Internet availability is rated as poor for staff of panchayat raj system.
7. Alternate availability of electricity ( Generator, Inverter etc.) is also poor.
8. Staff members needs motivation by CEO, BDO for using ICT.
9. High efforts for Computer & Internet Training of staff members is required.
10. ICT Troubleshooting support from Zila Parishad for its offices needs improvement.
11. The rate of Computer literacy of office staff is average.
12. Internet literacy of office staff is average.
13. IT Act Awareness among staff is poor.
14. ICT is useful in effectively and efficiently managing Development Functions of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samities under Panchayat Raj System.
15. Staff agree that their District is benefited with ICT implementation in Panchayat Raj System

### Conclusion

1. India having its own e-Governance plan has serious focus on rural adoption of technology.
2. The e-readiness of officers under Panchayat raj system is satisfactory and efforts need to be made for making it excellent. High speed internet, uninterrupted power supply, system breakdown support and continuous training to staff can make the difference.
3. The officers and staff of Panchayat Raj offices as well as citizen users find system effective, saving cost, time and efforts.
4. The proficiency of stakeholders in using applications need to be improved, particularly hands on training for comfortable use of ICT is necessary.

### Recommendations

1. Regular training for Officers and Staff members needs to be arranged for ICT based applications launched by Government under Panchayat Raj System.
2. ICT infrastructure in Panchayat Raj System offices needs to be improved and efforts for high e-readiness is to be taken.
3. Office staff under Panchayat Raj System should be regularly trained for effectively and efficiently using computer and internet.

4. Computers with latest processor and hardware specifications need to be provided in Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samities. Also high speed internet should be provided for seamless access of e-services.
5. Alternate power and Internet facility needs to be provided in Panchayat Raj offices.
6. Officers should keep motivating staff for using ICT.
7. Zilla Parishad should establish efficient ICT Troubleshooting support mechanism for offices under Panchayat Raj System.
8. Government should organize IT Act Awareness camps for stakeholders of Panchayat Raj System.

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