

e-Suvidha

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ABSTRACT

e-Suividha is an e-governance package designed for community information centres (CICs; <http://www.cic.nic.in>) of the north-eastern states of India. This web-enabled software is developed to automate a number of citizen-centric services being delivered by the district/block administration. The current version of e-Suividha provides a single window facility for submitting application forms for various services and allows them to monitor the status of the application till its processing is complete. It allows the head of the office to monitor the overall performance of various officers responsible for delivering these services. The software has client and server components developed mainly using ASP.net.

Introduction

August 17, 2002, was a landmark day for the north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim, when CICs were dedicated to the people of this region. CICs were conceptualised as a tool for bridging the digital divide. These centres are located at the blocks, which are the lowermost administrative hubs in the implementation of socio-economic development programmes in the country. These CICs are equipped with computer and communication infrastructure and allow the local population to get connected with the digital world. This opened up new possibilities, hitherto unthinkable, of providing better government services to the people by exploiting the installed ICT infrastructure of CICs. Many citizen-centric services were designed and developed specially to exploit this opportunity. e-Suividha is an attempt in that direction. It attempts to provide a flexible e-governance setup where citizens can submit their requests for services at a single location and monitor its status. The administrators can monitor how his or her subordinates are providing services, and consequently the administrator can initiate correcting steps. This brings in transparency to the process of providing services at the local level and reduces harassment of the citizens. In a nutshell, e-Suividha uses information technology to simplify the processes of government functioning and to bring about simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance.

Existing Setup

Generally, in the existing administrative setup, when an applicant submits his or her application along with supporting documents, the application goes through a number of steps of verification and validation. These verification and validations could be those of supporting documents submitted with the application form or physical verification of place of residence, police verifications of the background of the applicant, etc. Once verification, validation, etc., are over, each official gives his or her comment and the whole process continues till it reaches the final authority in that setup, who gives the verdict about eligibility of the applicant for getting that service. As depicted in Fig. 1 the system cannot be called citizen-centric. For example, a citizen who requires an income certificate, first approaches his block development office to know the procedures for getting such a certificate. Then he submits his application with the required documents to the person concerned. On receipt of the application, it is first checked whether the application is complete and all required documents are submitted. Then enquiry is done to confirm the facts. On the basis of the enquiry report, all the documents are validated, and on completion of the validation process, the income certificate is issued. When these processes are on, the citizen has to visit the office many times till he finally gets the certificate.



Citizen



Government Office

Fig. 1 *Pictorial Presentation of the existing system*

The New System

In our attempt to automate this process, the first step considered was to automate the application collection process and create a system that can handle all types of application needed to avail various government services (single-window system/ government gateway). This will include printouts of the form, giving detailed information regarding supporting documents if any, acceptance of all types of applications for services provided by the government officer and facility for monitoring of application status. The system needs to be very flexible so that any one with proper authority can

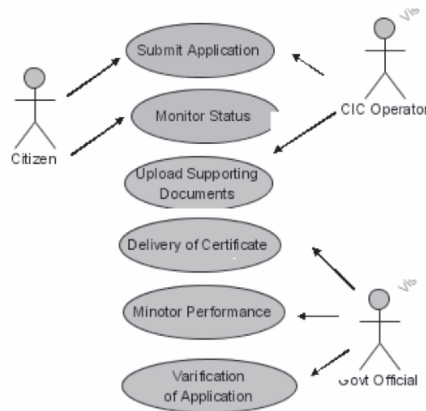


Fig. 2 Use Case Diagram of e-Suvidha

add new services to the existing system without much difficulty. At the next stage it was decided to have online verification and validations of the supporting documents and automate appending comments with the application and automate. Other verification processes like police verification, which are currently carried out at offices other than that of the block development officer, can be automated at a later stage when required infrastructure for that is in place. System requirements for such a setup are described in Fig. 2. The system also provides a mechanism for government officials to monitor overall performance of his or her office in providing services, through backlog reports, current status reports, etc.

System Architecture and Technology

It has been decided that the software would be a web-based application. The software provides an automated single-window system, where an applicant can submit application for any type of service provided by that office.

e-Suvidha treats CICs as ‘application acceptance centres’ (AACs) and different government offices as ‘application processing centres’ (APCs). AACs are designated to work as a single-window system where application forms for any government services may be submitted. APCs are government departments where these applications are actually processed.

The e-Suvidha application has four modules: administration, processing, application status and AAC.

- The administrative module (Fig. 3) is used to set up the name of the services, expected time in days to complete processing of application for that service and details of documents required along with application to create user-id and password for the department that process the application, etc.

- The processing module is used by the people at district/sub-district level to process applications. The official here can view and update the status of the applications received. Once the processing of application is complete, the corresponding certificate can be generated automatically.
- The AAC module (Fig. 4) enables the CIC blocks to act as single-window facilitation centres for accepting application for various services. It is used to capture information and upload the information received from the applicant along with scanned supporting documents.
- The application module enables the applicant to view the status of the application submitted at AAC using the application number from the web site given in the acknowledgement slip.

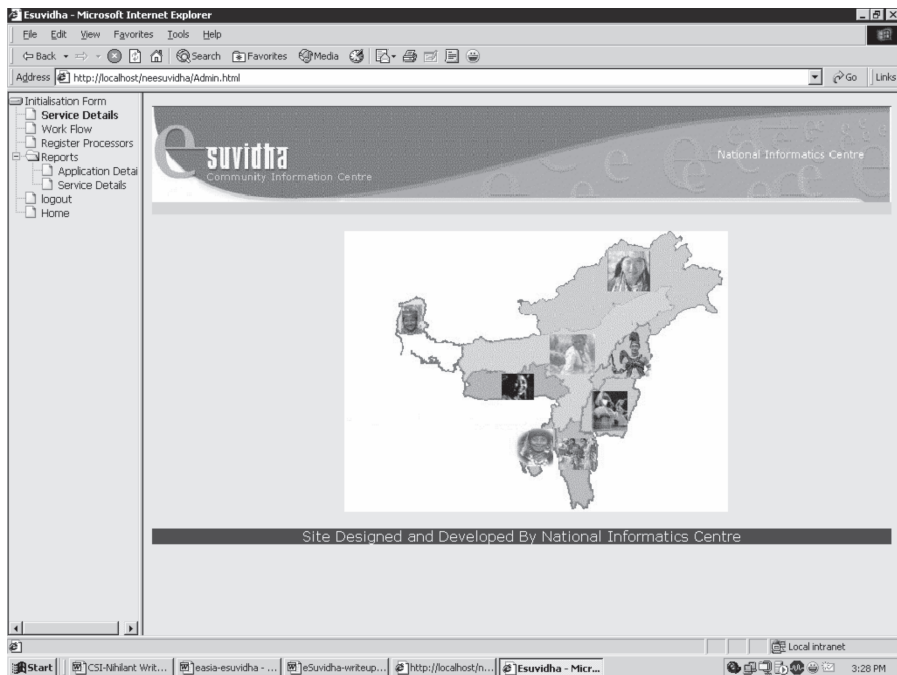


Fig. 3 Administration Module

A top-level view of the overall architecture is shown in Fig. 5.

e-Suvidha has been developed using ASP.Net. The interface used by the CICs provides the facility for capturing information and uploading the information received from the applicant along with scanned supporting documents. Updating of application status is done by the APCs over the internet through a web-based interface. A web-based interface is also used for various administrative purposes and reports.

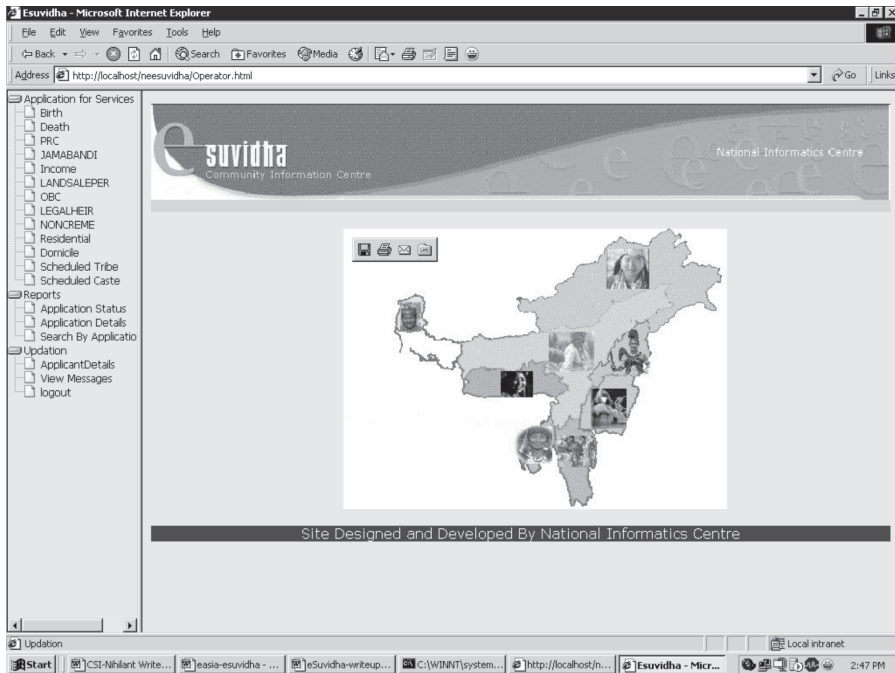


Fig. 4 *Application Acceptance Center Module*

After setting up of each service using the administration module, the AAC can start accepting application forms from the citizens for the configured services. The application then reaches the officer at the APC, who would process the application. Officers update online the status of the application after a processing step is complete. Once the application is being processed the applicant can monitor the status of his or her application through the internet without visiting the office. The system also provides a mechanism for government officials to monitor the overall performance of his or her office in providing services, through backlog reports, current status reports, etc.

Achievements and Benefits

e-Suvidha has been installed at about 100 CICs so far. States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Tripura have taken the lead in installation of the setup. The installation process involves configuring e-Suvidha regarding different services provided by it. Since successful implementations require full cooperation of the block/district administration, CIC operators have sensitised the local administration about the capability of the software. Training and awareness programmes were conducted for the BDOs and CIC operators regarding the software. In order to accelerate

the process initiative at the highest level is being taken, for example, the IT secretary of Arunachal Pradesh has already written to all deputy commissioners to take initiative in implementing e-Suvidha across the state.



Submit application & documents
Process Application



Community information server at centres (CIC)
District/State Headquarters



View status of the application
CIC / Information Kiosks

Fig. 5 *e-Suvidha Architecture*

Implementation of e-Suvidha at CIC Pangin, Ramle Bango, Along, Roing Mebo, and Nacho, of the state of Arunachal Pradesh is exemplary one. The state government has collected information from all administrative units regarding services and process involved in providing the service and the administrative level that provides the service. This information is used as basic input for configuring e-Suvidha.

e-Suvidha generally accepts application forms for SGSY (Sampoorna Gramin Swarojar Yojana), IAY (Indira Awas Yojana), income certificate for villagers falling under BPL, income certificate for villagers for old-age pensions, character certificates for villagers, financial sound certificates for villagers, etc.

In Assam CICs of Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur, Kamrup and Dhemaji districts have taken a lead role in implementing e-Suvidha. In the state of

Manipur and Meghalaya, CICs of Senapati and East Kashi Hills are very active in implementing and using e-Suvidha. In all these states, e-Suvidha has generally been configured for various schemes for self-employment, certificates like those for below poverty line, income, domicile and licenses for video hall, guns, etc. Some user charges are also being taken for these services.

e-Suvidha brings in a number of benefits, such as:

- Hassle-free process for the applicant – the applicant goes to the nearest CIC to submit his or her application and can check the status of the application on the web. The applicant need not visit the actual office to submit his or her application or to know the status.
- Transparency in dealing – the applicant goes to the acceptance centre and does not have to deal with the officials who actually process it.
- Greater monitoring and control over the office performance of staff – details of pendency at each stage is maintained and is available on-line for monitoring by the head of office.

Conclusion

Application processing in government is mainly paper-based and not very citizen-friendly. Generally, in the existing administrative setup, when an applicant submits his or her application along with supporting documents, the application goes through a number of steps of verification and validation. The citizen has to visit various desks several times before the document is finally available to him or her.

With the implementation of e-Suvidha, citizens can submit their requests for services at a single location and monitor their status. The administrators can monitor the efficiency of his or her subordinates in delivering these services; and consequently will be in a position to initiate correcting steps in improving the efficiency. This brings in transparency to the process of providing services at the local level and reduces harassment of the citizens. In a nutshell, e-Suvidha uses information technology ‘to simplify the processes of government functioning to bring efficiency and transparency in governance’.