

Helping voices of people to reach out

Akhilesh Kumar Singh | TNN

Kanpur: IAS officer Amod Kumar always dreamt of using his IIT knowledge for a social cause. His dream was realised when in 2004 he launched Lokvani or voice of the people — a digital G2C (government to citizen) initiative. And in July 2005, the state government issued an order mandating all the districts to replicate the Lokvani model.

"More than 80,000 people have sought relief through the Lokvani in Sitapur and above 90% of the cases have been resolved," says a visibly proud Kumar, district magistrate, Faizabad. He was the DM, Sitapur when he launched the initiative.

The concept has received worldwide acclaim. It was the finalist at Stockholm challenge in May, 2006. Back home, it received the Golden Icon award for outstanding performance in service delivery at the 9th National Conference on e-governance and the Manthan-AIF award, 2006. Besides, IIM-Lucknow and Ahmedabad have done case studies on the concept. The two institutes took it up as basis for academic discussion among students as well as the faculty. Says Archana Shukla, IIM-Lucknow faculty, who presented her paper at an e-governance conference in Poland last year, "Lokvani has laid a firm foundation for e-governance in the state. We hope that it would be a torchbearer for other such G2C efforts across the country." She was taken by surprise at the overwhelming response the concept received in Poland.

The concept works on a convenient format. Citizens don't need to visit the district office for various government services; instead they can avail of the services at the *tehsil*, block and town levels. Besides, services like land records, arms licence application status and GPF accounts



of basic education are available online now. To ensure transparency, details of development works, ration allotment to fair price shop dealers, money sent to Gaon Sabhas etc. are made available to people. The most popular service till date has been Online Public Grievance Redressal, which has received more than 80,000 complaints in Sitapur alone. The Lokvani system not only gives citizens an avenue to track the progress of their grievance, but also provides the DM an effective tool to monitor the performance of various departments.

Kumar conceptualised Lokvani in September 2004 af-

ter commissioning a study of similar initiatives in the districts of Jhalawad (Rajasthan) and Dhar (Madhya Pradesh). The study revealed the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts. Lokvani was accordingly designed to improve upon them. "The feedback from the two states was not encouraging as the concept had not worked there. Subsequently, we reduced the loopholes of the previous concept and introduced a few new things," says Kumar, a civil engineering graduate from IIT-Kanpur. By December 2004, 13 Lokvani centres were set up. Today, the state boasts of 80 centres.

Feedback from kiosks revealed that more than 50% of the complaints were being resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. "We got the response in a week's time once we logged the complaint through Lokvani," says Gita Kumari from Sitapur town.

The going has been good so far. Understandably, Kumar has major plans for future. "More services like online registration of death/births, certificates for SC/STs, domicile etc will be offered." Moreover, kiosks will be opened at the Nyay Panchayat level too.

However, challenges remain. "The system has to evolve in a way so as to reduce the dependence on the DM's direct interest in the project. This is possible if DM's progress is monitored and compared at the state level. The financial viability of the kiosks at the village level is a hurdle, which can be overcome by creative ways to distribute services and commercial products," says Kumar.

