

E-Governance for Information Dissemination Bhoomi, Karnataka

The Background

In a people-friendly move, the Chief Minister of Karnataka launched the first of the Records of Rights, Tenancy and Cultivation (RTC) Information Kiosks in Maddur taluka of Mandya district on 6 February 2001. This initiative was taken by the Government of Karnataka under its declared information technology policy of utilizing information technology for rural development.

The Thrust

The thrust of the project was on the following:

- Facilitating easy maintenance and updating land records after:
- Irrigation/natural calamities/consolidation/ transfer of ownership
- Providing comprehensive scrutiny to make land records tamper proof
- Providing required support to implement developmental programmes that require data on distribution of landholdings.

The Strategy

Following were the strategic components of e-governance for rural development in the Karnataka initiative:

- ✚ Facilitating the preparation of an annual set of records in mechanized processes like collection of land revenue, updating cropping pattern, etc
- ✚ Facilitating a variety of standard and ad hoc queries on land data
- ✚ Facilitating the farmers easy access to their records through various kiosks and web
- ✚ Providing farmers an easy mechanism to lodge the request for updating land records
- ✚ Facilitating usage of this database by courts, banks and other government agencies

The Process

The data entry software **Bhoomi**, developed by the NIC, Bangalore, is very comprehensive and takes into account all the divisional variations in land records maintenance. The initial data entry is done at the taluka level through private data entry agencies. The data entry agencies use the data entry software to enter data in offline. Once the data entry is completed, printouts are taken by the data entry agencies and then validated by the village accountants by comparing against their original land record books called RTC or Record of Rights, Tenancy and Cultivation. The data after correction is then ported to the Bhoomi software.

Bhoomi provides for printing of land records as and when required. It incorporates the process of online updation to ensure that the RTCs provided to the farmers are in sync with the time. When a change of ownership takes place through sale or inheritance, farmers can file for a mutation of the land record at the Bhoomi centre. All the mutations to the land records database are made directly on the computer so as to ensure that data on computer remain current. The Government of Karnataka has passed a rule that as and when the land records scheme is operationalized in a taluka, manually written land records or RTC will become null and void. Only computerised RTC, duly signed by the authorised signatory, will be valid for all legal purposes. A notification to the above effect would be issued in a taluka only when the scheme is firmly in place in that particular taluka.

Record Kiosks

Land record kiosks are being set up in every taluka office in Karnataka. Landowners would be able to obtain copies of their land records on payment of Rs.15. The land records database will be connected to banks and lending institutions to facilitate the use of the database by these institutions for providing crop loans. The Government of Karnataka also plans to allow the high court and other district and taluka courts to use this database in their judicial and administrative work. In future, it also intends to permit private internet service providers (ISPs) to use this database as their value addition content and charge them a user-fee. This would help the Government of Karnataka make the land record project a self-financed scheme. The government also has plans to gradually let the information kiosks (which are proposed to be set up by private parties in Karnataka in rural areas) use these databases to provide land records at the farmers doorstep, although they may not be signed in the beginning by anybody and would be more for informative purposes only.

People's response at the taluka level has been overwhelming. Queues can be seen at the kiosks of the taluka centres where they have been operationalized and people are more than willing to pay a nominal fee of Rs.15 for getting a copy of the land records instantaneously.

Salient Features

- The software incorporates the state-of-the-art bio-logon metric system from Compaq, which authenticates various users on the basis of their fingerprint. This ensures that nobody can hack the system by imitating other users.
- The Bhoomi software has the provision to scan original mutation orders and notices served on interested groups by revenue inspectors who are the authorised personnel to pass such orders in the field. Both documents are scanned to ensure that future responsibility is fixed on revenue inspectors by showing the original documents

signed by them, but interested parties cannot claim in court that they were not served with the necessary notice before the effect of mutation.

- Bhoomi enables the administrators to generate various type of reports on the type of soil, number of land owners owning land above a certain average, type of crops grown in a taluka and their percentage, etc. Such information enables administrators and policy-makers to make appropriate decisions.

Funding

The Computerisation of Land Records is a centrally sponsored scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. The total expenditure on the scheme is Rs. 2.9 lakh, which includes expenditures on the cost of computers, data entry and related costs. However, the fingerprint authenticating system and the touch-skin information kiosks are totally a Government of Karnataka initiative and have been installed at an additional cost of Rs. 4.9 lakh. Therefore the government's involvement is significant and the innovations introduced by the Revenue Department in Karnataka are a major effort to make land records completely transparent and easily accessible. The fool proof system makes the revenue officials accountable for all the entries made in the land records.

Major Achievements

The achievements of Bhoomi Project include the following:

- It presently serves 70 lakh farmers across more than 170 kiosks in the state.
- It has created transparency of records for the farmers and the administrators. Most farmers have direct access to information about their properties at all times. All necessary records are available to them without the long delays that usually accompany applications to village accountants.
- These records are available free of human arbitration and provide support for development programmes with the help of valuable land records data to departments like Agriculture, Industry and Planning.
- It facilitates easy preparation of annual records like land revenue.

Lessons Learnt

Land record management has always been a weak area in state administration. The centrally sponsored scheme of computerisation of land records is a significant step to strengthen land record management at the national level. Karnataka's Bhoomi Project represents an innovative approach in this direction by providing transparency as well as easy and quick access to land records, with an added advantage of security and reliability to

the farmers. The Computerised Land Record System has succeeded in including all taluka-level revenue officials in the e-governance efforts of the Karnataka government. The system can be successfully replicated in other states, provided the Government of India considers enhancing the financial allocation to the states and the state governments also make a commitment to implement the system as has been done in Karnataka.
