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## **UNIT 13 E-SEVA: ICT PROJECT IN SELF-HELP IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

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### **13.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of ‘e-seva;’
- describe the services rendered under the e-seva project; and
- examine some of the lessons learnt.

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### **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The Project ‘e-seva’ (e-services) began in the district of West Godavari that falls in the State of Andhra Pradesh. The Project is a tool to bridge the digital divide and has used ICT for providing access to various citizen-to-citizen (C2C) and citizen-to-government (C2G) services to the people living in rural areas. Under this Project, web enabled rural kiosks (centres) have been established in the villages. The unique thing about these centres is:

- they are run and managed by the women self help groups; and
- they have been able to position the rural women as information leaders to help bridge the gender divide.

The Project, thus, provides information leadership to these groups and helps them act as change agents and makes it possible for them to grow in strength and stature with the Project.

These rural kiosks or centres are run on a district portal (<http://www.westgodavari.org>) that allows access to various citizen centric services. The computers in the kiosks are on a district wide network (a hybrid of dial up 802.11 and WiLL) helping kiosks interact with the district server hosting the local portal. To save on the networking cost, the Project has developed a unique synchronisation tool that allows the kiosks to work offline and

allows the databases to be periodically synchronised in minimal time. Besides, the horizontal portal is put on the global World Wide Web and allows vertical integration with the expanding frontiers of universal knowledge and information bank.

The Project uses the opportunities that the ICT offers in empowering the citizens and allows e-enabled education inputs to children to build their creative insights. It offers a wide range of services from the issuance of various certificates to getting information about various programmes and also networking citizens and allowing them the flexibility and convenience of mutually beneficial transactions. It also allows access to hitherto marginalised communities and helps in bridging the existing information gaps. It is, therefore, a step towards digital unite.

It would be meaningful to have a look at the growth of this Project over a period of time. The broad dates are discussed as below.

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## **13.2 EVOLUTION OF E-SEVA PROJECT**

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The stages of evolution of e-seva Project is mentioned as below:

### **June 2002**

A pilot ICT initiative to strengthen the self-help groups started in one block of the district of West Godavari.

### **November 2002**

A comprehensive programme to deliver civic services at rural points in convergence with self-employment schemes envisaged and conceptualised.

### **January 2003**

The Project e-seva in West Godavari district for providing access to various C2C (citizen-to-citizen) and C2G (citizen-to-government) services to the people living in rural areas through web enabled rural kiosks started in 46 places.

### **June 2003**

The Project getting evolved and institutionalised recording over 300000 transactions by this time.

### **September 2003**

Partnership with Azim Premji Foundation forged to initiate model whereby children from the elementary government schools can daily come and learn at the centres through multi media CDs.

### **November 2003**

- 120 more centres added to the Project fold;
- E-enabled education reaches to over 28000 students, transactions cross 600000 in number.

**July 2004**

- Number of students taking e-enabled education increases to 70000;
- Centres getting a bigger look and their own buildings.

**October 2004**

- Number of transactions cross 1.5 million;
- Over 350 million rupees collected against electricity bills.

**December 2004**

The centres and the Primary Health Centres start the tele-medicine to seek expert advice for the poor patients; over 50 patients receiving the benefits every day.

**January 2005**

- Transactions cross 2 million;
- Project conferred the ‘National Award for Exemplary Implementation of E-Governance Initiative,’ 2004 (‘Gold Icon’) under the Innovative Operations and Best Practices – Professional Category, by the Government of India.

**February 2005**

A strategy titled ‘Closing School’ for intensively training graduate unemployed youth in computers, English and communication and other managerial skills for corporate placement launched.

The Project has been developed using local knowledge and local content by local professionals. The development of the portal and operationalisation of the applications and tools has been designed for local situations and network speeds. All the kiosks have, in turn, been handed over to women and youth self-help groups for running on business lines. These individuals have also been trained and have shown remarkable improvement in their possessed skills. The content on the citizen petitions is also in local language. Although Roman alphabets are being used currently, steps are on to switch over to the local language fonts.

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### **13.3 SERVICES OFFERED THROUGH E-SEVA PROJECT**

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A number of services are made available to the people through the e-seva Project. We will discuss them individually.

- **Online Filing of Complaints and Grievances**

The Project allows citizens to file their grievances in these centres. Every grievance is acknowledged and transferred online for bringing in field level action. Concerned departments can easily monitor registered grievances by logging with their user id and passwords specifically assigned to them. The real time summary statistics and performance summary statement of the individual departments can be seen and verified. The citizens can verify and track the status of their grievance disposal online. The Project works on the principle that the citizen need not go himself to the authorities if someone can carry his grievance and in this case if a telephone wire can do that, where is the need for them to act

otherwise? Citizens now need not wait if there is a drinking water problem or a non-functioning fair price shop or a government functionary not doing his duty. All this is only one click away now. Till date, over 12000 different grievances relating to various departments have been received from the citizens and over 11000 of them pertaining to various problems have been redressed.

- **Online Application Registration**

The citizens avail various development and welfare programmes of the government. This may range from getting a loan under self-employment schemes to applying for an old age pension or asking for subsidised agricultural inputs. Instead of moving from offices to offices and getting harsh responses, the citizens just need to come to the kiosk and apply online. They get their acknowledgement number and the rest is taken care of. The module provides for online forwarding, transmission, handling and disposal of such requests, which would, therefore, minimise the disposal time and the concomitant (simultaneous/concurrent) citizen effort to get their cases redressed. The interconnectivity and linkage with the citizen database also helps in weeding out bogus and repeat cases. The old age pensions were computerised and put on the Project Website along with the photographs and the citizen identification number that helped the administration to weed out over 7000 bogus names saving over Rs. 7 million for the State.

- **Issuance of Certificates**

There are many kinds of certificates that the citizens require from the governments, the important among them being the caste and the nativity certificate. The citizen now need not go to the Mandal Revenue Office for these works. He can apply directly at the e-seva centre from where the request is transmitted online; the certificates are prepared and made available to the applicant at the kiosk itself without any inconvenience and without any drudgery of sifting through offices. The philosophy behind this intervention is that citizen always loathes approaching a government department for the fear of getting discourteous treatment and being subjugated to corrupt practices. The Project, therefore, improves upon this interface and expects them to come to a centre run by their own peers, a place that is much more accountable, open, transparent and subject to public scrutiny. Over 350000 certificates have so far been issued to the citizens that tantamount (sufficient) to a saving of over Rs. 30 million to the citizens, an indirect cost that the hapless citizen incurs due to rampant corruption in issuance of such certificates.

- **Issuance of Land Records**

The Seventh Five-year Plan document rightly opined, 'land records form the base for all land reforms and, therefore, regular periodic updating of land records is essential in all states.' The information relating to land plays a very important role. The Project has cast this data into the public domain to support development of a citizen centric land records system. The result is evolution of a transparent and effective land record delivery system that fully addresses the insecurities and concerns of the farmers.

- **Online Auctions and Bidding**

One fundamental reason for the rural-urban divide is the lack of well-developed markets in the rural areas hindering efficient sale and purchase of goods. As a result, most of the decisions made by the farmers and the rural poor are based on insufficient information and are, therefore, sub-optimal and in majority of the cases go against them. The Project

has been trying to fill in these information gaps and allow the rural people to post their products for online auctions at any of the e-seva kendras/centres. This has also opened the possibility for the DWACRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) and self-help groups to market their products directly, without any middlemen, horizontally within the district and vertically outside. There is also a facility for citizens to send in gifts to their near and dear ones.

- **Online Mandi (market) Rates**

Ideally, an average household makes a decision on buying or selling goods and products on the basis of information they collect locally. Every kendra uploads the market rates prevailing in their area, which are then available to everyone. The rates in other markets elsewhere in the State are also available for the citizens to watch the trends and make the right decision after weighing all options.

- **Payment of Dues**

The kendras offers the facility to the citizens to pay their electricity bills, telephone bills or dues of land revenue. The departments, too, gain because of expeditious collections. They save on collection costs and time and are able to monitor performance simultaneously.

The women self-help groups through these e-seva centres have so far collected over 1.4 million bills amounting to Rs.400 million without any difficulty.

- **Easy Access to Information**

The Right to Information act is well served by the E-seva kendras. The kendras through the district portal allows access to all kinds of necessary information to the citizens. Apart from the governmental programmes, one is able to access the databases pertaining to old age pensions, ration cards, multi-purpose household survey records, self-employment schemes, civil works, etc. This induces transparency in the implementation of these programmes and facilitates weeding out ineligible cases to enable corresponding benefits to reach the needy.

- **Matrimonial Services**

An online marriage bureau has been operationalised so that prospective brides/grooms can place their bio-data eliciting suitable offers, making search for life partners easier and cost effective.

- **Tele-medicine**

Videoconference with specialists through the e-seva portal is proving to be of great help to the needy in remote areas where medical expertise may not be available. In such areas it can be possible that instead of the patient travelling all over for medical advice and treatment, the request for the same can travel on wire to a distant medical centre/medical specialist and the right prescription/diagnosis can travel back to the patient wherever he/she may be. This has enabled better medical and health services in the rural areas.

- **Tele-agriculture**

A lot of questions relating to farm practices many times go unanswered, resulting in incorrect input applications. The Portal acts as a round the clock helpline for handling such queries.

- **Forms Download**

There are various forms that every department has for use by the citizens. The kendra acts as a one-stop shop for downloading all such forms. Any changes in them would also get reflected in real time.

- **Citizen Forum**

The kendra through the Portal provides a virtual meeting place for the citizens to discuss issues relating to their district/villages and come out with prospective solutions. The citizens can now freely interact with each other, vent their ideas and jointly work towards social change. This also provides opportunity to conduct opinion polls on important matters, hence, leading to improved and participative decision-making. There is also a feature called I-look for citizens to post news and views.

- **E-education**

The digitised inputs on computer enabled education made available in the e-seva centres has enriched the analytical and thinking abilities of the rural students. This has opened to them the advanced frontiers of knowledge. The Project has tied up with an NGO for the supply of computer enabled CDs and all centre in-charges have been given training. Over 70000 elementary school students are currently taking classes, thrice in a month, at their nearest e-seva kendra. This also underscores the point that the advantages of ICT cannot be limited to a few sections of the society and everybody has an equal right to access the same. Internet being the worlds' biggest library helps the citizens to gain access to a brave new world of information.

- **Common Accounts Keeper for Self-Help Groups**

The kendras help in synergising and pooling the efforts of women self-help groups. Instead of individual groups maintaining their own accounts, the self-help groups are in a position to use the Project computer for maintaining their internal lending records and also enter into online transactions with their banks. Some of the banks are also planning to put the ATM counters in some kendras, which would further facilitate the monetary transactions of these groups.

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## **13.4 E-SEVA: A WAY FORWARD**

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The Project has had a tremendous impact in furthering the gender and digital unite. It has been able to strengthen the women self-help groups and provide services to the citizens in a hassle free manner. With over 160 kiosks in the district, the Project has completed more than 2 million transactions in 2005. An amount of over Rs 4500 million has been collected as electricity bills without any difficulty. All these centres are doing good business and are becoming self-sustainable. They are earning between Rs 10000 to Rs 25000 per month. Many of the centres are also adopting innovative methods of revenue generation. 13000 different grievances have been received from the citizens, out of which over 12000 have been redressed. The Project has led to a citizen centric land records system resulting in evolution of a transparent and effective land record delivery system fully addressing the insecurities of the farmers. The Project has also opened the possibility for the self-help groups to market their products directly, without any middlemen,

to citizens horizontally within the district and vertically outside. The Project portal is gaining grounds and has large number of pages and databases related to the district and the citizens. The data pertaining to over 4 million citizens in varied form is available on the Website. The Website has also become a major dissemination and broadcasting tool for the various welfare programmes. The Project has helped in the creation of a knowledge and information economy thereby bringing in more opportunities and prosperity to the impoverished areas of the district. The Project has also induced transparency in the implementation of the government programmes and has facilitated the benefits to reach down to the poor.

The Project has won the 'Gender ICT Award' at the World Summit on Information Society, Geneva, December 2003. The Project has also won the first prize in the National Awards of the Computer Society of India, 2003. Recently, it has bagged the 'Golden Icon Award,' Government of India for its innovative operations.

The Project recognises that no matter what the rhetoric is, real right to information is possible only if the information is put into the public domain and new technologies provide the most cost-effective solutions in doing that.

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## **13.5 CONCLUSION**

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The Project is now 43 months old and it would be apt if we have a look at the following findings and lessons learnt.

- the Project has proved that by combining the resources and energies of groups and individuals to pursue self-employment, a viable low cost alternative to bring in the benefits of ICT can be created and sustained;
- the initiative has demonstrated that such projects can bring in transparency in the functioning of the administration to a plausible extent and allow an independent domain and space to the citizens to interact with government;
- such a Project can address a wide range of services that can bring additional returns to the operator and provide opportunities to the citizens to become part of the tech savvy world; and
- such a Project requires a strong will at the highest level, political and administrative, so as to overcome the pressures and obstacles of vested interests.

The Project can be replicated by other state governments to render effective public services to the people and create a responsive administration at the rural level.

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## **13.6 ACTIVITY**

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Let us know about ICT projects/experiments of similar nature being implemented in your State or other states and regions.