



# Basic Amenities and Services Management in Rural Areas through 'PARAKH'

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## ABSTRACT

*Madhya Pradesh, a central State in India, has about 55,000 Villages spread over 3,08,252 Sq. Kms, 313 Developmental Blocks and 48 Districts. It has a population of 4,85,65,955, 83% of which resides in Rural Areas. Providing and ensuring the Basic Services/Amenities in the far-flung Rural Areas of the state is a gigantic task before the State Government. With the advent of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the State Government has embarked on the mission of using "ICT for the masses" and evolved the mechanism to improve the delivery of basic services/amenities in the Rural Areas of the State using the ICT instead of directly delivering the services through ICT. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has started a Project "PARAKH" with the objective of improving the delivery of Basic Services/Amenities in all the Rural Areas of the State. This has enabled the Government to take full advantage of Networking Capacity for the purpose of capturing, analysing and monitoring of the Data at all levels and attain the improved efficiency at the Administration level by decreasing the response time. This paper shares the experiences of "PARAKH" which focuses on the delivery of services in the rural areas of the State, keep the reality check on the services and helps in better management of Basic Services & Amenities.*

**Keywords:** Basic Services/Amenities, "ICT for the Masses", Rural

## 1. Introduction

"PARAKH" is the Basic Services/Amenities Management System intended to improve the management of Drinking Water Facility, Electricity, Education, Health, Agriculture, Veterinary Services, Women & Child Development, Distribution of essential commodities through Fair Price Shops, Distribution of Old Age and Social Security Pension and Disposal of Revenue Cases.

Earlier, Rural Citizens were used to inform nearest block level administrative unit of the government about non-functioning/non-availability of services in their village. Due to practical difficulties viz. distance, approach, time and cost of movement from village to block level office, rural citizens were unable to report the situation. Thus, even though, the Government spends most of its annual budget in providing/maintaining the Basic Services and Amenities to its citizens, it was noticed that the public, in general, remain dissatisfied with the administration since large number of the services/amenities remains affected many a times.

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“It is vital for citizens to receive the services they need at the minimum cost to the individuals. A government should be able to handle information quickly and efficiently, be it monitoring project status or reaching out to the people (Ghosh & Lahiri, 2006)”. E-Governance is one of the important applications of Information Technology (IT). “It is the commitment to utilize appropriate technologies to enhance government relationships, both internal and external, in order to advance democratic expression, human dignity and autonomy, support economic development and encourage the fair and efficient delivery of services (Wadhwa & Ali, 2006)”. It improves efficiency and effectiveness in government and its responsiveness and transparency for the public. There should be collective and collaborative effort to provide services to the public. “Development of managerial effectiveness would call for strategic as also operational approaches. The conceptual clarity shall have to be supplemented with the knowledge of ground realities. Binding both the faculties together should be the aim. Having an information system to support the decision making process is the pre-requisite for managerial effectiveness (Vasant, 2003)”.

In 2000, the State devised an 11point programme, which consisted of monitoring of 11 basic services that are provided at the village level. The 11 services that were covered include Drinking Water Facility, Electricity, Education, Health, Agriculture & Veterinary Services besides improving the Functioning of Anganwadis , Distribution of essential commodities through Fair Price Shops , Distribution of Old Age and Social Security Pension and Disposal of Revenue Cases.

Learning from the past experiences and to strengthen the existing monitoring system, the Government of Madhya Pradesh, recognizing the fact that access to minimum level of social infrastructure facilities must be an integral part of a strategy for improving the quality of life of the people and for eradicating poverty, has introduced the Basic Services/Amenities Management System called "PARAKH" in Feb.' 2007 to ensure the efficient functioning of the system for delivering and improving the basic services to its citizens. It is intended to decrease the response time to mitigate the problems faced in the implementation of the programme at the grassroots level.

## **2. Priorities & Purposes**

The main purpose of the project 'PARAKH' is to ensure effective delivery of the services to the common man. Integration of ICT with administrative mechanism has helped in better management of various Amenities/Services provided by the Government Departments in the far-flung rural areas of the State. The system is used by Sub divisional Officers, Collectors, Commissioners, Departmental Secretaries & Chief Secretary for various purposes.

### *Objective*

The main objective of the project “PARAKH” is to ensure efficient delivery of the Basic Services/Amenities offered by various State Government Departments (Table 1).

### *Geographical Spread & Population coverage*

The project is aimed at improving the delivery of Basic Services/Amenities in the Rural Areas. With this in view, it is implemented in all 313 developmental blocks of the State resulting in the benefit to the Rural masses which constitutes about 83% of the State population..

### *Convenience to Citizens*

Before the introduction of “PARAKH” project, rural citizens were used to inform nearest block level administrative unit of the government about non-functioning/non-availability of services in their village. Due to practical difficulties viz. distance, approach, time and cost of movement from village to block level office, rural citizens were unable to report the situation and thus bearing the problems for long period. The proactive mechanism adopted by the State Government under the “PARAKH” project has facilitated a

point of contact on behalf of the government for collecting information from all the Villages on the specified day every month. The module on Registration of Complaints by the Public also facilitates the Rural masses to go to the nearby internet point and instantaneously lodge the Complaint and see its status on the web site.

**Table 1: Objectives of PARAKH**

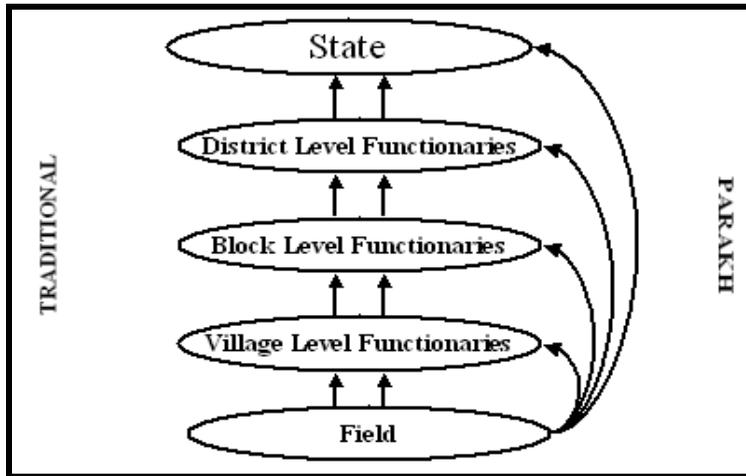
SN	Objective	Concerned Department which is to ensure
1.	Handpumps installed in the Village must be properly functional and must be repaired within a week in the case of fault	Public Health & Engineering
2.	Transformers must be repaired within a week in case of fault	Energy
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure Regular Opening of Schools</li> <li>• Ensure Regular presence of teachers</li> <li>• Ensure Regular distribution of Mid Day Meal (MDM)</li> <li>• Ensure Regular disbursement of Salaries to Gurujis and Shikshakarmis</li> </ul>	School Education
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure Availability of Continuous Health Services in Villages and Immunization once in a month</li> <li>• Ensure adequate Family Planning facilities for the interested families</li> </ul>	Public Health & Family Welfare
5.	Ensure Regular distribution of Essential Commodities through Fair Price Shops	Food & Civil Supplies
6.	Ensure proper functioning of Anganwadis & regular distribution of quality food in these anganwadis	Women & Child Development
7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure regular Disbursement of Scholarship/Stipend to the students of SC and ST category</li> <li>• Ensure effective implementation of Atrocity Act and distribution of relief amount to SC &amp; ST people</li> </ul>	Tribal Development
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure effective disposal of Land related Cases within 3 Months</li> <li>• Ensure the possession of land to Patta holder belonging to weaker sections of the society</li> </ul>	Revenue
9.	Ensure Regular Disbursement of Old Age/Social Security Pension	Social Welfare
10.	Ensure proper Veterinary Services	Veterinary
11.	Ensure availability of Basic agriculture inputs to farmers	Agriculture

### *Transparency in Governance*

As the complete data i.e. the Status of Complaints, the information collected by the nodal officer and the complete status in a village etc. are all available on the web for dissemination under various sections, it ensures that whatever is the situation at the field level, the same is reflected uniformly at all levels in the new system as shown in Data Flow - Traditional vs Parakh System (Figure-1). Thus, it enhances the transparency in the system. The information is also made available to the public representatives during the review meetings.

### *2.5 Increasing the accountability*

The state tried to implement this sort of monitoring system to improve the delivery system of services to its people. The officials at the block and district level are to visit on a sample of villages and check on the observations that they have received regarding the delivery of services in these villages. This ensures in creating more accountability to the agents of service delivery system. It also creates a pressure on them as these observations are being seen by the various officials at the block, district and state level. Similarly the accountability of the block and district officials has increased.



**Figure 1:** Data Flow - Traditional vs. Parakh System

### 3. Implementation Strategy

Proactive mechanism is evolved to collect the information about Basic services/Amenities from all the 55,000 villages of the State. For this purpose, the following are done :

#### *Selection of independent Nodal Officers*

The State designated independent Nodal Officers who are not part of the system implementing the various services that are being monitored to be the watchdogs of the delivery system in the state. This enabled the Nodal Officers to report the data freely to the block. These Nodal Officers visit the villages assigned to them and write the details in the format that they are supposed to fill up. These formats are completed before the 22<sup>nd</sup> of every month.

#### *Data Collection & Capturing*

The programme was designed to capture information on some of the basic services that are needed to be efficiently delivered at the village level. It brings up the information as to what are those services that require immediate attention to increase the quality of life of the people. Comprehensive formats for assessing the benefits of the selected services were formulated for the purpose of monitoring. The Data is collected by 22<sup>nd</sup> of the Month.

The data entries are completed by 30<sup>th</sup> of the month and the required reports for taking the follow-up actions are generated and submitted to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) & Development Officer at the block level. This is done through the Off-line software, which is provided to all the Block Head Quarters. The block officials take action on the problems that has been observed by the Nodal Officers and instruct the respective department to take corrective action. The same is submitted to the District Magistrate and the various officials at the district level. Similar exercise is done at the district level. Collectors are supposed to take the review meeting in the first week of every month.

Also, when these district and block officials visit the villages, they follow up the various observations that they have received. The Data is sent to the District Informatics Centre, NIC at the District Headquarters where it is consolidated using the NIC resources and sent to the State Headquarters over the NICNET where the State level data is consolidated and hosted on the web server at the Integrated Data Centre(IDC), NIC State Centre for the benefit of all the stake holders for the monitoring purpose. For complete flow of information, please refer Information Flow: Parakh (Figure 2).

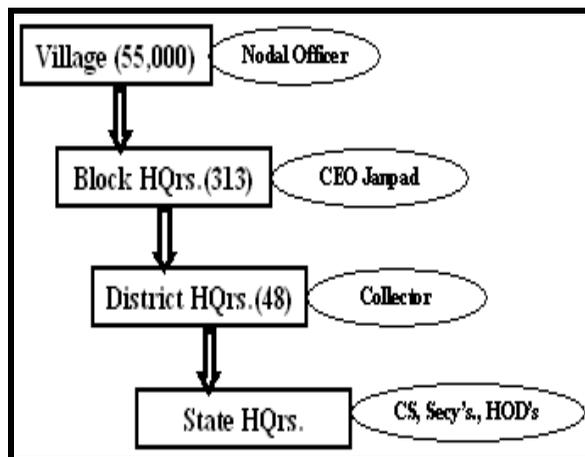


Figure 2: Information Flow: Parakh

#### *Follow-up*

Complaints received through Nodal Officers are taken note of at the Block level & redressed. Once the data is available on the web, the follow-up action taken on all the complaints including the one which is directly registered is updated on the web to disseminate the information to the masses.

#### *Establishment of strong objective Monitoring System:*

The system has established a strong mechanism, the Collectors are supposed to take the review meeting in the first week of every month. The minutes of these meetings are to be uploaded on to the web-site. The Departmental secretaries reviews the data every month while the Chief Secretary reviews the status on third Thursday of every month through the video-Conferencing facility. The minutes of these meetings are also uploaded on to the web site.

#### *Web Based System*

The system provides for Complaint Registration by Public, Dissemination of Statistical / Detailed Reports on, Infrastructure/Services, Complaint Follow-up, Uploading of minutes of the meeting, Monitoring of Complaints, review of minutes of the meeting and nodal Officers report.

#### *Stakeholders Feed back*

Based on the Stakeholders feedback from time to time, the formats are revised and new features are added to make the system more effective and sustainable. The feedback obtained from various quarters are appropriately considered at the highest level and the formats are revised and new features for the Public such as for registration of Complaints, retrieval of its status, Disseminating the complete information pertaining to the village, Retrieval of Statistical & Detailed information pertaining to Basic Services/Amenities, Public Forum for posting the views besides the modules for the administration such as for Uploading of Minutes of the Meeting, entering the Follow-Up, Monitoring of Complaints & the Meetings held are added in the system.

#### *Change Management & Training*

The project is implemented by the State Government with the support of National Informatics Centre, M.P State Centre, which is a premier Information Technology organization under the Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, Government of India. The technical support is provided by the NIC to the state government in the implementation of the project. The following strategy is

implemented by the State Government to collect the information about the Basic Services/Amenities every month from all the 55,000 villages.

About 25,000 Nodal officers are appointed to cover about 55,000 villages of the State of Madhya Pradesh. The collected information contains both quantitative and qualitative data. These officers are assigned to collect information from about 2 to 3 villages and the data is entered off-line at the block level in a software. The changes in the software is done at the State Headquarters and the same is handed over to the District Informatics Officers of the District Centre, NIC for training and deployment locally at the Block Headquarters. No formal training is required to the Nodal Officer for gathering the information on the changed formats as they are self explanatory.

#### **4. Key Strength of the System**

- Information is from users as against from the provider
- Gives opportunity to verify claims of the provider
- System is independent from the provider
- Is working for more than 7 years
- Provides information to administrator and public both

#### **5. Benefits**

##### *Process automation*

Once the data is collected and consolidated at the State level, the entire data is made available on the web site for the benefit of all the Stakeholders. The system facilitates automated process of Registration of Complaints and it's monitoring at all levels of administration from Block to State.

##### *Increase in efficiency*

Before introduction of this programme, no regular independent monitoring mechanism for monitoring the delivery of Basic Services/Amenities was in practice. Thus, Basic Services Management Programme called "PARAKH" was conceptualized and introduced to ensure the efficient functioning of the system for delivering the basic services to its citizens. It is intended to decrease the response time to mitigate the problems faced in the implementation of the programme at the grassroots level. The programme was designed to capture some of the basic services that are needed to be efficiently delivered at the village level. The programme was designed to bring up the information as to what are those services that require immediate attention to increase the quality of life of the people. The system "PARAKH" has helped the administration in the analysis of this information, identify the problematic areas and rectify the problems. This has helped the administration to improve the delivery of services.

##### *Improvement in Morale*

Before the implementation of the Project, the Government Officials used to earn the wrath of the Public & its representatives for non-functioning of the Services/Amenities. With the established mechanism in place, now its possible to identify the problematic areas and provide the services in the least possible time. This has enhanced their image in the eyes of the Public and thus improve the morale of the internal stake holders.

#### **6. Innovation**

The state implemented this Management System to improve the delivery system of services to its people. Proactive mechanism is adopted by the State Government in the collection of information. The system is developed for the analysis of this information. The officials at the block and district level are to visit on a sample of villages and check on the observations that they have received regarding the delivery of services

in these villages. This ensures in creating more accountability to the agents of service delivery system. It also creates a pressure on them as these observations are being seen by the various officials at the block, district and state level. Similarly the accountability of the block and district officials are increased. Options are added to enable registration of the Complaints directly and retrieve its status by the Public. The Department officials at the Block/District level have been asked to enter the follow-up action taken on the web. Provision is made to upload the Minutes of the Review meeting by the various functionaries. These efforts will further enhances the creditability of the system and further improve the services. Thus, the Project may be considered worthwhile for replication in other states.

## **7. Sustainability & Transferability**

Basic Services/Amenities to the rural masses have always been the top priority of the State Government. The advent of Information and Communications Technology has made it feasible to collect and analyze the data of this voluminous nature even from the remotest corner. It has made possible effective monitoring at all levels. It has made possible better planning and improvement of the delivery of Services.

As the people have become aware of the established monitoring mechanism they are increasingly using the same and thereby establishing community ownership of the same. This has also enabled in mobilizing the community of improving the services available to them. The ownership of the community and the mobilization of the community members for the same increases the sustainability of the services and also the Management Programme established in the state. The appointment of the Nodal Officers independent of the departments providing services has brought more credibility to the Management Programme. The earliest possible response to the problems identified has enhanced the success of the programme. This has improved the recognition of the Nodal Officers among the village community. This in turn has helped to sustain the enthusiasm of the Nodal Officers. It has integrated with the regular administrative structure, thus making the system sustainable in the state. The general public is the beneficiary and since it is in place for almost seven years and has already shown results, the sustainability is reflected.

As “PARAKH” is looking at the necessary services that are needed by the people, there is a gradual increase both in the demand for the same and at the same time in the continuity of the service. This will continuously help the service providers to improve the delivery of services.

The project was started in the year 2000. To incorporate the stakeholders feedback received from time to time and citizen centric schemes, the project is amended/re-launched in the year 2002, 2005,2006 and 2007. Looking in to the inherent benefits of the project, the State Government of Rajasthan has recently studied the system and is replicating the system.

## **8. Concluding Remarks**

The Proactive mechanism being adopted by the State Government in collecting the information every month from all the villages about the services/amenities has helped the administration in identifying the problematic areas. The use of ICT has enabled the administration to capture, analyze and monitor this information and take effective steps in solving their problems. The programme provides an excellent feedback mechanism which in turn depicts administrative transparency in implementation of various schemes and programmes beneficial for the rural masses. This has enabled concurrent monitoring at various levels and thus enabled in improving the delivery of services. Presently, with the kind of ICT infrastructure we have, up to the Block level, this sort of mechanism may work well in improving the management of Basic Services/amenities in Rural Areas of the State. The programme provides an excellent feedback mechanism which in turn depicts administrative transparency in implementation of various schemes and programmes beneficial for the rural masses. The identification of problems through the

proactive mechanism has helped the administration to resolve the problem in time. This has enhanced the reputation of the Government amongst the Public.

### ***Acknowledgements***

It is not possible to implement such a huge system without the active involvement of all the Collectors, Nodal Officers and Block level Departmental officials. Commitment of the Chief Secretary and Secretary to the CM in implementing the programme for ensuring the Basic Services/Amenities in all the Villages is praiseworthy. It is also worthwhile to mention the name of Manohar Dubey, Deputy Secretary to the Chief Minister who is primarily responsible in conceptualizing and implementing the programme throughout the State.

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