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E-service delivery removes discretion, ensures accountability and delivers with ease

E-service delivery in various states is changing the notion of traditional public service delivery in India

- G Vamshi Krishna

Earlier, to get a marriage certificate, one had to visit the registrar's office, high pendency of files led to delays in service delivery and lack of citizen's charter didn't do any good either. Bribing the concerned officer was one of the main recourse. Even after being subject to this tortuous process, there was no guarantee that the marriage certificate could be obtained on time. Whereas looking at the current service delivery in Karnataka, wherein if

you were to apply for a marriage certificate, you are guaranteed to get it within 3 days and the entire application procedure can be done from home. In case of any delay, the concerned officer is penalised. This transformation has been possible because of 'Sakala' - an electronic service delivery portal introduced in the state in 2011. Technology in service delivery has led to transparency, reduced corruption and improved accountability.

In today's world, robust public service delivery is co-terminus with good governance and governments are increasingly recognising this. In India, this is evident from the fact that 21 states have implemented the Right to Public Service Delivery Act.

Further, many states are implementing electronic service (e-service) delivery under the e-governance framework. Among the e-service delivery mechanisms being implemented across various states, few are performing

exceptionally well. These include MeeSeva in AP and Telangana, Sakala in Karnataka, Aaple Sarkar in Maharashtra and Saral in Haryana. By comparing the implementation and performance of e-services across these states, this article explains the various advantages of e-service delivery and the challenges associated with it.

Comparison of e-services across the states

I. Better Last mile connectivity

Through e-service delivery, citizens can access services at their doorstep. In the case of MeeSeva in Telangana, its geographical outreach is significant with a total coverage of 4526 centres in the state. Even a digital illiterate who stays in a remote village can go to his/her nearest MeeSeva centre and access online services with the assistance of an operator. Thus it can help address the digital divide and bridge rural-urban divide in accessing electronic service delivery.

Geographical outreach				
	MeeSeva	**Sakala**	**Saral**	**Aaple sarkar**
No. of centres	4526	NA	115	NA
MeeSeva - Telangana; Sakala - Karnataka; Saral - Haryana; Aaple Sarkar - Maharashtra NA - Not Available				

II. Wide range of services

These portals are becoming focal points to deliver a plethora of services across the states. Citizens need not stand in long queues to access services or visit government departments for various applications. Sakala has the maximum coverage of services as compared to other e-service delivery portals, wherein services range from students being able to apply for bus passes to citizens getting police verification certificates online. Thus, citizens can access most of the services at a single point leading to an overall rise in e-transactions between the public and the government. It also adds revenue to the states' exchequer. With successful interactions, satisfaction of the citizens increase and overall public trust in government increases.

Service range				
	Mee Seva	**Sakala**	**Saral**	**Aaple sarkar**
Range of services	322	894	485	392
No of departments	34	73	33	37

III. Time bound delivery of services

In general, it is observed that lack of information often results in poor service delivery to the citizen, because it is at the discretion of the provider. However, across these electronic portals which are bound by citizen's charter, there is time-bound service delivery with penalties for delays. For example, Saral has proper guidelines for each service and mentions the designated officer to authorise service delivery besides penalising for any delay. Progress of each service can be tracked online with SMS alerts. In Karnataka, through Sakala clock, performance of

various commissionerates and departments can be viewed round the clock. This mechanism seeks to ensure transparency and accountability in service delivery. Also, people can demand services, thus changing the perception of the citizen from being a passive beneficiary to active participant.

Service delivery time for each service				
	Mee Seva	Sakala	Saral	Aaple sarkar
Birth certificate	5 days	3-7 days	14 days	5 days
Marriage certificate	-	3 days	3 days	-
- Service is not provided				

IV. Performance appraisal and grievance redressal

However, implementing electronic service delivery alone is not the panacea to better public service delivery. In the case of Saral, under the Right to Service Act, services delivered on time constitute around 80% of the total services delivered. On the other hand, for MeeSeva there is no such data

published on the portal. Therefore it is very difficult to assess its performance. In this regard, there is a need for periodic publication of reports and constant monitoring which will enable the system to function effectively. When it comes to monitoring, Sakala and Saral are doing much better compared to other portals and MeeSeva is performing poorly. Sakala publishes monthly and annual reports with various indicators like services delivered on time, pendency and compensatory amount paid etc. This way, apart from addressing various bottlenecks, poor performing employees and organisations can also be penalised.

There is a grievance redressal mechanism under MeeSeva, but the absence of a Right to Service Delivery Act in Telangana has resulted in poor enforcement of penalty provisions. Therefore, a proper grievance redressal mechanism backed by a statutory service guarantee act (like in Maharashtra, Karnataka and

Haryana) could go a long way in ensuring its effective functioning.

Services delivered under RTS time and publication of reports				
	Mee Seva	**Sakala**	**Saral**	**Aaple Sarkar**
Applications delivered on time(%)	NA	94.5% (Dec 2018)	80%	59%
Periodic reports	NA	Monthly & Annually	Under district leadership board	NA
Ranking of districts and departments based on its performance	NA	Monthly & Annually	Based on Saral score	NA

Challenges in e-service delivery

I. Capacity building and training

To deliver electronic services, capacity building for government officials is of utmost importance as there is a huge digital divide in our country and citizens depend on employees and operators for accessing e-services. Also, frequent technological changes and periodical addition of new services warrant more capacity building. Without proper training mechanisms, operators would not be able to deliver services effectively. This calls for periodic training of the employees and operators. For example, under MeeSeva there is a dedicated portal for training with various methods like 'classroom training' and 'Mana TV training' whereas Sakala and Saral still need to improve in this aspect. Thus, training should become an integral part of service delivery portals so that operators can deliver e-services without any difficulty.

II. Procedural hurdles

Although, several services are provided through the digital platform, procedural hurdles hampering complete digitalisation still exist. For example, some services in MeeSeva require signatures of Village Revenue Officers (VRO) and other officials, before applying online. In farm mechanisation scheme, a Demand

Draft (DD) has to be submitted although the option of online payment would be a superior alternative. Such roadblocks prevent complete digitalisation.

Further in the Sakala scheme, even though there are penalties for delay, enforcement is very weak. According to a news report, for 60 lakh delays, only 2 officers were penalised. These issues need to be addressed to make electronic service delivery more accessible and efficient.

In order to deliver services effectively, governments have to be sensitised towards citizens' needs and aspirations. State governments are adopting different models to deliver based on the local context so as to reach this objective. Every model has its own advantages and disadvantages. Competitive federalism can play a role here as states can learn from each others' best practices and improve their respective e-service delivery models. And improving service delivery is a continuous process. E-service delivery creates a transparent and inclusive mechanism. It has altered the traditional notion of public service delivery where receiving public service was perceived as a privilege. With electronic service delivery mechanisms in place, citizens should feel service delivery is as easy as changing a TV channel.