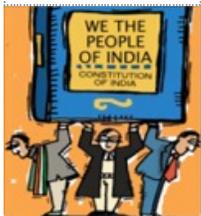


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SAANSAD ADARSH GRAM YOJANA

Why good governance may need more than adoption of villages

A new scheme launched by PM Narendra Modi envisages development through a model in which every MP chooses a village to develop, with people's participation. Vikas Jha looks at the numbers and realities to explore the real needs of rural development at the panchayat level.

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26 January 2015 - Good governance at the grassroots has received a kind of new momentum in India with the announcement of the [Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana](#) (SAGY), or the Member of Parliament Model Village Programme. Under the Yojana, each Member of Parliament (MP) will be responsible for developing the socio-economic and physical infrastructure of three villages by 2019,

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Among others, SAGY includes objectives "to trigger processes which lead to holistic development of identified Gram Panchayats (GPs), to substantially improve the standard and quality of life of all sections of the population, to generate models of local-level development and effective local governance, and to nurture the identified *Adarsh Gramsas* schools of local development for the other Gram Panchayats."

The social components of SAGY emphasise good governance, and SAGY guidelines list a number of related activities. Key among them are "strengthening of local democracy through strong and accountable Gram Panchayats and active Gram Sabhas, e-governance for better service delivery, Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) or Aadhaar cards for all, proactive disclosure of all information, the role of a Gram Panchayat as an information facilitation centre, grievance redressal at the Gram Panchayat level, and social audit of government programmes implemented by the Gram Sabha."

Rural India is now preparing for the implementation of the SAGY in 795 Gram Panchayats (GP) in its first phase (one for each of India's 795 MPs) and the scheme is expected to cover 2,385 GPs by 2019 as each MP adopts three GPs over the period of his/her tenure of five years. These GPs will receive full support from the district administration, state government and central government. The remaining 250,804 GPs, where SAGY is not being implemented, will need adequate devolution of functions, funds and functionaries (commonly referred to as the 3 Fs) to replicate the SAGY in the future.

However, devolution of the 3 Fs to GPs will be difficult to achieve because the majority of state-level political leaders do not want independent units of governance at the panchayat level. They fear that conceding the three Fs will weaken the importance of state-level political leaders. Thus, such devolution is caught in political power struggles between leaders at various levels. Unless the state leadership shows political statesmanship as leaders in the state of Kerala did, the 2.5 lakh GPs will never have enough resources or the 3 Fs support to replicate SAGY in their respective domains.

The larger question of how good governance can be taken to the villagers living in these other 2.5 lakh GPs of India is currently the elephant in the room. The implementation of good governance activities detailed in SAGY guidelines in the 5,564 administrative blocks of India can be the starting point.

For example, in Mewat district, Haryana, one of the poorest pockets of India, line department block offices are understaffed, marked by high level of absenteeism, and remain nonresponsive to

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villagers. With poor infrastructural facilities, they can hardly serve as important nodal offices at the block level.

As a result, villagers queue up before the Deputy Commissioner's office with their grievances, whether it relates to repair of their electricity transformer, non-delivery of items under the Public Distribution System, non-payment for toilets under the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan, or any other lapse in public service which is the responsibility of line departments. This leads to tremendous loss of villagers' time and money, and loss of resources for the Deputy Commissioner too, who spends a good amount of time listening to complaints about non-delivery of services.

In order to facilitate good governance at the grassroots, state governments must seriously think of reforming block level offices. Block level offices should have the necessary state apparatus to create facilities of e-governance for better service delivery, such as information centres, resource planning, and support centres for Gram Panchayats, effective grievance redressal mechanisms, electronic monitoring with cameras and biometric systems for attendance.

All facilities for service delivery, information about government programmes and grievance redressal should be through single windows, so that the system efficiently provides public services instead of leaving villagers at the mercy of absent, unresponsive, and unaccountable departmental staff.

While the block offices will continue to be an important point of interaction with the villagers, another potential way to promote good governance in GPs not covered in the first phase of SAGY is through an information technology-based good governance platform that solves basic service-related complaints, serves as an information provider, proactively discloses public data, and gives spaces for monitoring of and suggestions about the functioning of programmes. These are essentials for providing good governance in all GPs.

The government of Karnataka's multimode [mobile governance platform](#), for example, has the potential to provide a good model for fulfilling these essentials of good governance. Through this initiative, citizens can access 4,500 services, both private and public. To access Mobile One services, citizens can dial 161 or *161# to reach a platform to pay utility bills and property tax, or apply for a driving license, among other government transactions.

The Government of Karnataka has taken Mee Seva, the one-stop e-governance shop initiative of Andhra Pradesh, to a new level by covering a large number of public services. Mee Seva started in November 2011 in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, and presently covers 161 public services implemented through 7,097 common service centres in 23 districts. It has eliminated the need for citizens to visit various government offices for multiple services; they can instead visit common service centers to access services.

Between January 2013 and July 2013, Mee Seva recorded 4.85 crore transactions, thus helping millions of citizens to overcome deliberate delays in government offices and public service delivery.

A [case study](#) involving the initiative shows how Appaiah, a 26-year-old carpenter, had very different experiences obtaining a birth certificate for his two sons – the elder born before the days of Mee Seva and the younger after its launch. While in the first case, it took Appaiah more than 10 days to get this certificate and that too, after paying bribes to the officers, two years later, he was able to obtain the same for his second child in just 15 minutes, thanks to the e-governance initiative.

Sanjay Jaju, the author of the case study, estimates that the annual savings for a citizen can be as high as Rs 3,000 crore, assuming that a person saves Rs 1,000 per transaction, with the average number of transactions per year through Mee Seva being 3 crore.

Such a multimode mobile governance platform offers great hope for rural India by bringing governance at the public's fingertips. Common service centres at the block level or for a cluster of Gram Panchayats would help citizens to access public services easily. Information about these facilities can be spread to rural India through vernacular newspapers, wall paintings, community-based organisations, NGOs, and community radios. The initiative has the potential to bridge the digital divide in India by making services available on mobile apps as well.

It will also be interesting to see how this initiative goes beyond the efficient delivery of public services to the proactive disclosure of public data and a provision of space for citizen participation and monitoring.

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The combination of all these actions can lead to transparency and accountability in governance, and hence for the true realisation of the vision behind SAGY, reforming block level offices and establishing a multimode mobile governance platform in every state should be high priorities on the government's agenda for ensuring good governance at the grassroots.

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- 2. Number for all Members of Parliament (795) obtained [here](#)
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Vikas Jha
26 January 2015

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