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e-Governance- Vision to Implementation Best Practices in e-Governance: Mee Seva

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Best Practices in e-Governance: Mee Seva

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Abstract

“MeeSeva” in Telugu means, ‘At your service’, i.e. service to citizens. It is a good governance initiative that incorporates the vision of National eGov Plan “Public Services Closer to Home” and facilitates single entry portal for entire range of G2C & G2B services.

The objective of MeeSeva is to provide smart, citizen centric, ethical, efficient and effective governance facilitated by technology. The initiative involves universal and non-discriminatory delivery of all government services to Citizens & Businessmen of all strata and improved efficiency, transparency and accountability for the government. The initiative features transformed government-citizen interface at all levels of administration along with a shared governance model.

MeeSeva started with 10 services in November, 2011 and today it offers 192 services to the citizens of Andhra Pradesh [1] through 7000 plus Mee Seva centers. Mee Seva is now an all-encompassing model covering most of the departments and services; thus converging into a value added technology-driven good governance initiative.

Mee Seva has already been adopted as a National model for delivering G2C services. The eDistrict MMP was redesigned, taking Mee Seva inputs, making it become ready for replication pan-India. The DeitY (GoI) has already sanctioned grants to AP to replicate Mee Seva in 5 states and convert Mee Seva into components to be placed in the National eGov app store for wider use.

1. Introduction

Before the era of Mee Seva, Government service delivery systems were manual and opaque. Citizens faced difficulties in accessing Government offices and services because of the tedious office processes and longer time lags in service delivery. Scenes of overcrowded government offices with unfriendly employees combined with chronic absenteeism and inefficiencies were a normal sight. Long queues, resultant delays and rent seeking were common during those days. In addition, the focus in administration was more on following procedures and keeping records than catering to the needs of citizens, thus losing the vision

and treating citizen as subject rather than object of development.

Government records like land records, registration records, birth/death registrations, municipal permissions etc., which were essential aids in getting benefits under various welfare programmes lied archived in unidentifiable sheaths and bundles of papers. This made retrieval a time-consuming and difficult process. The power of IT was primarily under-utilized and most of the departments had ineffective interfaces for service delivery to the citizens. Government employees too were not satisfied as the system induced drudgery and lack of occupational motivation were affecting overall productivity.

Meanwhile, the Information Technology, Electronics and Communication infrastructure in AP was growing at a brisk pace. GoAP had initiated eSeva in 2001 with the intention of providing bill payment services for various Government Departments and Private organizations in urban parts of the State. Success of eSeva has led Government of India at National level to introduce Common Service Centers (CSCs) scheme as a part of NeGP. Though eSeva succeeded in reducing the drudgery of bill-payments, it was still serving like a 'post-office'; accepting applications, sending by post to the concerned office, receiving back and then handing over to the citizens without any integrated service delivery model.

Subsequently CSCs too were established to extend similar benefits to the rural Citizens of the State. But lack of services rolled out and general apathy of the departments made them completely unviable. The infrastructure created under NeGP like State Data Centre, State Wide Area Network was also grossly underutilized.

The process of metamorphosis of eSeva to Mee Seva started with this backdrop. The idea was to make use of the existing infrastructure to deliver services to departments to align with such thinking. The selection of departments depended on the extent of citizen centricity of such departments. The focus of e governance was tweaked to identify the services and set in motion a process of business process reengineering to support such service delivery.

2. The Initial Hiccups

Mee Seva was brought in to bring in true convergence of all the NeGP initiatives in rendering G2C services in a transparent, fast and secure way. However, the journey of Mee Seva was not an easy one. Like any other initiatives, Mee Seva too faced numerous challenges at various stages of its voyage. One of the most challenging tasks Mee Seva had, during its initial days, was to establish itself as a citizen's **one stop e-governance shop**.

ITE&C department, the Nodal agency for implementation, identified the departments which had high public interfaces, like Revenue, Police, Urban Local Bodies, Health, Education, Social welfare, Rural Development etc., and initiated discussions with them. At the same time they also deployed teams to learn the issues and problems faced by the citizens while accessing information/services/benefits from these departments. Studies done by the teams revealed that the large demand and lack of transparency had resulted in wide spread corruption and breeding of large number of unauthorized agents and touts. It also revealed that at many places these unauthorized touts were looting citizens by creating a monopolistic environment.

3. Standardization & ESD Rules

To curb these and to ensure that the requests were processed only through authorized channels, ITE&C decided to standardize the entire delivery channels across the state. Subsequently, all the authorized/recognized delivery channels, including CSCs, APOne centers etc, were converted into Mee Seva centers. These centers, both in rural and urban, followed a uniform look and feel, same process models and delivery mechanisms and also were run by self-employed youth. These youths, besides eking their livelihood, provided a decentralized self-governance backbone to the administrative system. These multiple service delivery points, which were run by youths, redefined the governance and brought in strict adherence to citizen charter time limits.

In addition to these, the state also came up with ESD rules [2]. Government of Andhra Pradesh issued Andhra Pradesh Information Technology Rules (Electronic Service Delivery), 2011 in order to provide legal sanctity to the digitally signed certificates. It was also made mandatory for Departments to migrate to electronic service delivery within a period of three years. This ensured that departments moved to electronic delivery of services with in a period of time.

4. IT Readiness of Departments

Convincing other departments and bringing them under the Mee Seva parasol was another and perhaps the most challenging task the team had to undertake. Inter departmental coordination meetings were arranged regularly with key departments to ensure that they join the bandwagon. When the top level officers concentrated on

convincing the department, the rest of the team worked on identifying the level of IT Readiness of each department.

5. District eGovernance Societies

Another bold step from the state came in the form of District e-Governance Societies. Such societies were formed, registered and empowered to function as nodal agencies for the implementation of Mee Seva. These DeGSs played a vital role in implementing Mee Seva. With the help of DeGSs, the central team did many capacity building activities in every districts and mandals and ensured that the IT awareness levels of department officers were enhanced. In the similar manner, trainings for using digital signatures were also given to the concerned officers.

6. Architecture

Having a robust architecture was of prime importance and hence the entire solution was hosted at a state of art State Data Center. The Web Based System, which was deployed at a central location, ensured that the services were easily accessible to all the stakeholders, anytime and anywhere. The n-tier web-based solution, i.e. Web based application, was developed along with PKI Engine and Payment Processing systems. The project worked on an Integrated Service Delivery Model to provide a single entry point for a wide range of services to the citizens. It also brought in a digital PKI enabled integrated architecture through multiple service delivery points by blending various pre-existing state initiatives with the Mission-mode Projects like State Data Center (SDC), State Wide Area Network (SWAN) and Common Service centers (CSCs).

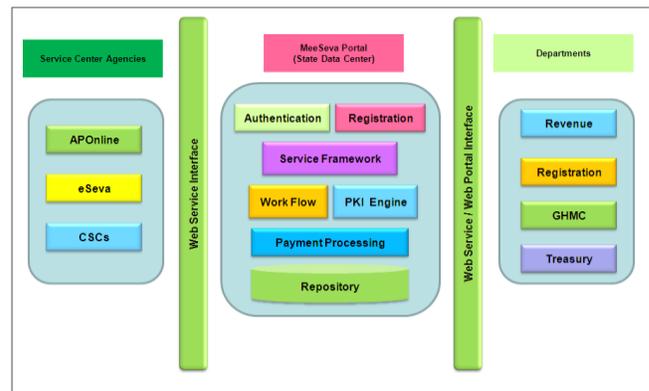


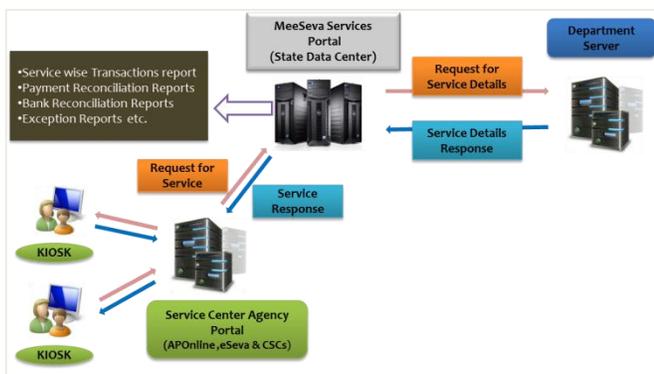
Figure 1: Mee Seva Architecture

Mee Seva adopted the concept of central pooling of records. The records were digitally signed and stored in the database and were rendered using a web-service. Additionally the fact that citizens/officers can verify the authenticity of such digitally signed electronically made such documents tamper proof.

For processing the service requests pertaining to the departments, the concerned department user had to log in

either into the departmental portal or Mee Seva directly with a secure user id, password and digital certificate. The portal would then display all the requests received from the citizens at various centres like APOne/eSeva/CSC etc. The entire process was done through single sign on facility and this allowed seamless operation of various interfaces and systems. Once the department user processed the requests by conducting field verification, he updated the status and remarks accordingly on the Mee Seva portal. Thus the system reduced a lot of manual efforts by consolidating the data and also made the decision-making process an easy task.

The project also brought in strict adherence to the citizen charter time limits and ushered in a whole new paradigm of across the counter services concept through massive porting



and bulk signing of databases.

Figure 2: Logic of Mee Seva

7. Innovative Features

The Project successfully tried out Innovative, Novel and hitherto Unknown practices and thereby unraveled the mysteries and did burst the myths surrounding and hampering the country's e-Govt. space for the last ten years. In the process, Mee Seva reduced the service delivery time and improved the customer service experience dramatically. Some of the 'many firsts' of the project are:

- Categorization of services - Since the first priority was to deliver services across the counter, services were categorized into Cat. A and B. Cat.A services were those which were delivered across the counter within 15 minutes.
- Digital signing of databases including bulk signing - Using the newly developed web-based application, the data ported to the central databases were pre-signed digitally. Bulk signing was adopted to increase the pace of signing manifold. This had never been tried before at this scale and

was also tamper-proof allowing audit trail to be maintained for all transactions.

- Single sign-on - It was implemented so that the departmental user moves seamlessly between departmental and Mee Seva application.
- State Electronic Certificate Repository (SECR) - All the certificates and documents issued by Mee Seva were stored at a virtual location called SECR. SECR was placed in the public domain for verification of the certificates (issued under Mee Seva) using the unique Application number.
- Creation of new databases - It was expected that during the month of June-August, there will be a huge demand from students for certificates for social benefits such as income, residence and caste certificates. This data was initially collected at School/college level for Class X and above students, and then verified and digitally signed by Tahsildars. This signed data was kept in a new database, so as to deliver this service under Category A when the need arises.
- Secured stationery - Secured stationery with 8 security features was used to deliver the certificates, to make duplication difficult. Online Verification, of course was possible by using the SECR.

The success of Mee Seva also put an end to the tyranny of ink signatures. Most of the functionaries ranging from Tehsildars to Police SHOs to municipal commissioners had been using digital signatures to process Mee Seva requests, thus making it the country's largest such system.

8. Accessibility and User Convenience

After the implementation of Mee Seva, 37% of the applicants were able to get their certificates within one visit. Applicants need not visit the Mee Seva Centers multiple times or respective department offices at all for availing the services. All the efforts had been taken to closely monitor the SLAs by the concerned authorities to ensure timely delivery of services to the applicants.

9. Government Process Re-engineering (GPRs)

Government process re-engineering was done to improvise overall efficiency of Government service delivery. The GPRs required were identified for various departments and implemented in various dimensions including technology, human resources, organization procedures etc. WEBLAND for Revenue Department, ISES certificates (for caste, income and nativity), Centralized CARD for Registration Department and Universal Birth & Death Certificate for Municipality & Panchayats and Centralized CDMA system

(Commissioner & Director of Municipal Administration); software applications were created. These eliminated unnecessary sections of traditional departmental processes, incorporating advanced technology for automating the services and redesigning existing workflow to reduce overall efforts.

10. Communication and Dissemination Strategy

ITE&C department utilized the power of communication in effective implementation of Mee Seva project and has innovatively devised an exclusive communication strategy utilizing various media platforms such as: Electronic Media, Television, Print Media, and Display Boards etc. along with established PR techniques to connect with various stakeholders of the projects. Mee Seva communication strategy incorporates various key segments where information is required to be communicated to stakeholders such as: capacity building, awareness, stakeholder motivation & enhanced participation, feedback/grievance management, conflict resolution, developing common interactive forums etc. Some of the many channels Mee Seva uses are Portal, Social Media tools, Television Media, Citizen Charter Boards, Mee Seva Award Functions, Discussion Forums, 1100 (Call Center), Workshops/Trainings, Video Conferencing etc.

11. Technical Sustainability

The entire ownership of the data vests with the Department itself. All the data is located in co-located Departmental servers in a highly secured environment in SDC, where all the Security policies are under implementation. Additional hardware has been provided to some Departments from ITE&C on need-basis. NMS is in place and firewalls are functional.

Class-3 digital signatures were issued to all the Departmental officers and kiosk operators for accessing Mee Seva portal for delivery of services. All the certificates issued are stored at the SECR for future on-line verification through the portal. SECR also serves as a repository, where certificates issued under Category B (involving Departmental work-flow and field level verification) are stored and can be re-issued second time across the Counter (Cat. A).

The Mee Seva Portal is integrated with PKI components such as Form Signer & Form Signer Pi for authenticating the respective individual for accessing the portal as well as for processing the requests through digital signatures. Mee Seva Portal uses standard Web technologies and techniques such as Secure Sockets Layer (SSL), HTTP redirects, cookies, JavaScript, and strong symmetric key encryption to deliver the single sign-in service. The sign-in, sign-out, and registration pages are centrally hosted in the Mee Seva Portal.

12. Economic Sustainability

The project was launched with an initial seed investment of Rupees 9 Crores. But the user fee model deployed allows ploughing back the revenues for maintenance, development and upgrading of services. User charges were fixed considering the profitability for various stake holders involved in the project without unduly burdening the citizen. With 3.2 Crore transactions by now, project has already made more than Rs 101 Crores in user fees and recovered the entire initial investment allowing decent returns for all the stakeholders, which are being shared amongst them. More than 28%/20% (A/B Category) is shared with respective departments (to maintain the databases, necessary infrastructure, capacity building), 26%/14% (A/B Category) with Director, ESD (to maintain Mee Seva Infrastructure/application maintenance), 14%/9% (A/B Category) with Authorized Service Providers (SCA, Monitoring & Infrastructure) while the majority of 32%/57% (A/B Category) is shared with the Mee Seva center which is a cutting edge interface at the local level. This approach made the project self-sustainable.

Table 1: Economic Sustainability

Category	% of Break up	Kiosk	SC A	Infra	Department	Total user charges with Service Tax
A	Amount	8	4	6	7	25
	% Share	32	14	26	28	100
B	Amount	20	3	5	7	35
	% Share	57	9	14	20	100

13. Payment Processing

As all ‘Mee Seva’ transactions are financial transactions which take place in ‘Mee Seva’ service centers, the SCAs are responsible to remit the collections arising out of ‘Mee Seva’ transactions to Government. Hence at the time confirming the receipt of service request in ‘Mee Seva’ system, the details of service request are recorded in the SCA database through SCA specific web service. After receiving a valid response from the web service, further processing related to the service request takes place in the ‘Mee Seva’ system.

14. Electronic Funds Transfer System (eFTS)

Electronic Fund Transfer System (eFTS) enables ‘Mee Seva’ system to automatically transfer statutory charges collected through various ‘Mee Seva’ service centers/ kiosks to respective department accounts. eFTS enables to consolidate all funds collected through various ‘Mee Seva’ centers in one central account in state capital (aka Pooling Account) and transfer funds electronically to the respective department accounts at a regular frequency. SCAs transfer the statutory charges collected for rendering various services into their respective bank accounts in a nodal bank. The nodal bank then transfers the amounts in SCAs’ amounts into ‘Mee Seva’ Pooling Account. Then ‘Mee Seva’ system generates FTO (Fund Transfer Orders) which is sent to the nodal bank. Nodal bank processes all the FTOs and money is transferred to respective department bank accounts. SCAs transfer the money collected from their ‘Mee Seva’ service centers into SCA Pooling Account in the Nodal Bank. Periodically on the advice of Director, Electronic Delivery of Services (EDS) Department, the amount in SCA Pooling Account is transferred to ‘Mee Seva’ Pooling Account in the same Nodal Bank. The amount in the ‘Mee Seva’ Pooling Account is then transferred to the respective Department Accounts in different banks, through FTOs generated by the ‘Mee Seva’ system, again on the advice of Director, EDS. The fund transfer to Department accounts is processed through RBI gateway using RTGS and NEFT systems. ‘Mee Seva’ system also generated all necessary fund transfer statements that are necessary for reconciliation between multiple stakeholders.

15. Replicability and Future Enhancement Plan

Replicability at State level - Both vertical and lateral expansion became very easy and it has also boiled down to a matter of plug and play job. The addition of departments, districts, services, kiosks helped the state achieve scale, scope and learning economies. The expansion of Mee Seva from 1 district/120 centers/10 services/2 departments to 23 districts/7000 centers/192 services/18 departments in just about a year’s time itself is an example of this.

Replicability at National Level: Mee Seva has already been adopted as a National model for delivering G2C services. The eDistrict MMP was redesigned, taking Mee Seva inputs, making it become ready for replication pan-India. The DeitY (GoI) has already sanctioned grants to AP to replicate Mee Seva in 5 states and convert Mee Seva into components to be placed in the National eGov app store for wider use.

16. Capacity Building

ITE&C Department collaborated with IEG, Hyderabad to organize trainings to kiosk operators and department officials on Mee Seva services. Monthly Training calendars/schedules were prepared and communicated to

government offices and kiosk operators, who can attend the training as per the schedule. Department officials and kiosk operators trained till 26th November 2013 by capacity building team of ITE&C department are as below:

Table 2: Capacity Building

Department/Kiosk Operator wise Training Details			
	Nominations	Trained	%
No. of Department Officials	15534	12766	82%
No. of Kiosk operators	60884	43245	71%
Total	76418	56011	73%

17. Feedback Mechanism

The feedback from the beneficiaries is obtained periodically by teams visiting the centers and is used for improving the system. For e.g. in high volume centers, where scanning of documents was resulting in long queues, high-speed scanners were introduced with scanning by a dedicated team in the kiosk. Beneficiary feedback was also being collected from the citizen using the call-center 1100.

The project also bridged the digital divide by allowing uniform access to services to the digitally illiterate population. The daily transactions and their disposal were also exhibited through an LED board outside State Secretariat and District Headquarters for better transparency and beneficiary feedback.

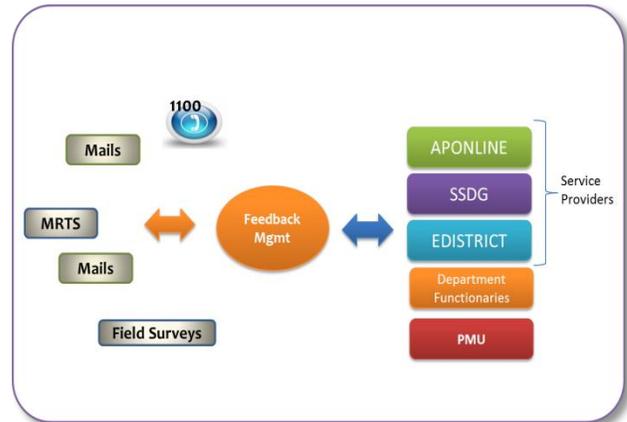


Figure 3: Feedback Mechanism

18. Key Learnings

The achievement of Mee Seva can also be measured in terms of the wider digital inclusion of the entire population of Andhra Pradesh towards development and growth. The key learning is that the Projects like Mee Seva should avoid the deeply rooted technological determinism which assumes that the layering of ICTs in development alone will

automatically solve many pre-existing constraints related to gender, caste, feudalism, privilege and traditional exercises of power, factors which limit the real potential of ICTs in citizen centric service delivery in particular and development in general.

The project also holds a lesson that thorough preparatory work is important to avoid mishaps or breakdowns in service delivery, availability and updating of accurate data, adherence to timelines indicated in Citizen Charters, monitoring the performance & dynamic evaluation from time to time. The project has been a success mainly because of the involvement of multiple stakeholders with specific motivations, all seamlessly fusing towards a common goal. Mee Seva is a simple, home-grown initiative which has evolved every passing day through the efforts of thousands of stakeholders all across the state. The big learning is to involve all the stakeholders' right throughout the project cycle and allow the project to evolve. The push from Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh helped in getting the departmental buy-in and this truly exemplifies the need of political will in such changes.

18.1. Economies of Scale, Scope and Learning:

Mee Seva approach to service delivery needed a complete transformation in capacity which was strategized to be achieved by bringing in Innovation in organizational and Technological Model. A complete realization that the process had to move through all the stages starting from visioning and leading to a sustainable model of service delivery was the cornerstone of the overall strategy.

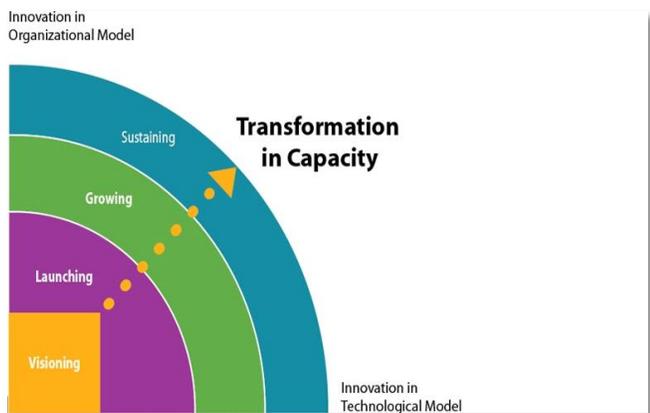


Figure 4: Transformation in Capacity

Technology driven efforts were planned, assigned and implemented for various departments to increase efficiency in service delivery. Department processes were re-engineered considering the feasibility of implementation. Besides these, participation from various stakeholders was ensured for problem solving and decision making processes. Resource utilization was maximized by

incorporating innovative procedures and expanding domain expertise among government departments to increase their overall capacity. Mee Seva approach also made it possible to achieve multiple economies of scale, scope and learning leading to enhanced capacities and ease of expansion.

18.2. Breaking the Department Silos:

Various departments exist to facilitate and simplify the government functions. However, when a citizen approaches different departments for a single request, it complicates his life and effort. Mee Seva successfully addressed this concern. It facilitates the interaction between different departments and thus sparing citizens from the pain of knocking the doors of different departments for a single application/request. For example, Mee Seva facilitated communication and data transfer/file movement between Revenue and Registration department.

19. Conclusion

Mee Seva currently offers more than 190 high impact services. This is expected to go up to 300 in the next 1 month. The project has already crossed 3.2crore transactions and most of the government departments are on board now. The target is to ensure that Mee Seva becomes the entry and exit point for the citizen to approach the government for any service. The project also delivers more than 20 crore transactions every year for other services like Bill Payments, thus making it the country's biggest one stop e-governance shop and a perfect role model for Best Practices in e-Governance.

20. References

[1]<http://www.meeseva.gov.in/APSDCDeptPortal/UseInterface/Services.html>
 [2]<http://www.meeseva.gov.in/APSDCDeptPortal/Downloads/GO%20ESD%20Rules%202011%20MS%2010.pdf>