



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM



Public Service Delivery Innovations with Citizen-Centred Digital Transformation



Experiences from Assam Citizen-Centric Service Delivery Project



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1. Introduction

1.1. Efficiency of Service Delivery

Efficient delivery of high-quality public service is at the heart of state-society relations, good governance, and inclusive development. Across many countries, governments have harnessed the transformative potential of digital technologies to help reduce complexities, reengineer cumbersome inflexible processes; and support real improvements in service delivery performance and outcomes.

However, the early efforts of digitizing services were concentrated around the needs, processes, and functions of the service providers; and the needs and concerns of service recipients remained mostly at the periphery. In contrast, the citizen-centred public service design approach places citizens at the centre of decision-making processes; and the government as a service provider designs service delivery solutions that are relevant to various citizen segments and tailored to their circumstances.



Putting citizens at the heart of public service delivery provides a two-fold benefit: it increases citizens' satisfaction and trust in government and makes public administrations more efficient.

2. Assam Right to Public Services Portal

Designed around the objective of enabling citizens to access services under the Right to Public Service legislation, the Assam Citizen Centric Service Delivery Project (ACCSDP) adopts an integrated approach, addressing both the supply-side and demand-side attributes to mitigate accessibility and accountability-related challenges. This was attempted in an institutional and sectoral content where public service delivery ecosystem was characterized by fragmented manual methods dependent on voluminous paperwork, routine procedural delays, and cumbersome processes that demand citizen applicants' multiple visits to government offices and standing in line. ACCSD Project thus focused on timely and efficient delivery of RTPS services to citizens using technology-mediated means: (i) electronic



Figure 1 Low-Code No-Code Technology Architecture powering ARTPS Portal Functionaries

¹Assam Right to Public Service Act, 2012 was enacted the RTPS Act in 2012 with the objective of ensuring delivery of notified public services in a time bound manner. It was amended subsequently in 2019 with the provision of establishing Assam State Commission for Right to Public Services.

submission and acceptance of citizens' applications for select RTPS services; (ii) rule-based digital processing of citizens' applications by concerned department; and (iii) delivery of digitally authenticated certificates / documents with facilities for secure download by the applicant. This has been made operational with Assam Right to Public Services (ARTPS) Portal, which was inaugurated in October 2021 by Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman, in the presence of Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma. In addition to facilitating citizens' integrated access to 110+ services of the government, the multilingual ARTPS Portal is designed for seamless data exchange with other enterprise-grade digital applications of the Government of Assam; and automated tracking of individual service requests and appeals, actions taken by the designated officer, and rule-based escalation in case of time overruns in the delivery of applied service.

Given that RTPS services are extensively availed by the poor in order to obtain documentation needed for accessing a range of programmatic benefits and social protection entitlements, their easy and timely receipt positively touches the lives of people. It is therefore no surprise that more than 4.10 million service applications have been registered on ARTPS Portal over the very first year of its inception; and more than 85% of these service requests have been delivered within the prescribed timelines. Beneficiary feedback gathered from select RTPS service recipients on their overall experience reflects an excellent 98% satisfaction level; and more than 96% have acknowledged receiving the service 'before or on time' with excellent response quality.

3. Citizen-Centered Process Redesign

Applying citizen-centric principles implies a fundamental change in how services are designed and delivered. With the objective of making this happen and ensuring services are well-designed, efficient, user-friendly, and accessible to all, ACCSD Project has made a substantial investment in business process reengineering to get service delivery methods simpler: eliminating unnecessary documentation, streamlining back-office procedures and administrative approvals, making

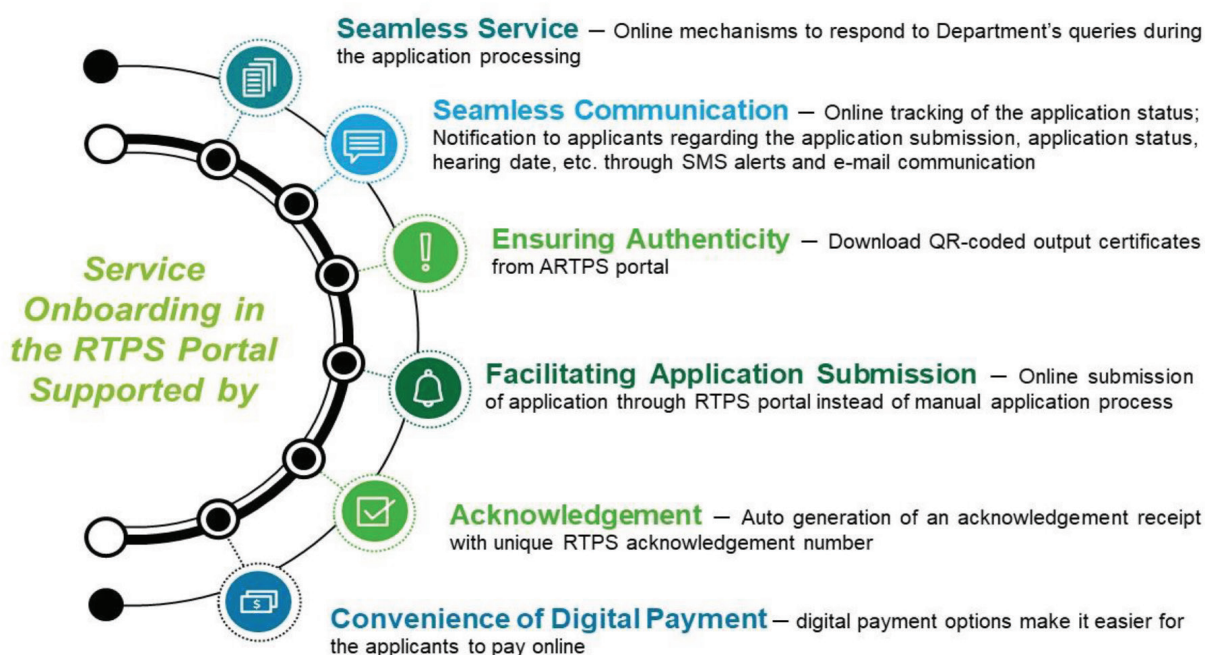


Figure 2 Key Features of Service Onboarding in RTPS Portal

²More services are getting listed on the Portal and a total of 140 services will be available for citizens' easy access in next few months.

underlying business processes aligned to best leverage digital enablement gains, and introducing newer ways for citizens to engage with government.

BPR efforts have been taken up by ACCSD Project for 137 services in Government of Assam departments and Autonomous Councils with perceptible improvement in citizens' experience of accessing services. A limited scale Time Cost and Visits (TCV) analysis of the high-on-demand 'Annual Income Certificate' service in Diphu Revenue Circle Office under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council reported an estimated 35 percent reduction in time to access the service. Citizens residing in that Circle also acknowledged a substantial reduction (to the tune of 50 -70 percent) in the overall cost of applying for and obtaining the income certificate.

The service of getting a Learner's License is availed by almost all young men and women. With the introduction of Aadhaar-based identity validation, the time required for accessing this service got reduced from 30 days to just 1-3 days. Earlier, the service applicant had to visit Regional Transport Office located in district headquarters, usually more than once, to apply for and receive this service; and invariably gets exposed to pervasive rent-seeking practices. With Aadhaar enabled online application for this service through ARTPS Portal in PFCs, there has been an estimated 75% reduction in overall cost of accessing this service. Similarly, the business process redesign of another important service for young people: registration and renewal of name in Employment Exchange (to secure jobs), has resulted in significant improvement in user experience and radical reduction of processing time and administrative cost in the District Employment Exchange office, entrusted to deliver this service.



Figure 3 Key Benefits of using RTPS portal

The change in user-experience was best encapsulated in the words of a young applicant of Employment Exchange service:



No standing in queue, no office visit, no meeting any official and also no out-of-pocket expense for availing the service. The experience of both application and receiving the service from the RTPS Portal was a superb experience .

*Young Applicant,
Employment Exchange Service*



³Eight tribal districts of Assam are substantially administered by three Autonomous Councils: Bodoland Territorial Council, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and NC Hills Autonomous Council, under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It would be pertinent to take note that ACCSDP was instrumental in getting RTPS service access expanded to Autonomous Council districts. Intense engagements were initiated with the Council Authorities to ensure that the service delivery innovations are equally accessible to the citizens of these eight tribal districts.

4. Enhancing Service with Multichannel Delivery Model

A multichannel service delivery model has been pursued by ACCSDP to ensure that the e-delivery of public services does not exacerbate the access challenges for common people. Accordingly, more than 350 Public Facilitation Centers (PFC) have been established across all districts of Assam for citizens to digitally apply for and receive RTPS services on ARTPS Portal. Equipped with reliable IT systems, internet connectivity, and trained manpower, these service providers have common facilities attached to sub-district level offices of government, enabling citizens to access the entire bouquet of RTPS services through the Portal. Especially in remote areas, PFCs serve as a vehicle for service accessibility to citizens, saving time and transport-related expenses in visiting the office to apply for a service. Local tribal residents of Kat Teron village of Karbi Anglong district had to travel 130 km of hilly terrain to reach the Phuloni Circle office and can now avail of the services from their nearest PFC located at Rongmongwe Block just a kilometer away.

In addition, MoU has been executed with CSC e-Governance Services India Ltd, accrediting 1,500 CSCs to serve as RTPS access points. Beyond these channels of public access, the ARTPS Portal also allows individual citizens to directly access the hosted RTPS services using self-owned digital devices. Going forward, the Project is working to establish a protocol of online receipt and offline processing of citizens' applications with near real-time tracking for the other services where the back-end service delivery processes are not 'e-ready' yet. This will allow citizens to submit online applications for these services too, without the requirement of in-person visits to concerned government offices.

I had applied for mutation of land at Demow Block Office PFC. I got my papers easily & in time without visiting the circle office or paying anything extra. I did not have to approach any middlemen or pay anything extra to get my documents. Having a PFC nearby is a big relief.
Meenu Dutta, Sukanpukhuri,
Sivasagar, Assam

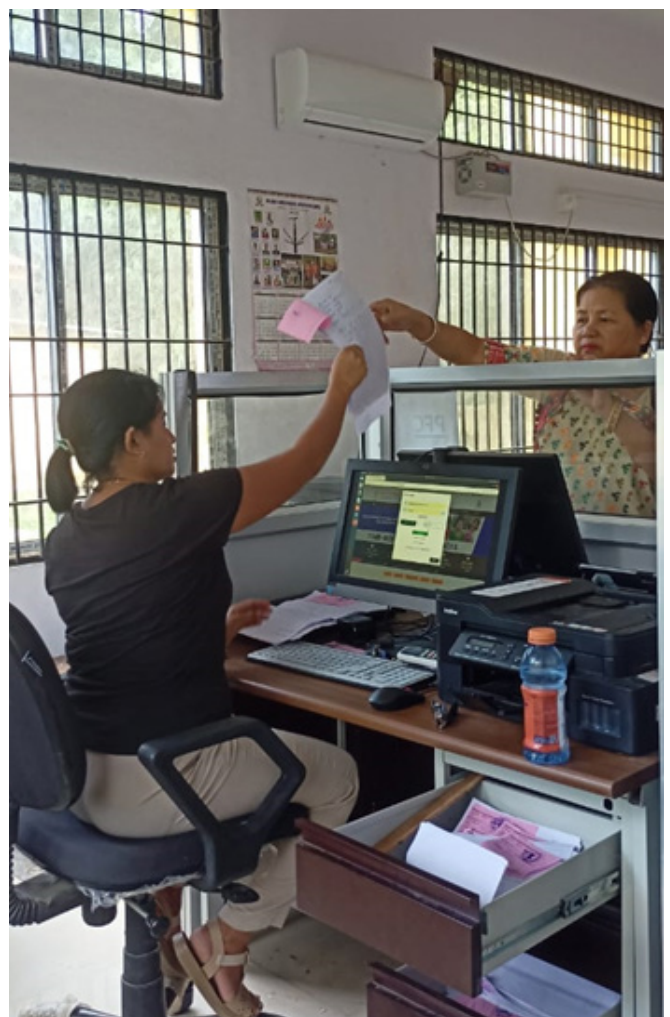


Figure 4: A Karbi woman applying for a service from Silonijan PFC

5. End note

Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, Hon'ble Former President of India rightly pointed out that "e-Governance, has to be citizen-friendly. Delivery of services to citizens is considered a primary function of the government". In essence, ACCSDP Project has attempted to translate these principles into action by placing citizens at the center of decision processes; and therein lies the key to its successful accomplishments.