

Is m-Gov the way forward?

POLICY BRIEF

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

State-level Initiatives

Carving a space for mGovernance within country-wide eGovernment programs is vital. It is also critical to appoint an empowered orchestrator at state-level to champion eDelivery programs.

Stakeholder Incentives

Technology start ups should be funded to innovate in developing mobile based solutions. Participation from SMEs can add value by expediting roll-outs while limiting the cost of scaling up rural service delivery.

eDelivery Options

Government services can be delivered electronically through multiple channels. It is important to identify the most appropriate mode for each service based on cost effectiveness and reach.

Standardisations

Standards that recognise mobile transactions, protect privacy and ensure security for data transmitted over the mobile network are important. However, stringent policies that may deter innovation of service provision must be avoided.

WHY MGOVERNANCE?

The increase of mobile phone penetration across the world presents a new opportunity for services previously provided manually or electronically to be channelled via the mobile phone. While governments, including those in developing countries, have been paying significant attention to eGovernance and eGovernment applications, these have been predominantly focused on the traditional Internet. Given the low penetration of PCs and Internet in individual BOP households, the installation of Internet kiosks (at best serving a cluster of 5-10 villages) is usually proposed. Operations of these kiosks require Internet connection, electricity, and a physical location—infrastructure that is non-existent or of poor quality in rural areas in most developing countries. Therefore, in comparison, the concept of mGovernance, is more cost effective, flexible and requires minimal supporting infrastructure giving all citizens the option of having equitable access to government services.

CASE STUDY: ePAYMENTS, INDIA

The pension scheme granted for destitute persons, was distributed via the village payment offices; thereby creating room for corruption. As a result most pensioners

do not receive their complete dues. Similarly, payments due to the poor under an employment guarantee scheme can be collected via post offices; implying additional travel costs, delays and wage loss. Alternatively, such payments are collected by agents on behalf of the poor workers involving a payment to the agent.

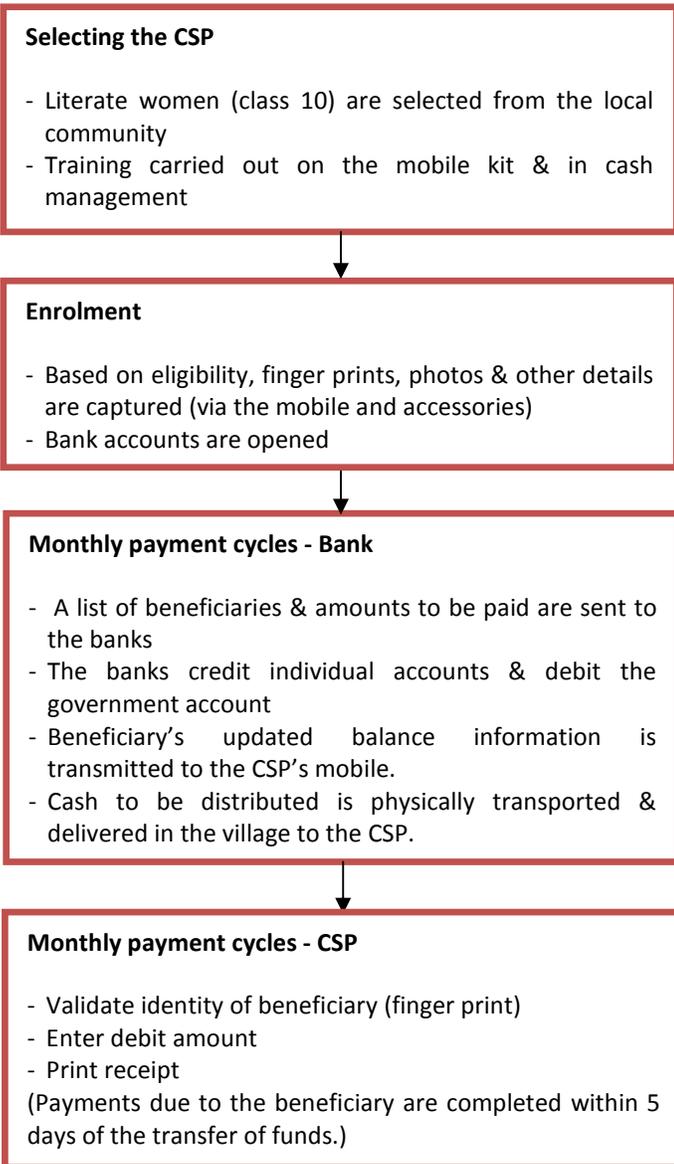
The *m*-approach

The Zero Mass Foundation (ZMF) project is advancing financial inclusion by enabling banks to open accounts for rural pensioners and helping the government disburse monthly social pensions in villages in an efficient, convenient, transparent manner without bribery or fraud that existed in earlier manual systems.

The project has achieved a significant scale, serving 1.6 million pensioners in a short period. Besides providing convenience to poor pensioners the application can eliminate payments to non-existent pensioners. Appointed business correspondents, operate as bank agents who are authorised to open accounts, deposit and withdraw from beneficiary accounts. In Andhra Pradesh, the foundation's program have set up Customer Service Points (CSP) by

selecting women from the local Self Help Group (SHG) who are given kits comprising of a GPRS enabled mobile phone and accessories¹. These kits can process banking transactions such as deposits and withdrawals electronically by real-time exchange of information with the bank's database at the backend.

Key Processes



EXPANDING THE SERVICE

The case described uses the mobile phone at a central location in the village and does not necessarily depend on the mobile penetration amongst the BOP. However, there are a host of other services that can be used at a lower level; i.e. to directly connect an individual with government services. The introduction of a technology savvy system to the BOP would not have been possible without the effective collaboration of stakeholders – government, non-profit organisations and the private sector. This highlights the importance of providing incentives to foster innovation and development in an impartial manner.

Access to a mobile network is a necessity for mGovernment services to be successful. Due to the cost of implementation however, accessibility in rural areas are scarce. In such scenarios, innovative initiatives taken by technology start-ups provide a means to connect the unconnected. With aid and government support, such programmes can be used to scale-up rural service delivery.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the introduction of mServices will benefit the bottom of the pyramid (BOP) the most. This reiterates the necessity to ensure ease of use, while providing necessary education and training to the potentially lower literate user base.

Although the use of the mobile phone presents great advantages, it is important to consider and evaluate the appropriateness of its use for the type of service being deployed. After all, mGovernance does not necessarily replace eGovernance; however, it can certainly be used to enhance services and increase reach.

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¹ The GPRS mobile phones are enhanced by a chip that enables secure data communication between the phone and the RFID smart card using Near Field Communication (NFC). A biometric scanner to read finger prints and a printer can also connect to the mobile phone using wireless communication.