UNDP
Government of India

ICTD Mid-Term Evaluation
(Dr. Chetan Sharma and Dr. K.S.K. Sai)

SUMMARY REPORT
(Anusha Lall)

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the results of the mid-term evaluation of eleven ICTD projects supported by UNDP. These projects are set in the context of the National e-Governance Program of the Government of India and the UNDP country program for 2003-2008 that – among other commitments – aims at harnessing the potential of ICT towards promoting sustainable human development and elimination of human poverty and inequalities. The selection of these projects has been taken up under the themes of governance, rural livelihoods, integrated citizens' services delivery, and women's empowerment.

The report provides a background to the evaluation and summarises the outputs and outcomes of the selected projects in the context of the thematic focus. It provides the key findings from the mid-term evaluation of the eleven projects and highlights specific recommendations where appropriate. Finally it incorporates a discussion of the lessons learnt from these findings, which provide the basis for a set of recommendations and suggestions for future programs.

These recommendations provide direction in terms of the need for an intensive preparatory process and needs assessment; for appropriate partnerships supported by clear and detailed agreements and effective coordination mechanisms; a strong implementation agency; effective project linkages and alignment with the larger framework of operations; strong backend management; awareness generation and capacity building programs for project beneficiary as well as functionaries and stakeholders; the appropriate selection of location of service delivery outlet and service; technological innovations and leveraging the potential of ICT-based platforms; revenue generation alternatives; established processes and feedback mechanisms; and community participation and ownership.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Government of India has approved the implementation of the National E-Governance Plan which seeks to lay the foundation and provide the impetus for long-term growth of e-Governance within the country. The Plan seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms, set up core infrastructure and policies, and implement a number of Mission Mode Projects at the center, state and integrated service levels to create a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance.

The country program of UNDP for the period 2003-07 has among its priorities, the goal to work towards the promotion of sustainable human development and the elimination of human poverty and inequalities. UNDP feels that ICTs can play a vital role in achieving this objective, provided a pro-poor focus is given within the framework of the country's e-Government programme. UNDP supports the mainstreaming of ICTs to achieve national development goals because of their role as catalysts, enablers, engines for socio-economic development and pro-poor growth. UNDP's approach is multi-stakeholder, aiming at innovative, result-oriented policy guidance in the support of holistic, cross-sectoral e-development strategies and programs.

Against this background, UNDP, together with Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, Government of India, conceptualized the project ICT for Development (ICTD). The National Institute for Smart Government (NISG) is the main implementing agency of the ICTD project.

The project includes:
- Ø Funding, implementation and management of pilot initiatives in the areas of e-Government and e-Governance.
- Ø Developing solutions & applications to bridge the digital divide.
- Ø Preparing roadmaps for e-governance.
- Ø Documenting success stories, transfer of knowledge and capacity building in the area of e-government.

The ICTD project requires combining appropriate technology and infrastructure with local knowledge and expertise to deal with varied development challenges. It is therefore being implemented drawing on the strengths and views of the government, civil society, the private sector and the international development community.

While the ICTD pilots are implemented by project partners like state governments and non-government organizations, NISG is responsible for the project management and monitors their progress with regard to the timelines and deliverables. NISG also provides consultancy for the pilots in the areas of conceptualizing projects, preparation of request for proposals, business process reengineering and also conducts capacity building exercises for project partners. NISG thus plays the role

of the facilitator for selected pilot projects and is not involved directly in the implementation of projects.

There are four broad themes that have been selected as the focus of the ICTD project:
- Ø Integrated Citizen Services
- Ø Rural Livelihoods
- Ø Governance
- Ø Women's Empowerment

Additionally, the ICTD project involves capacity building, change management, business process re-engineering and knowledge and experience sharing as integral activities, aligned with the objectives and needs of specific pilots and initiatives.

Terms of Reference

This summary report is intended to provide the key results of the mid-term evaluation of eleven pilot initiatives that were approved for funding by the UNDP following a meticulous selection procedure. The results of the mid term evaluation are to be used for strengthening the ongoing strategies under the ICTD project, provide course corrections if needed, and for guiding future programming and in this context.

Seven of the identified pilots are being implemented by government agencies, and four by non-government organizations. These pilot initiatives are listed here as follows:

S. No	Project Name	Theme	Implementing Agency	Implementation State
1.	Ashwini	Rural Livelihoods	Byrraju Foundation	Andhra Pradesh
2.	Bangalore –One	Integrated Citizen Services	Dept. of Administrative Reforms, Govt. of Karnataka	Karnataka
3.	Decentralized Rural Information System & Technology Initiatives (DRISTI)	Governance	West Bengal State Rural Development Agency	West Bengal
4.	e-Justice	Governance (Access to Justice)	Center for Good Governance	Andhra Pradesh
5.	e-Krishi (Agri-Business Centers)	Rural Livelihoods	Kerala State IT Mission	Kerala
6.	e-Procurement	Governance	Dept. of Administrative Reforms, Govt. of Karnataka	Karnataka
7.	Enterprise Development Service	Rural Livelihoods	Development Alternatives	Madhya Pradesh/Punjab/UP
8.	Integrated Community Service Centers (i-CoSC)	Integrated Citizen Services	Dept. of IT, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh	Himachal Pradesh

9.	Mahiti Manthana	Women Empowerment	IT for Change	Karnataka
10.	Mahiti Mitra	Governance	Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan	Gujarat
11.	Village Information System	Integrated Citizen Services	Gujarat Informatics Limited	Gujarat

The purpose of this evaluation of the eleven projects has been outlined as:

Ø To determine extent of the project's achievements against the objectives laid down in the project document, i.e. how far the project has been able to demonstrate the use of ICT for improved governance/ service delivery in various areas through pilot initiatives, encouraging Business Process Reengineering (BPR), development of local solutions and applications and encouragement of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model;

Ø To assess, how far the project has been able to achieve the objectives of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in strengthening decentralization and promoting gender equality – through facilitating use of ICT for improved local self governance and also empowering women and marginalized communities using ICTs;

Ø To assess the social impact of the funding for the projects, i.e., to measure the Social Return on Investment of the ICTD Project;

Ø To examine the relevance of the ICTD programme in the context of India's development policies and make specific recommendations for re-aligning/ strengthening/ mid-course correction; and

Ø To identify pilot initiatives (out of the existing eleven), or specific components of these pilots which can be replicated or scaled up and identify new areas for intervention.

Evaluation Methodology

The methodology for the mid-term evaluation of the identified pilot initiative has broadly built upon the following elements:

Ø Desk review of relevant documents such as project documents, MYFF targets/ reports, progress reports and all other available data;

Ø Discussions with the UNDP management, programme officers, DIT, NISG, partners, NGOs and members of Project Standing Committee;

Ø Field visits to select key projects; and

Ø Consultation meetings.

The references for the evaluation process, derived from the purpose of the evaluation have included:

Ø Assessment of progress towards the achievement of the outcome, core result and annual target as stated in the MYFF and outputs and outcome as stated in the ICTD project;

Ø Examination and assessment of strategies for sustainability, replicability and scalability of various pilot initiatives;

Ø Assessment of whether the partnership strategy of UNDP with partners such as the Department of Information Technology (DIT), State Governments, NISG, as well as NGOs, private sector has been effective and appropriate;

Ø Examination of the extent to which UNDP has been able to build national capacities in a sustainable manner through holistic, participatory and gender sensitive approach in the project;

Ø Analysis of the extent to which the Project has ensured gender mainstreaming;
Ø Identification of specific pilot initiatives which can be suitable for replication and scaling up;
Ø Analysis of the present monitoring and evaluation tool being used in the project through RBM package, in terms of relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes;
Ø Examination of the extent to which the project has demonstrated increased transparency, accountability, simplification and responsiveness in citizen's service delivery mechanism of the Government;
Ø Assessment of the uptake of services by the local community;
Ø Assessment of the extent to which the project has demonstrated skills enhancement/acquisition of new skills and increased livelihood opportunities particularly for communities in rural areas;
Ø Assessment of the extent to which the project has been able to address the local information needs and facilitate problem redressal in a given local socio-economic context;
Ø Analysis of the learnings from some of the pilots which can provide strategic inputs to the upcoming CSC scheme of the Government of India; and
Ø Extrapolation of key lessons from the project for providing relevant information pertaining to implementation of the National E-governance Plan.

REVIEW OF OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

The discussion of the outcomes, outputs, and outcome-output linkages with reference to the specific pilot initiatives in this section can be organized under the thematic heads of governance, rural livelihoods, integrated citizen's services delivery, and women's empowerment.

Governance

Governance, in simple words, is the process by which governments deliver services, including dispensation of justice to the people whom they govern, and the hallmarks of good governance can be identified as transparency, accountability, commitment, equity and efficiency in service delivery. In developing economies however, government services often fail to reach the poor and that living in rural and remote areas, and when services are provided, the quality is often inadequate. This has been attributable to the absence of a proper mechanism to hold the service provider (either the government itself or an intermediary) accountable.

ICT provides a means to address and redress some of these issues, which has been incorporated in the implementation of the ICTD pilot projects. A brief summary of how it has been done in the relevant projects is given below.

DRISTI

The entrenchment of the decentralization process necessitates the Panchayati Raj Institutions to deliver better services to its stakeholders. Effective participation of the people in self-governance necessarily requires access to information regarding the functioning of the Panchayats, whereby Panchayats need to play the role of "information provider". The use of information technologies is sought to bring more transparency in the functioning of the government and help people to participate in decision-making process.

The Decentralized Rural Information Services & Technology Initiatives or DRISTI project implemented by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal, seeks to promote efficiency in managing various programs and delivery systems, to design and use planning tools (including GIS based technology) for village level planning, the creation of a better monitoring and compliance machinery and also promote social audit. It also aims at providing IT-based solutions for all major Panchayat functions, including micro planning at village level. This is in addition to providing updated information to all the stakeholders, including civil society for promoting transparency and accountability.

The project was originally intended to cover 20 Panchayat Samitis (block level) and 50 Gram Panchayats (village level) of Burdwan District. The scope of the pilot initiative has been extended with components such as the Gram Panchayat Management System (GPMS) and Integrated Fund Monitoring & Accounting System (IFMAS) installed in 129 Gram Panchayats and 31 Panchayat Samitis respectively.

The project has also served to improve the efficiency of service delivery with respect to various Government to Citizen services. ICT based accounting has strengthened the decentralized 3-tier Panchayati Raj System and the PRIs benefit by consistent, transparent and planned deployment of financial resources.

E-Justice

The E-Justice project being implemented by the Center for Good Governance in Andhra Pradesh attempts to mitigate the problem of accessibility to law and justice, arising due to complexity of law and legal procedures. It does so by bringing out simplified versions of many of the important laws in English and the local language and making them easily accessible to the common man.

The broad objectives of the project are to create awareness among the citizens residing in the rural and semi-urban areas about legal provisions and the roles and responsibilities of the governmental functionaries, and also to generate awareness about the existence of various support agencies and groups. The project further proposes to develop a legal information database which would present simplified versions of the legal enactments, case laws, and procedures that are relevant to people especially women and the marginalized sections of society.

In the current balance, rural citizens can approach eight e-Justice kiosks, four each in Mahbubnagar and Krishna districts, with their legal problems. Forty-five key laws have been simplified and translated into the local language Telugu. Awareness generation efforts regarding legal matters and available redressal mechanisms, especially with reference to weaker sections of society, is supported through proper advice and handholding in processing paperwork, for those who have general legal problems.

Agencies like the Legal Services Authority (LSA), which facilitate access to Justice delivery system, are involved in the process. Paralegal volunteers are being trained and linkages have been established with nearly ten agencies working in the field of social justice. ICT is being used for information dissemination and follow up.

E-Procurement

The e-procurement initiative is being implemented by the Government of Karnataka with the aim of ensuring transparency in government procurement. The ICT-based public procurement system or e-procurement marketplace to be implemented in six departments in the pilot phase, is to cover all procurement activities by all government departments, corporations, municipalities and local bodies across Karnataka by the year 2011.

The e-procurement process is intended to automate and streamline the procurement processes of the buyer organisations and create a centralized pool of registered and pre-qualified vendors spread across the world for meeting procurement requirements of the buyer organizations in a timely, efficient and cost effective manner. It is to counter cartelization and unfair and intimidating procurement tactics, as well as provide economies of scale and equal opportunity to SMEs.

The project is designed to cover aspects of procurement such as Supplier Registration, Indent Management, Catalogue Management, Contract Management, e-Auction, e-Payments, Accounting, Management Information Systems, and not e-Tendering alone. HP India Ltd has been engaged as the private partner or Application Service Provider (ASP) for the project.

The ASP is also required to set up a help desk to attend to queries, and impart training to employees and agencies of the Government of Karnataka, and any suppliers who may ask for it. Revenue accrual through transaction fees to be paid by suppliers, as well as imposition of penalties for below par performance for the ASP would come into force at the end of the pilot phase.

<u>Mahiti Mitra,</u>

The Mahiti Mitra pilot initiative implemented by Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (KNNA), an NGO in Gujarat, envisages the creation of Setu ICT kiosks through the existing Setu centres, and developing the kiosk as a platform which enables the Gram Panchayat bodies and Gram Sabhas to access various ICT technology applications. Its objective and design are directly intended to harness ICT in support of decentralization, and transparent, efficient and effective governance.

The kiosks are intended to provide simple information tools and services in order to improve the capacity of these local bodies for self-governance and to generate better development opportunities, based on a sound understanding of local conditions and people's needs. Empowering the Panchayati Raj Institutions to audit and monitor government services and facilities, supporting informed planning through technological tools such as the Geographical Information Systems and Village Database and Profiles, and creating close communication linkages between the Gram Panchayats and the district administration/Zilla Panchayat as well as other agencies are also part of the project plan. Capacity-building of PRI's and of local communities for the utilization of ICT tools, and for active partnerships in self-governance is also essential to effective implementation of the project.

Out of 18 Mahiti-Mitra centers that were to be set up across 380 village clusters, 17 are operational. Mahiti Mitra centres have facilitated the citizens to access the entitlements due to them which were earlier difficult to access. GIS applications have been developed as tools for better grassroots developmental planning.

The project is supported by Abhiyan and its partner network including government and non government agencies. ICT has facilitated better information linkages with various partners, and has been used largely in the area of improving governance through computerization of systems.

<u>Rural Livelihoods</u>

Ensuring rural livelihoods is integral to rural development, which remains a priority for India. ICTs and their benefits are relevant in support of interventions to promote rural livelihoods. These technologies can be harnessed to support distance learning, overcoming concerns of location, availability of skilled teachers/ trainers, etc. E-commerce applications can facilitate access to markets and market information including pricing, as well as provide a networking platform for producers and suppliers. Various ICT-based initiatives themselves can constitute income generating activities.

A brief summary of how ICT has been used in the pilot projects to support rural livelihoods is provided here.

<u>Ashwini</u>

Project Ashwini is being implemented by Byrraju Foundation, with the objective of creating a platform for multi-dimensional interaction between experts and service providers in towns/cities and defined target segments in rural Andhra Pradesh. It seeks to empower the rural population by providing timely access to an array of high quality services, using a virtual delivery platform for facilitating this interaction. In functional terms, it involves delivery of high quality healthcare, education, agriculture related advisory, livelihoods training, and e-governance information services to the chosen villages.

The project is now fully operational and being implemented through 32 centers in West and East Godavari districts (as well as a center in Krishna district) of Andhra Pradesh.

The current assessment highlights the setting up of a dedicated communication network linking the Ashwini centers with nodal centers at Bhimavaram, Amalapuram, and Hyderabad. Videoconferencing facilities have been established at these centers, and at Eluru (the resource center for telemedicine activities) to impart interactive training to students at the Ashwini centers, in areas such as embroidery, fabric painting, knitting, computer training, language (English), mathematics and the sciences.

The centers further disseminate information related to good agricultural practices. Linkages have been established with large buyers, to obtain market access for goods produced by the trainees, generating regular income and improving the employability of the students. There are provisions for telemedicine activity in 13 health centers, with equipment from ISRO, the usage of which is yet to pick up.

<u>E-Krishi</u>

The E-Krishi project being implemented by Kerala State IT Mission seeks to facilitate and enable farmer and other stakeholder interaction with agricultural service providers in the private, government and non-government sectors. The project design provides a web-based solution for small and medium farmers as well as owners of large landholdings, operated through agri-business centers, to address the existing gaps in agriculture information flow and transaction management.

Service delivery for the pilot project is being undertaken through the existing Akshaya platform in the Malappuram district, Kerala. While the project was to be

implemented in 135 out of 340 Akshaya centers in the district, currently130 Akshaya centers have been upgraded as e-Krishi information centers.

A portal (www.e-krishi.org) has been designed to bring together all buyers and sellers of agricultural produce as well as agriculture service providers, where the farmers list produce, the buyer can post his requirements, and suppliers of various agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc. can post their details and transact business to mutual advantage using the portal and with assistance from the Akshaya entrepreneurs. The portal has been further enhanced to facilitate buyers and sellers to see category wise postings, and also provides search options. More than 10,000 farmers and 400 buyers have been registered so far. 21800 major farmers have so far posted on the e-krishi web portal for selling their commodities, though the number of transactions that have materialized have been limited.

A toll-free help line manned by 3 agricultural graduates and supported by more than 120 agricultural experts is also available to answer the farmers' queries. The farmers also get information about best agricultural practices and latest price information at the kiosk. Training programs have also been conducted in Mallapuram for various stakeholders such as farmers, Akshaya entrepreneurs, panchayat members, agriculture officers, etc.

Enterprise Development and Support Services

The Government as well as civil society has looked to rural entrepreneurship to generate employment among rural youth. The Enterprise Development and Support Services (EDSS) project being implemented by TARAhaat, Development Alternatives focuses on providing rural entrepreneurship opportunities to youth, women, self-help groups, landless and small land holders in the areas of non-traditional agriculture and natural waste recycling based manufacturing.

The primary components of the ICT-based service are an Enterprise Package to provide both technical training in a specific type of business (currently including Natural Recyclable Waste-based Micro Concrete Roofing Tiles, and Broiler-based Small Scale Poultry Farming) in terms of the fundamentals of enterprise management and to impart customized concepts on how to establish market and financial linkages; an Entrepreneurship Development Program for the rural populace to enhance their understanding of setting up, planning and managing a business; and local language 'Ask the Expert' and online FAQ service to provide on-going business support. These products have been built on a multimedia platform, keeping into account the low levels of literacy. Potential entrepreneurs are also trained and assisted with financing opportunities, writing business proposals, loan application processes, and so forth.

The services are being provided through TARA Kendras, TARAhaat's rural business and community centers in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Bhatinda, Punjab. As on March 2007, 31 enterprises had been set up with the aim to establish 8,500 enterprises by June 2010. Current assessments provide for 301 who have been imparted entrepreneurship training, though only 12% have started doing their business. Linkages have been established with key banks such as NABARD, Regional Rural Bank and State Bank of India, along with informal linkages with key government departments such as KVIC, Employment Exchange Bureau and the District Industries Centers.

There appears to be local acceptance of project services, especially in Bundelkhand. District mobilizers have been appointed to promote entrepreneurship among underserved communities, Dalits, religious minorities and women. The Project team has been maintaining close relationship with the prospective entrepreneurs who have undergone the program. However, lack of integration with existing entrepreneurship schemes as well as shortcomings in project design and implementation appear to have held back progress.

Integrated Citizen Services Delivery

The citizen has emerged the prime focus in the process of governance. However, the multiplicity of basic service providers, combined with bureaucratic hurdles and the lack of transparency and accountability imposes severe constraints and inconvenience for the people in availing of the range of government and basic services.

The integrated citizen service delivery mechanism as envisioned in the ICTD project is intended to offer all citizens high quality service at accessible locations with absolute transparency. It has the overarching mandate of reducing wasteful effort and expenditure. The intended outcomes include improved accessibility of services and efficiency of service delivery, enhanced participation of the citizens, effective integration of basic services and increased returns to the service provider to generate further economies of scale.

The manner in which the ICT platform is being utilized for integrated citizen services delivery in the identified projects is briefly summarized as follows.

Bangalore-One

Implemented by the Government of Karnataka, the Bangalore-One project aim to provide services of the Central, State and Local Governments in a convenient manner with efficiency, transparency and reliability, through a chain of Integrated Citizen Service Centers and other multiple access channels (including mobile phones and the internet). Created on the lines of the e-Seva project in Andhra Pradesh, Bangalore One centres have been set up with a vision to enhance government service delivery to citizens and businesses, by offering an integrated interface, for a broad spectrum of government and private services.

The project is being implemented in a phased manner through a public-private partnership model, with NISG support and a consortium of M/s CMS Computers and M/s Ram Infotech Ltd. as the private partners. Project execution is to be carried out on BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) basis with a heavy service orientation. The private partner is entrusted with the task of establishing the centers and the delivery of services, payment for which is closely linked with compliance to the Service Level Agreement.

It is estimated that Bangalore city would eventually require 50 citizen service centers to provide 100 G2B, G2C, and B2C services. As of now, 12 Government Departments and Agencies and 9 private agencies are currently offering their services through 17 Bangalore-One centers across Bangalore city, including

acceptance of passport applications. 15 of these centers operate on a 24 hour basis. In a little over 2 years of operation the project has reached over 200,000 transactions per month. Space constraints have also led to the proposal for mini Bangalore-One centers as an alternative, though with more limited services on offer.

Training programs for center operators, counter operators, and personnel of the participating government departments as well as of online help at the Bangalore-One portal are incorporated into the project process. Several innovative features and user-friendly features have been developed for the project, supported by technological innovation and customization, such as multiple form handling capacity, collaboration between counters, acceptance of multiple forms of payment, etc. to further enhance efficiency of service delivery.

Integrated Community Service Centers (i-CoSC)

The Integrated Community Service Centers (i-CoSC/ Sugam) project is being implemented by Department of Information Technology, Government of Himachal Pradesh in Shimla district. The project aims at setting up a one-stop shop information resource and service center for the people, using simple yet state-of-the-art methods of organizing, sharing, and communicating information. As a tool for development, it aims to empower the masses by providing access to community-based information, communication resources and ICT-based applications - particularly on health, education, agriculture and natural resources, and rural enterprise development.

The objective of the project was to implement 17 i-CoSC centers covering all tehsils, sub-tehsils, sub-divisions and district headquarters in Shimla district, offering a wide range of government services. A work flow system to facilitate citizens to scan and send documents to administrative offices, enable citizens to access information and government services cutting across different tiers of administration closer to their homes and under a single roof, have also been envisaged.

Currently, over 50 services across 27 departments are being made accessible to citizens across the 17 Sugam (i-CoSC) centers. Services as the provision of certificates (e-Praman) and Record of Rights (HimBhoomi) have been accessed the most number of times by citizens. Other applications that are currently accessible include HIMRIS (for land and property registration), Vahan & Sarathi (for driving licenses and registration of new vehicles), arms licensing, job portal, ticket reservation of HRTC and so forth. An effective study of the design and workflow of the project has been undertaken though the workflow application is yet to be implemented, in addition to the completion of a business process reengineering model for various services. An integrated web portal for i-CoSC has been finalized and readied.

The State Government of Himachal Pradesh has taken complete ownership of the project, and coordination across departments is being ensures at the district level with involvement of the representatives in the District E-Governance Societies. The extension, upgradation and integration of services; improvement in the quality of services; greater transparency, efficiency, objectivity, accountability and speed of service delivery; provision of relevant information and advisory services to the

farmers and direct participation of masses are some further project objectives that have been broadly met, in the light of the recent roll-out of the project, with work on connectivity still in process. Extensive citizen awareness programs through advertisements and workshops have also been launched, with especial encouragement for citizen feedback. Well structured IEC (information, education and communication) campaigns have been directed at concerned officials for motivating them and bringing about a change in perceptions of and attitudes to citizen services.

Village Information System

The Village Information System (VIS) is a pilot project being implemented by Gujarat Informatics Ltd. and the Government of Gujarat, with support from Panchayat structures. It is targeted at the rural population of Gujarat, with the objective of bringing better, efficient, transparent and effective governance and citizen services that are easy and simple to access with minimum associated costs. In addition to providing a communication hub in the form of a rural kiosk offering citizen services, the project seeks to integrate all the projects under the Government of Gujarat's e-Governance initiatives programs (including e-Gram, e-Dhara, Mahiti Shakti) using hybrid connectivity solutions.

The VIS project being implemented in 100 villages in rural Talukas of Patan and Mehsan Districts of North Gujarat, is taken up for replication in all 18,000 villages of Gujarat by the State Government. It operates on the entrepreneurship model, with Village Computer Entrepreneurs (VCE) to manage the rural kiosks. The services are currently being offered through a computer deployed at the Panchayat offices. A revenue sharing mechanism between the VCE and the Panchayat has been worked out. The ownership of the project is to be transferred from Gujarat Informatics Ltd. to the e-Gram Mission Society, to support autonomous self-government, through the State-level agency for the e-Gram project and Common Services Center scheme.

The nature of services being offered under the project include citizen-centric services such as the online submission of application forms and issuance of various certificates, as well as information services covering agriculture, market prices, stock information for farmers, fairs, festivals and events, government schemes and government and civil society sponsored camps and programs. Messaging and internet services, including e-mail facilities covering government departments and kiosks, and bulletins providing specific information in some areas have also been provided. Other services that have been proposed include Public Information Services in the areas of health, agriculture and animal husbandry, education, as well as a grievance redressal system; and commercial citizen services to facilitate buying and selling, such as transport and cold storage facilities; and interface with existing applications and databases such as land records, ration card system, etc. Supplementary activities such as life insurance and other general insurance services, postal and related services, and acceptance of utility bill payments are also being explored as supplementary sources of revenue.

The appointment and training of Village Computer Entrepreneurs (VCE) to manage the rural kiosks under the entrepreneur model, has been completed in all 100 villages. Connectivity has been provided in 10 villages of Mehsana district by extending the Gujarat State Wide Area Network (GSWAN) connectivity. Needs assessment and briefing programs for the rural population have also been carried

out. Software customization is being undertaken by the National Informatics Center (NIC), Government of India.

<u>Women's Empowerment</u>

The exploration of blending of technological systems and processes with development realities is also relevant in the field of women's empowerment, a core human development concern in India and in most of the developing world. The manner in which this is being carried out under the Mahiti Manthana project is discussed as follows.

<u>Mahiti Manthana</u>

Implemented by IT for Change, an NGO in Karnataka, the Mahiti Manthana ('knowledge processes') project builds upon the work of Mahila Samakhya (MS) - an established grassroots initiative of the Government of India for empowering socially and economically disadvantaged women in rural areas through self-help group activity. The objective of the pilot is to develop appropriate ICT-based processes and systems best suited for MS Kendras' (MSKs) Resource Centre activity, to strengthen the information and communication processes of the self-help groups or Sanghas. A multi-pronged strategy is followed to provide content on education, health, and other social and legal issues through this project, to be disseminated through radio and video programs and computer-based modules. The activities are intended to directly address concerns of the difficult to reach groups - poor, rural, non-literate women from disadvantaged castes and help them to realize their rights.

The project has been piloted in Mysore District, Karnataka since 2005. 7 villages in 3 Talukas had been identified for setting up of the Resource Centers. The project is currently being managed by an IT for Change unit based in Mysore. However, one of the project goals is to accelerate the withdrawal of intensive institutional support and hand over the project process to the self-help groups, whereby the women engage directly with technology options. Community ownership of the project is then being built with the management of Resource Center entrusted to a Sakhi (recruited from the community) monitored by a Managing Committee comprising 7-9 members, with representation (without voting rights) from IT for Change and MSK. Various options to attain monetary sustainability of the centers are being explored, with community ownership being a key factor.

All possible ICT tools, such as radio, video, help lines and computers are being explored to develop contextual socio-technical processes for empowerment. The Kelu Sakhi ('Listen Friend') radio initiative has facilitated the promotion of home grown informal processes during production of radio programmes and collective listening aligned to Sangha (SHG) processes at the community end. Videos developed by the Sangha women showcasing simple workshop recordings, process captures, discussions etc are shown to the Sangha women and discussions are held revolving around the video topic.

The Namma Mahiti Kendras (Telecenters) provide a platform to reach to outside agencies, and establish better 'equation' within the community. The telecenter initiative was preceded by opinion leader orientation and Sakhi training, and ran from April 2006 to January 2007. The telecenters have created a platform that brings together women from different Sanghas/collectives, to use the resource center, with ICT interventions serving to rejuvenate discussions. The User Groups initiative is also being visualized by IT for Change, to identify the information requirements of the village.

There were intensive preparatory processes including baseline survey, needs assessment, village mapping, and interaction with opinion leaders as well as group assessments to plan the intervention. Capacity building has been undertaken for functionaries of the project and the women's groups, in computer training and internet use, and radio and video workshops.

KEY FINDINGS OF MID-TERM PROJECT EVALUATIONS

The key findings from the mid-term evaluation pertaining to each of the pilot projects are listed here. Project-specific recommendations emerging directly from the mid-term evaluation are also highlighted where appropriate.

<u>Governance</u>

<u>DRISTI</u>
- Ø The project demonstrates the role of ICT in strengthening the decentralization process and the institutions of the local governance system, with the PRIs benefiting through consistent, transparent and planned deployment of financial resources.
- Ø The project supports the feasibility of ICT to develop an enhanced understanding and appreciation of rights and responsibilities to enable informed decision-making in local self-governance and development.
- Ø The ICT-based project has provided for the digital networking of remote areas, facilitating liaison and two-way communication across local governance structures (PRIs) to enhance efficiency.
- Ø In-house knowledge for the development and deployment of applications can be effectively engaged, given the advantage of domain knowledge.
- Ø Major business process reengineering and change management undertaken by all parties has contributed to an institutionally and technically sound project.
- Ø The convergence of ICT, decentralized planning, and citizen services delivery can be efficiently and effectively implemented given the political and administrative will.

<u>E-Justice</u>
- Ø The project successfully demonstrates the relevance of a well designed ICT-platform for bringing the law and legal services to the people and also improve the justice delivery system.
- Ø The E-Justice portal provides an interface and links with various commissions such as the Human Rights Commission, National Women's Commission, etc., whereby citizens can file their complaints directly for appropriate action.
- Ø A large percentage of legal cases addressed by the kiosks pertain to women, particularly married women. Thus the project has also contributed to the cause of women's empowerment.
- Ø The number of kiosks is not sufficient to make any perceptible impact.
- Ø The kiosks are not viable on a stand alone basis, and given the prevailing circumstances in the rural India they may not be able to generate

significant revenues and may require the financial support to sustain the project activity.

Ø The location of the kiosk in terms of adequate, suitable, accessible and easily visible space presents a problem.

Ø There is not enough clarity regarding the mandate of and services offered by the center, with persons approaching the kiosks for requirements other than registering a case.

Ø While the number of visitors is not large it is steadily increasing. There is a continued need for handholding and capacity building of intended project beneficiaries, for generating more public awareness of services, and for community mobilization and participation.

Ø There is a need for longer term operation or gestation period before assessing the impact, effectiveness and revenue generation capacity in this nature of project.

Some specific recommendations and suggestions for the E-Justice project are also offered on the basis of the evaluation:

Ø There is the perceived need to set up more such centers.

Ø The possibility of renaming centers to ensure clarity of scope and services provided needs to be looked into.

Ø The possibility of locating e-justice centers near the courts or on the premises should be explored to leverage the value of services being provided, as well also to reduce operating costs.

E-Procurement

Ø The future sustainability of the project is ensured by the revenues from transaction charges to be levied against project tenders; the incorporation of performance incentives in the partnership model with development and deployment expenditures as well as training costs passed on to the private partners, to be recovered against service delivery; and also given that the e-procurement program is to replace all other procurement arrangements of the Government of Karnataka, with its complete ownership.

Ø There have been delays in the implementation of the project, given its scale.

Ø The timelines have been ambitious, given that obtaining organizational details, mapping structures and approval processes are time consuming.

Ø There is resistance from field-level government staff whose authority and conventional processes would be impacted by business process reengineering.

Ø The effectiveness and timely implementation of project processes needs to be secured by government support, also taking into account that changes in the administration or political trends can affect project implementation.

Ø There is a need to engage with institutional and other operatives to generate acceptance of the services being offered, as well of and modifications or changes in established business and service delivery processes.

Mahiti Mitra/ Abhiyan

Ø ICT deployment under the project has facilitated better information linkages with various partners, and has been used largely in the area of improving governance through computerization of systems.

Ø The project has successfully built upon the implementing agency's partnership networks and infrastructure to enhance project scope, deliverables and outreach. The implementing agency has effectively

leveraged its strong development base of the organization in region of implementation.

Ø The project demonstrates the success of in-house software development and deployment of innovative applications to bridge the digital divide (also contributing to its sustainability)

Ø The project design supports the decentralization of governance processes, fulfilling the capacity building needs of the PRIs in terms of their governance functions (through the computerization of systems) and also development functions (through supporting better planning and implementation of health, education, natural resource management and livelihood options).

Ø The project demonstrates the need to factor in and work closely with various sections of community, especially in terms of demonstrating the use of ICT applications and building ICT capacity given local realities. A specific strategy to encourage women users would also prove useful.

Ø The current limitations of the project emerge in terms of the lack of backend integration with government and alignment with government services, as the present district administration does not have the ICT backbone to support services offered by the project or the financial sustainability.

Some specific recommendations for Mahiti project emerging directly out of the mid-term evaluation process are listed here as:

Ø It would be useful to explore the possibilities for linking up or integrating with the e-Gram or Common Services Centers Scheme, towards enhancing the scope and effectiveness of the project (and securing replicability).

Ø The Mahiti Mitra project would benefit from technological support for scaling up. There is a perceived need to adapt project functions to provide information access using various technologies.

Rural Livelihoods

Ashwini

Ø The project demonstrates that the drive and motivational capability (and also its reputation and goodwill) of the implementing agency contribute significantly to the project's success.

Ø The implementing agency and project personnel have effectively undertaken the task of capacity building, in the light of the initial challenge of getting local community convinced of virtual concept.

Ø The Ashwini project has benefited from the appropriate selection of ICT tools and equipment, including the effective use of videoconferencing in setting up e-classrooms.

Ø Service delivery space and facilities are being utilized innovatively towards income generation (such as offering advertising slots), and the project has also successfully mobilized public contributions.

Ø In terms of the actual implementation the implementing agency has successfully undertaken the mid-course correction in shifting location of 167 centers to avoid knowledge gap.

Ø The project is to undertake phased application of user charges and on the basis of the popularity of services, expected to achieve sustainability by December 2008.

Ø The project design is characterized by a high level of initial investment, especially in terms of its technology demands and also given infrastructural

constraints as the lack of secure connectivity solutions (the availability of broadband networks for instance would substantially reduce investments in project telecom facilities). It currently also faces the challenge of adequate availability of resource persons. The high costs (that are currently being borne by a strong implementing agency) have an implication for further scalability and replicability of the project.

Ø The acceptance and success of the services being offered is commendable, especially the e-learning facility which is the main revenue generating activity; but given the restricted size of the rural population the project faces a continued need for innovation and diversification of services to ensure sustainability.

Ø The future sustainability of the project can also be enhanced through establishing linkages with external agencies and effectively leveraging the network and set-up given that the Ashwini platform is currently underutilized in terms of both usage and delivery content.

Enterprise Development and Support Services - EDSS

Ø The scope of the project is relevant since it seeks to address gaps in motivating rural youth towards self-enterprise development (an integral component of various centrally and state-government sponsored schemes.)

Ø There appears to be acceptance of the EDSS programme and products by both potential and existing entrepreneurs given the volume of unemployment or underemployment in the region.

Ø There appears to have been effective technological adaptation in terms of offline-online synchronization, which has proved useful in overcoming infrastructural obstacles, as well as in supporting the relevance of ICT-based capacity building tools as a supplement to classroom teaching.

Ø The project team has been maintaining a close relationship with the prospective entrepreneurs having undergone the program and offering appropriate support.

Ø The project is undertaking mid-term correction in terms of the implementing agency working actively on developing relationships with local and private financing institutions with higher rates, given that financial links with banks is weak area (insufficiently addressed in the design and implementation process).

Ø The drawbacks of the project appear in terms of the lack of sufficient with the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) and also with the lead District Rural Development Banks; and this lack can be linked with the difficulties in accessing credit for the prospective entrepreneurs and procedural difficulties.

Ø Lack of support from the decentralized government machinery also appears to have hampered the effectiveness of the project.

Ø Insufficient study of the market scope for the products taken up under the project has marked the selection project, which has proved inappropriate. This has also constrained the prospects of project beneficiaries and limited opportunities for self-employment. These gaps can be attributed to the lack of local supervision by a project manager (supervisory functions are exercised by project functionaries in Delhi rather than in the region of implementation). Low levels of employment generation and training volumes have provided cause for concern.

Ø Currently there is uncertainty of support mechanisms as credit, lack of transparency in processes for the acquisition of funds and finances for start-up, expansion, or upgradation, pointing to inadequate initial planning.

Specific recommendations for the EDSS project that have emerged from the mid-term evaluation are:

Ø The project should necessarily look at establishing linkages with the relevant government schemes (at various levels and ministries such as the Ministry of Rural Development) to secure long-term institutional sustainability.

Ø Appropriate branding in terms of the project space and products can be undertaken.

E-Krishi

Ø The project demonstrates successful leveraging of existing infrastructure, also in terms of the inherent advantages of the Akshaya platform - location of centers, range and variety of services, connectivity, strong networks and linkages, the PPP model, and sustainability of operations.

Ø The project exhibits focus on capacity building, training and awareness programs, publicity campaigns, etc. to secure the involvement of the target beneficiaries or the farmers.

Ø The project provides for inclusion of panchayat and government officials in project process.

Ø The project has attempted to focus on a comprehensive and related set of agriculture information services, with effective tie-ups with information, advisory and service networks.

Ø The wide-spread base network and reliance on internet-based platform provide for ease of scalability and replication. The fee structure for service offered is to be evolved on the basis of market acceptance of pilot services.

Ø One of the key shortcomings of project design and service delivery mechanism appears to be the basic – in terms of insufficient – level of transaction support. There has been limited focus on aggregation and as well as low transaction results and insufficient tracking of transactions with reference to the portal. The resistance or slow acceptance of technology from the farmers also contributes to the low level of transaction, combined with the continued dependence on traditional production and supply chains (middlemen, etc.)

Ø At present the project process reflects inadequacy of input service providers and of institutional buyers, as well as the need for financial support to sustain a range of activities.

Ø The effectiveness of the toll-fee call center in terms of turnaround time, relevance of solutions being provided, and the expense being incurred for set-up require review.

Integrated Citizen Services Delivery

Bangalore-One

Ø The provisions of the Service-Level Agreement for the Bangalore-One project allow for minimizing of government costs and investment, and of the risk of technological obsolescence with responsibilities for investment and scope for innovation shifted to the private partner.

Ø The project demonstrates the workability of the Private-Public Partnership model, with clearly defined partner roles to ensure transparency, accountability, efficiency and manageability, and to avoid ambiguities.

Ø The project agreement and design is characterized by inbuilt performance incentives for the implementing partner; in terms of linking payments with performance to ensure and maximize tangible benefits, and basing

provisions for additional compensation to partners also on additional revenue accruing out of higher aggregate transaction charges.

Ø Customization of technology has been undertaken to serve the project and local needs.

Ø Strong capacity building initiatives have been undertaken for project operators and users.

Ø The efficiency of service delivery and user-friendliness and popularity of services have led to extremely satisfactory revenue generation rates.

Ø The Bangalore-One project and services score over other schemes such as the CSC with 24x7 operations. These centers have also taken over services such as the acceptance of passport application forms.

Ø The success of the project has already led to replication in at least two new initiatives.

Ø The technology-savvy environment (Bangalore) serves as an advantage in the implementation of the ICT-based project and provision of related products and services.

Ø The current major constraint to expansion is the difficulty of finding requisite space in the city for the Bangalore-One centres. The possibility of mini centers with a restricted range of services is being considered as an alternative.

Ø The government partner has not been able to keep up with project commitments in a timely manner. There is a need for business process reengineering within functioning departments as a constant process (in response to the continuing challenge), to ensure efficiency of services and service delivery for citizens.

i-CoSC

Ø Complete ownership by the State IT Department appears to have contributed to a sound institutional framework for the conceptualization, implementation and delivery of the I-CoSC project.

Ø The creation of District level e-Governance Societies provides a mechanism for the participation of the District Collector, Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) and the State Govt. IT Department in the project process, which contributes to the sustainability of the project.

Ø The project demonstrates the willingness of citizens to pay user charges, if they are assured of quick delivery and objective decisions.

Ø The project exhibits the effectiveness of business process reengineering for delivery of range of services; provisions for a strong implementing agency, the development and implementation of relevant software, and processed for the efficiency of record keeping have been built into the project design.

Ø Innovative in-house innovations in ICT applications and field deployments have contributed to project sustenance and replicability.

Ø The project objective of integrating with the National e-Governance Program (NeGP) or the Common Services Centers (CSCs) scheme has inherent scalability potential for the project. It also demonstrated the utility of integrating with the broader framework rather investing in competing structures, thus ensuring effectiveness and value of services and service delivery.

Ø Integration with local self-government and PRIs has been successfully accomplished, with a strong focus on inclusion. The housing of the i-CoSC

centers in local self-government bodies' premises appears to be a useful institutional arrangement.
Ø The project is currently faced with a range of infrastructural concerns in terms of connectivity, human resources, equipment, software and other related operational issues such as hardware maintenance.
Ø The location and design of the service delivery kiosk are a concern, given the need to provide a congenial space where citizens can avail of services.
Ø Defining service delivery standards and attending to workflow implementation emerge as continuing project needs.
Ø Delays from within Government processes have led to delays in the delivery of project services. The multiplicity of authorities involved also raises accountability issues.
Ø There is a continued need for strong social mobilization among target beneficiaries; and for awareness generation and capacity building to enhance receptiveness to technology among project officials – especially from the government departments.
Ø There is a need for balancing the demand for and supply of services, and to look at providing multiple services to generate volume of transactions. Even with constant connectivity there is a constant need for value added, customized, local language content, value added services, to account for enormous infrastructure costs.

Specific recommendations for the i-CoSC project emerging from the mid-term evaluation are:
Ø To look at advertising in the local language.
Ø To take up the improvement of waiting areas in the kiosks.
Ø To look at the formation of new committees which including panchayat officials and local community leaders to ensure wider participation in decision-making and for promoting community management (moving towards community ownership and operation) of services and resources.

Village Information System
Ø The relevance of the project is supported by the fact that it is already being taken up for replication.
Ø Project operations have attained financial sustainability in number of villages of implementation, with successful leveraging of existing infrastructure of Gujarat Government.
Ø The project acts upon the perceived need for information services and demonstrates a focus on offering a bouquet of services, and integrating with existing programs as well for provision of maximum services without duplication.
Ø The introduction of Village Computer Entrepreneur to manage kiosk in entrepreneurial mode is a project innovation. The project design includes a revenue sharing mechanism as an incentive for VCE to earn extra income and explore various services.
Ø The project implementation process has included the undertaking of needs assessment, project briefing for the local people and community involvement to ensure relevance and acceptance of services. The objective of inclusion built into project design.
Ø Integration of the project with local structures has been carried out successfully, with the housing of the VIS center on Panchayat premises proving a sound institutional arrangement.

Ø Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have been effectively included in the project design.
Ø The long-term integration of the pilot into CSC scheme ensures the sustainability of the project.
Ø Responses and returns on the project provide the learning that citizens are wiling to pay for efficient and reliable services.
Ø The project design has incorporated the needs of business process reengineering and technological innovation.
Ø Strong project branding has been carried out.
Ø The project has been hampered by delays in the selection of entrepreneurs and due to connectivity issues, also leading to entrepreneurs leaving the project on account of limited services and revenue.
Ø There is a need for stronger training programs for the entrepreneurs.
Ø Project expenditure and budget revision are currently of concern to project partners.

Some specific recommendations for the VIS project that have emerging from the Mid-Term evaluation are in terms of:
Ø Focusing on the securing the direct involvement of District Development Officers in the project.
Ø Incorporating prominent and more local language display into the project implementation space.
Ø Providing more the comfort and accessibility of the centers to the users of project services.

Women's Empowerment

Mahiti Manthana
Ø The project supports the acknowledgement and inclusion of women in information networks, and of supporting community participation. The project highlights the relevance of alternative and bottom-up approaches.
Ø The project involved an intensive preparatory planning process by the partners including needs assessment, village mapping, interaction with local opinion leaders and other group assessments. Clear selection criteria have been established with reference to the location of resource center, with reference to size of target population, accessibility of center, and infrastructure conditions such as electricity supply.
Ø The suggestions for selection of target villages have not been supported by ground realities (in terms of sufficiently responsive women's groups to run and sustain the initiative), leading to project delays. Locating this gap in the wider decision-making mechanisms and process for project implementation partners underlines communication inefficiencies and inadequate planning.
Ø There appear to be related concerns of ownership of the project, project responsibilities and implementation. Inadequate orientation of partner organization to ICT, lack of sufficient coordination and convergence, little or no trickle-down of decision-making to the districts and issues of adequate compensation to those involved can be cited as the specific concerns in this regard.
Ø Project needs demand a suitable and neutral space to conduct orientations and enable discussion. However the lack of infrastructure as well as problems in acquiring appropriate locations for the center has proved to be

an enormous constraint on project success along with problems of slow partner response and staff turnover.

Ø The lack of established project processes hampers the chances of project replicability. The sustainability of the women's groups is not dependent on the resource center or ICT applications, and scaling up for now is possible mainly within the base framework of the Mahila Samkhya Kendras. Replication or scaling up otherwise remains dependent upon the interest generated amongst the women's groups.

Ø The project is being implemented under challenging social conditions and conditioning, especially relevant to women's participation. There is a need to acknowledge and align to the special needs and contexts of various women's groups, with reference to constraining factors as caste, class, conflict, access to resources including technology, as well as their receptiveness to technology-based services.

Ø There is a strongly perceived need for community orientation to generate community receptiveness, and eventual partnership in and ownership in the resource centers to ensure sustainability. This can also take up the need for diversified services for adequate revenue generation.

Ø The project evaluation highlights the need for a well thought out strategy to bring together grassroots organizations and technology innovators as an immediate challenge.

Ø There is a need for a long gestation period before evaluation can be effective. In this case there is also the need to acknowledge that the process of women's empowerment cannot be restricted to program mode.

Ø The project situations bring out the requirement for ICT interventions to be preceded by the perceived need of target community for effective implementation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

At the very outset, it can be said that the mid-term evaluation of the selected projects highlights the relevance of information and communication technologies for development, across the thematic orientations. Despite varying degrees of progress and the nature of successes and failures so far, the initiatives prove that ICTs can be successfully harnessed towards the ends of efficient, effective, transparent and accessible governance, promotion of rural livelihoods, providing citizen services, and for women's empowerment. ICT platforms by and large also enhance the scalability and replicability of such initiatives.

The project evaluation outcomes also offer a number of lessons for the broad area of ICTD initiative in the country, and across similar development circumstances globally. For instance, projects and initiatives need to be informed by local conditions and requirements, and by infrastructural realities of the country and specific region. It is important also to acknowledge the novelty of technology for the masses in developing countries, necessitating enduring campaigns and programs for awareness and capacity building of all associated with the project – including the beneficiaries, functionaries and stakeholders.

Project realities highlight the relevance of partnerships and the need for detailed and precise partnership or service level agreements to facilitate effective and timely implementation and maintaining quality and efficiency of operations, for strong preparatory processes in terms of practical planning for project costs, budgets, and appropriate and feasible timelines. The long gestation period required for ICTD projects is brought out in a number of cases.

The need for strong implementing agencies, suitable location of service delivery outlets, balancing the demand and supply of services, strong coordination between project partners and implementing agencies, establishing effective project linkages and strong backend management, aligning with other initiatives (government or otherwise) in the field as well as with government information programs, regular data collection and coordination necessary for development planning are some other lessons that are sharply brought out.

Infrastructure remains a concern necessitating technological innovations, and strong technological support integral to project design remains an asset. The enormous capacity and potential of ICT platform can be effectively leveraged to offer range of public and private services and support the right to information. An information and development orientation is essential for ICTD initiatives to thrive.

The selected projects substantiate the reality of enormous investment costs and long gestation period for return on investment in ICTD projects on the whole, which can in offset with solutions such as engaging in innovative revenue generation services and activities for operational sustainability, and leveraging partnerships and even existing infrastructure and networks for efficiency and saving on costs.

Community involvement remains essential to maximize utility and utilization of services, and there appears to be a continued need for awareness and capacity building programs to generate acceptance of services and service delivery mechanisms among beneficiaries and also project functionaries and partners (given thoroughgoing business process reengineering needs, with especial reference to government partners).

<u>Some Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Programs</u>

The lessons derived from the mid-term evaluation of the eleven pilot projects can be translated into a set of general recommendations and suggestions for future programs. These recommendations and suggestions are discussed here under appropriate heads as follows.

Intensive Preparatory Process and Needs Assessment
It is extremely important to allow for an intensive preparatory process wherein needs assessment and initial engagement with the target environment and communities can be carried out. This allows for the project objectives, design and implementation framework and proposed services and products to be informed by and customized to local needs and requirements. Additionally, it can assist the implementing agency to account for and also seek alternatives to overcome local constraints pertaining to infrastructure (electricity, connectivity, etc.) and social conditions (local priorities, access to resources, community receptiveness to technology) through solutions including technological innovations and undertaking local awareness and capacity building programs. The high levels investment and long gestation period of ICTD projects needs to be kept in mind as well. Adequate time needs to be allocated for planning and obtaining information for the design, preparation for and implantation of the project, and target setting in terms of scale, scope, project costs and budgets and feasible timelines requires a practical approach, keeping in mind the project context.

Appropriate Partnerships, Clear and Detailed Partnership and Service Level Agreements and Effective Coordination Mechanisms for Effective and Timely Project Implementation
Projects can benefit from the identification and negotiating of appropriate partnerships and alliances which can help secure requisite institutional, technological, infrastructural, financial, and also local support. The relevance of the Public-Private Partnership Model can be cited, though the terms of the partnership and other extenuating conditions can be worked out on a project-specific basis. Clarity and precision of a detailed partnership or service level agreement can facilitate effective and timely implementation on the basis of clearly defined partner roles and project responsibilities. Establishing strong coordination mechanisms for project partners can enable timely and appropriate decision-making and responses to project challenges. Incentives for partner interest and performance can be successfully incorporated into the partnership model.

Strong Implementing Agency
The infrastructural strength, network presence, and wherewithal of the implementing agency all have implications for the success, sustainability, scalability and replication of project. Dedication ownership and championship of the project and its objectives had proved an advantage in all of the projects evaluation. The lack of ownership and lack of clarity and commitment regarding project obligations can also be seen to have also served as an obstacle to project progress.

Effective Project Linkages and Alignment with Larger Framework, Strong Backend Management
Project objectives can benefit from the establishment of effective project linkages with service providers and other agencies, which benefits are passed on to the user

communities in terms of the range and relevance of available services and facilities. Efficient service delivery in this regard is also predicated on strong backend management. The effectiveness, relevance, and non-duplication of services also requires that project partners align with (or even integrate with, as demonstrated in a number of cases) the larger framework in terms of existing schemes and programs with similar objective that are being undertaken by the government or other agencies (such as the e-governance framework, national employment and other schemes). Aligning with government information programs is also useful, so that project beneficiaries have access to relevant information.

Ongoing Awareness Generation and Capacity Building Programs for Project Beneficiaries, Functionaries and Stakeholders

The novelty of technology for the masses and even for project personnel and partners on many occasions demands ongoing awareness generation and capacity building programs, related to technological possibilities and ICT applications. Tools such as local language advertisements and continued hand-holding of the users of project services can be used to popularize these services. The impact of project objectives on the existing business processes of the project partners also highlights the need to attend to the reorientation of project functionaries and stakeholders.

Appropriate Location of Service Delivery Outlets, Selection of Services, Technological Support

The location of the service delivery outlet (telecenter, kiosk etc.) is critical in terms of its accessibility the comfort and ease offered to the target users, in addition to the efficiency of service delivery. Acquiring an appropriate location is proving to be a challenge which can allow for the consideration of alternatives such as tie-ups with relevant institutional structures (such as local government institutions) that can house these outlets, or setting up mini centers where appropriate. There is a need to balance the demand and supply of services within the local context, in terms of community needs and market realities. Strong technological support integral to project design remains an asset.

Leveraging the Potential of Infrastructure and ICT-based Platforms and Supplementary Revenue Generation Activities

The existing ICT-based platforms remain under-utilized, given their enormous capacity and potential. Both infrastructural concerns and the high investment costs that ICTD projects on the whole entail can be offset (to some degree) by leveraging this platform to offer a range of public and private services. In the light of these investment costs and long gestation period for return on investment, it is useful to look for innovative revenue generation services and activities for operational sustainability as well.

Project Design, Processes and Implementation

It is suggested that the project design incorporate feedback and corrective mechanisms to enhance the responsiveness to local and other needs. Regular data collections and monitoring and evaluation are required to support efficiency in project processes and for development planning. Strong local management and supervision proves essential for effective service delivery. The content of the services can also be enhanced with a focus on strong content develop and review, that can be taken up in-house or through appropriate linkages. A point that needs to be highlighted is that there is a need for established project process for both efficient operations and replication.

Community Participation and Ownership

Community involvement is essential to maximize utility and utilization of services. Participation of the community in project processes, towards eventual community ownership and operation of project resources and activities is emerging as an important element in ensuring the success and meeting the identified objectives of the ICTD projects.

APPENDIX: PROJECT ASSESSMENT INDICATORS AND RANKING CHART

S. No.	Project	Implementing Agency	State	Theme	Evaluated By	PARAMETERS/ PROJECT RANKINGS														COMMENTS/ ADDITIONAL REMARKS
						Concept and Initial Design	Implementation and Timelines	Innovative/ Effective ICT Use	Effective/ Appropriate Partnership Model	Community Participation	Effective Capacity Building/ BPR	Relevance/ Impact (referred against project objectives)	Responsiveness to Local Needs	Popularity and Public Response	Sustainability	Replicability	Scalability	Support to Decentralization Objectives and Processes	Gender Mainstreaming/ Promoting Gender Equality	
1	Ashwini	Byrraju Foundation	Andhra Pradesh	Rural Livelihoods	KSKSAI	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	NA	High	Replicability is high within the state and moderate outside the state
2	Bangalore –One	Dept. of Administrative Reforms, Govt. of Karnataka	Karnataka	Integrated Citizen Services	KSKSAI	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Replicability is high within the state and moderate outside the state as it demands readiness of the administration
3	Decentralized Rural Information System & Technology Initiatives (DRISTI)	West Bengal State Rural Development Agency	West Bengal	Governance	Chetan Sharma	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Supports Decentralized Planning, Governance & Gender Involvement. Project is in the process of being replicated in various parts of the state
4	e-Justice	Center for Good Governance	Andhra Pradesh	Governance (Access to Justice)	KSKSAI	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	Moderate	High	High	Low	High	High	High	High	
5	e-Krishi (Agri-Business Centers)	Kerala State IT Mission	Kerala	Rural Livelihoods	KSKSAI	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	High	High	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	High	High	Replicability is high within the state and low outside the state as it demands a well spread out platform like Akshaya
6	e-Procurement	Dept. of Administrative Reforms, Govt. of Karnataka	Karnataka	Governance	KSKSAI	High	Moderate	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	NA	Replicability is high within the state and moderate outside the state
7	Enterprise Development Service	Development Alternatives	Madhya Pradesh/Punjab	Rural Livelihoods	Chetan Sharma	High	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low	Lack of convergence with the Govt. schemes, lack of effective community participation, efficient project management, sustainable credit delivery mechansim, forward-backward market linkages
8	Integrated Community Service Centers (i-CoSC)	Dept. of IT, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh	Himachal Pradesh	Integrated Citizen Services	Chetan Sharma	High	Low	High	Low	Low	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Moderate	Serves as an excellent replication model under NeGP, and is sustainable due to strong ownership of the HP Govt. Substantial benefits for the citizens.
9	Mahiti Manthana	IT for Change	Karnataka	Women Empowerment	Chetan Sharma	Moderate	High	High	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	Low	High	High	Empowerment cannot be ensured in project mode; lack of ownership/buy-ins from the local partners, lack of effective content, learning aids in the telecentre
10	Mahiti Mitra	Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan	Gujarat	Governance	Chetan Sharma	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Supports Decentralized Planning, Governance & Gender Involvement & MDGs overall.
11	Village Information System	Gujarat Informatics Limited	Gujarat	Integrated Citizen Services	Chetan Sharma	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	The project is a pre-cursor to the NeGP and CSC scheme in many ways.