

Brief of Citizen Consultation Round (CCR) on October 5, 2009

Gunter Grass was not incorrect when he made the remark, *“The job of a citizen is to keep his mouth open”* but unfortunately the voice of rural masses have more often than not been unheard especially in crucial decisions related to technology design and implementation in rural areas.

An unique and innovative effort in this direction, titled ‘Evolving a Citizen-Centric Rural e-Governance Framework’ with its flagship event ‘Citizen Consultation Round (CCR)’ alias *‘Nagarik Paramarsh Dhaur’* was coordinated on 5 October 2009, Monday at IIPA by Mrs. Charru Malhotra, Asst Professor under the aegis of Center of ICT and e-Governance, Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi and Center of Rural Development and Technology, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT-D). The driving force of the CCR event is the concern of Mahatma Gandhi for the rural masses echoed in the statement *“True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village.”*

This CCR event flags the beginning of a four-phased project titled *“Evolving citizen centric rural e-governance framework”* and was coordinated by Ms Charru Malhotra, along with a Workshop Facilitating Committee comprising of Director-IIPA, Prof. Pranab Banerjee, Dr. Usha Mujoo Munshi, Dr. Pradeep Kumar from IIPA and Prof. L.K. Das, Dr. V.M. Chariar and Dr. M.P. Gupta from IIT-Delhi along with Workshop research team.

On 5th October at 9 am, the CCR event started with registration of 50 participants who were villagers, activists, and development workers drawn from the rural areas of Hindi speaking belt of India including states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. Senior bureaucrat Shri Puneet Kumar (IAS) Director, Ministry of Road Transport and Highway was kind enough to be the Chief-Guest of the event and Shri. Sanjeev Kumar, Director e-Governance, DARPG, Government of India graced the inaugural function as the Guest-of-Honor. Both the visiting dignitaries emphasized the need of an inclusive approach in designing ICT and e-government interventions for the rural areas for which events like CCR would assure citizen participation in the process. Director-IIPA endorsed the viewpoint by quoting Jonathan Schwartz, *“The big wave in the marketplace to me is citizens getting involved in technology, individuals getting involved in technology decisions.”* The Workshop Coordinator, Ms. Charru Malhotra, in her address emphasized that the goal of the CCR would be to elicit various issues confronting rural governance and ICT implementation at the grassroots.

At 11 am, the panel discussions commenced wherein the participants were divided into 5 panels namely *Kisaan, Kaarigar, Adivasi, Yuva and Naari*. Each panel was moderated by two experts aided by rapporteur and facilitator for documentation of discussions in a pre-designed PowerPoint template. The prime focus of the panel rounds was to elicit through collaborative dialogue approach, the challenges, and indigenous solutions for local governance and ICT acceptance at the grassroots specific to the category of villagers belonging to the respective panels. The views of the villagers were also captured in a pre-designed questionnaire (in Hindi) wherein they responded about the status of local governance, grassroots’ challenges, and issues confronting ICT/e-government

implementation (if any) in their respective villages that they filled with the help of the assigned facilitators (*'Sahayaks'*).

By 3 pm, each panel was ready with findings of each panel and presented the summary of their discussions along with suggestions to issues raised by participants to Joint Panelists. These joint panelists comprised of 4 distinguished senior academicians of IIPA, viz. Prof. Pranab Banerjee, Prof. Sujata Singh, Prof. Sushma Yadav and Dr. Pradeep Kumar. Each of them addressed the issues and concerns raised in the preceding sessions. The event concluded by Valedictory Address with Shri. Shankar Aggarwal, Joint Secretary-e-Governance, as the Chief Guest and Ms. Gomathi Nair, President, AIWC as the Guest of honor. Shri. Shankar Aggarwal mentioned about the "vicious circle" of corruption and inefficiency that grips the rural governance and to resolve this, he shared with the participants, the central government's decision of opening 1lakh CSCs (Common Service Centres) in all villages across India under National e-Governance Plan-NeGP . Participants were honored with Certificate of Participation, a small souvenier of appreciation for their participation and were also taken on a guided tour of '*Delhi-darshan'*. CCR has been an innovative attempt where all the discussions including the speeches and comments of the experts were in done in Hindi language and the outcome of CCR event is expected to provide valuable inputs for design of a citizen centric, Government to Citizen to Government (G2C2G) rural e-governance framework to achieve more meaningful and effective rural governance.