

## **E-GOVERNANCE AND DECENTRALISATION- STUDY OF AN INDIAN DISTRICT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The current era is witnessing the emergence of a new governance paradigm at the global, national and local levels. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are fundamental to these systems of governance. Decentralised governance is a need in all countries. The same set of policy imperatives are behind the drive for decentralised governance as well as the drive for e-governance. So, there is a need for understanding of how e-governance can contribute to decentralisation of power. In this paper, a framework of e-governance for facilitating decentralisation has been evolved and tested in a district of Gujarat. Here, decentralisation is understood as a combination of its different kinds, viz., deconcentration, delegation, devolution and agencification. This is an empirical study done within the local self-governance units of a district in a rural context in India.*

*This paper tries to measure the decentralisation of power within the governance machinery which can be facilitated by e-governance information systems. The relative empowerment of different branches of administration has been culled out. It was found that the empowerment of bureaucracy is the highest, followed by the empowerment of extra State actors. The elected representatives of the local self-governance machinery are not getting really empowered due to the e-governance process. This is a fundamental flaw in the design of these e-governance systems.*

### **Introduction**

In the last two decades, the global governance paradigm has changed considerably. There has been an increasing emphasis on the decentralisation of governance systems. The idea of decentralised

governance is recognised as a need in developing countries (Bardhan, 2002). The same set of policy imperatives are behind the drive for decentralised governance as well as the drive for e-governance. So, there is an intellectual as well as policy driven related need

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for understanding how ICT-enabled e-governance can contribute to decentralisation of power. In this paper, decentralisation of authority facilitated by e-governance within a district (a sub-province unit of administration) has been studied. Within this district, only the rural local self-governance institutions called "Panchayats" have been taken up for the study. E-governance facilitated decentralisation of authority throughout the panchayat system is captured through a framework.

### **A Framework of E-Governance Facilitated Decentralisation**

Some administrative divisions in India have to be defined at this stage. Within the nation state of India, the different provinces are called "States". The "District / Zilla" is a sub-unit of administration within a State and is regarded as the basic unit of administration. The district is further divided into rural sub-divisions called as "Taluks/Blocks" and each taluk is further divided into village administrative units called as "Gram Panchayats (GPs)". And at all these three levels, there are institutions of local self-governance called as "Panchayats". Thus, there are the District/Zilla Panchayats (ZPs), the Taluk Panchayats (TPs) and the Village/Gram Panchayats (GPs).

Another unit which has to be defined is District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), which is the "agency" in charge of rural development within the district. An "agency" is similar to the government bureaucracy but is located at a certain structural distance from

the government bureaucracy and has a certain autonomy and flexibility associated with it. This DRDA has its presence at all three levels within the district, viz., at the district headquarter level, at the taluk headquarter level and at the gram panchayat level.

The framework shown in Table 1 has been developed based on a review of the existing literature specifically in e-governance as well as in general area of governance. In this framework, "Decentralisation" is understood as a combination of its different kinds, viz., "Deconcentration", "Delegation", "Devolution" and "Agencification".

The power transferor in all these kinds of decentralisation is always understood to be the government bureaucracy. The power transfer can be to lower levels or to governance entities at the same horizontal administrative level. These kinds of decentralisation are made distinct and defined based on the nature of the power transferee. This is necessary because the different entities within the governance structure have different kinds of connotations vis-à-vis the decentralisation process. For example, a local self-governance institution getting power from the upper or same levels has a higher and different democratic value than a part of the government bureaucracy getting power from the upper or same levels. The different hierarchical levels in which these different kinds of decentralisation happen are also indicated in the following Table.

**Table 1: E-Governance-Decentralisation Framework**

E-Governance and Decentralisation	Kinds of Decentralisation	Attributes of the kinds of Decentralisation	Hierarchical Level of Empowerment
	Deconcentration (Rondinelli, 1983; Conyers, 1984)	Power transfer from any upper level to lower level of government bureaucracy and power transfer from government bureaucracy to bureaucracy of local self-government at the same or lower levels (Adamolekun, 1991; Conyers, 1984; Public Administration & Development, 1990)	District Head Quarters (HQ)
			Taluk Head Quarters (HQ)
			Village/Gram Panchayat level
E-Governance facilitated Decentralisation (DEITY, 2012; Prabhu, 2004; Bhatnagar, 2004; Gupta, Kumar and Bhattacharya, 2004; Chandhoke, 2003; Fang, 2002; Korac-Boisvert and Kouzmin, 1995; Kumar, Mishra and Mishra, 2008)	Delegation (Rondinelli, 1983)	Power transfer from government bureaucracy to Extra-State Actors (ESAs) (like Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), private entity or co-operative entity) at the same or lower levels (Rondinelli, 1983)	District Head Quarters (HQ)
			Taluk Head Quarters (HQ)
			Village/Gram Panchayat level
	Devolution (Rondinelli, 1983; Conyers, 1984)	Power transfer from government bureaucracy to Local Self-Government (LSG), Elected Representatives (ERs) at the same or lower levels (Adamolekun, 1991; Conyers, 1984; Rondinelli, 1983; John & Chathukulam, 2003; Shin & Ha, 1998).	District Head Quarters (HQ)
			Taluk Head Quarters (HQ)
			Village/Gram Panchayat level

(Contd.....)

**Table 1 (Contd.....)**

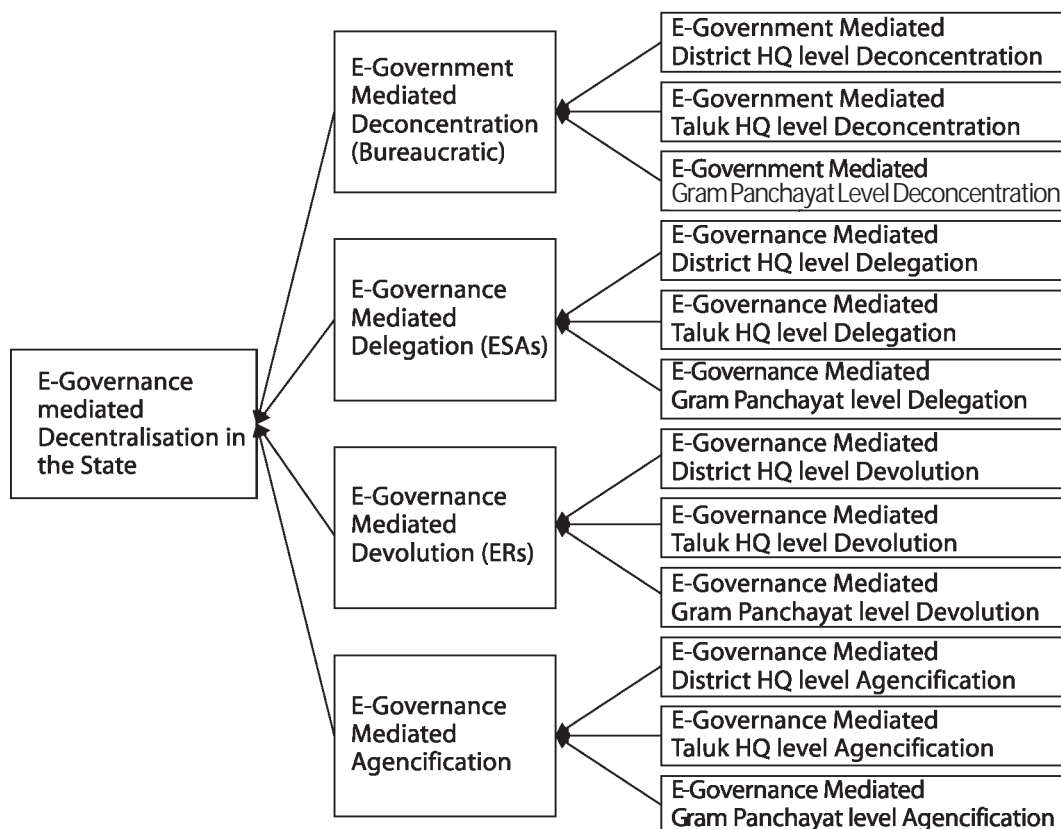
E-Governance and Decentralisation	Kinds of Decentralisation	Attributes of the kinds of Decentralisation	Hierarchical Level of Empowerment
	Agencification (Christensen & Laegreid 2004; Curtis 2008; Pollitt, Bathgate et al 2001; Spanou 2008)	Power transfer from government bureaucracy at same/ higher levels to "Agencies" (particularly DRDA)	District Head Quarters (HQ)
			Taluk Head Quarters (HQ)
			Village/Gram Panchayat level

In the above table, the references that support the claim that e-governance can facilitate decentralisation are given in the first column and the references that define

deconcentration, delegation, devolution and agencification are given accordingly.

Table 1 can be shown in a different way as in the following figure, viz., Figure 1.

**Figure 1: E-Governance-Decentralisation Framework**



## **Methodology**

**Instrument Preparation:** An appropriate set of questionnaire items have been evolved through a series of steps which are discussed hereunder.

Firstly, three moderately different sets of questions (items) one set each for deconcentration, delegation and devolution were prepared. The items were generated through the understanding gleaned from the literature, discussion with experts and inputs from simulated practitioners.

The items were chosen so as to broadly cover 'Operational', 'Tactical' and 'Strategic' authorities and these three authorities were the ones found out in earlier case studies done by the author on e-governance projects like E-Gram, E-Dhara or Mahiti Shakthi in Gujarat. This is to ensure that the items are a proper sample of the theoretical domain of the construct (Messick, 1993; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) which is one definition of "Content Validity". Another definition of content validity is that it reflects "the degree to which elements of an assessment instrument are relevant to and representative of the targeted construct for a particular assessment purpose" (Haynes et al, 1995). "Elements" refer to the content of individual items, response formats and instructions to respondents and "representativeness" refers to the degree to which the elements are proportional to the facets (domains) of the targeted construct and to the degree that the entire domain of the targeted construct has been sampled.

Here the "elements" of the assessment instrument (the content of individual items) are relevant to the targeted construct. The targeted construct is "empowerment" and all the items are chosen in such a manner that they are relevant to empowerment. Even the response format is a seven point Likert scale and it includes all the extreme possibilities like 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' and hence they represent the entire gamut of the magnitude of empowerment or no empowerment. This magnitude can take extreme possibilities as it is a real possibility in the empirical reality that any authority of any magnitude could be transferred to any other level facilitated by e-governance.

And as to the "representativeness" (the degree to which the elements are proportional to the facets of the targeted construct and to the degree that the entire domain of the targeted construct has been sampled), it is to be noted that empowerment has three major facets, viz., operational empowerment, tactical empowerment and strategic empowerment. These three facets broadly cover the whole domain of the construct because facets like policy level empowerment are not a part of the domain and there are no facets which are less important than operational empowerment. So, the entire domain of the targeted construct will get sampled once these three facets are taken care of. And all these three facets, in a broad sense are equally important and hence roughly equal number of items needs to be there for each facet and so equal number of items are

chosen. The items were then screened by some experts to trim and refine the pool of items to further ensure content validity (DeVellis, 1991; Robinson et al, 1991).

The preliminary pilot testing of the items was done in which, nine respondents including Talatis (the lowest level government employee at the GP level), elected representatives of GPs, Gram Mitras (contractual employees of the GP), GP clerks, VCEs (Village Computer Entrepreneurs who operate the computers) from three gram panchayats in Anand taluk in Anand district of Gujarat were administered the questionnaires in January-February 2009. Accordingly, the items were deleted, modified or some items were added. This process ensured the "Face validity" of the items because face validity means that

the items should appear valid to the respondents (Nevo, 1985). Face validity also means that the "mere appearance that the measure has validity" (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 1997) which is also ensured.

This modified questionnaire was administered to 106 respondents in Anand district across the gram panchayat, the taluk headquarter and district headquarter wherein the respondents were selected through convenience sampling. Accordingly, the items were further deleted, modified or some items were added. At this stage, the Cronbach Alpha test has been done for different items of the constructs to test the internal consistency of the items, viz., "Reliability" (Trochim, 2006).

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics: Deconcentration**

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	No. of Items
.909	.907	13

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
v2	61.74	66.469	.510	.514	.907
v3	61.53	64.256	.550	.522	.906
v4	60.74	61.064	.698	.810	.899
v5	60.58	62.250	.740	.794	.898
v6	61.53	60.364	.799	.770	.895
v7	61.66	65.637	.552	.404	.905
v8	62.29	62.914	.580	.644	.905

(Contd.....)

**Table 2 (Contd.....)**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
v9	60.37	60.834	.675	.686	.900
v10	62.18	70.479	.232	.302	.915
v11	61.37	64.455	.529	.529	.907
v12	61.71	63.509	.766	.783	.898
v13	61.68	62.330	.716	.605	.899
v14	61.26	58.740	.788	.694	.895

**Table 3: Reliability Statistics: Delegation**

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>					
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	No. of Items			
.774	.751	11			
<b>Item-Total Statistics</b>					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
v2	53.00	21.947	.440	.658	.756
v3	53.00	20.158	.622	.721	.730
v4	52.49	20.309	.547	.637	.741
v5	52.15	20.239	.663	.667	.725
v6	53.10	24.673	.182	.552	.783
v7	53.13	20.852	.569	.652	.738
v8	53.90	26.358	.043	.218	.785
v9	52.85	23.239	.370	.597	.763
v10	52.36	22.184	.583	.520	.742
v11	53.26	23.669	.293	.520	.772
v12	51.28	24.892	.232	.238	.775

**Table 4: Reliability Statistics: Devolution**

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	No. of Items
.849	.844	11

<b>Item-Total Statistics</b>					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
v2	47.59	27.680	.515	.610	.838
v3	47.69	28.150	.454	.649	.843
v4	47.07	25.067	.606	.501	.831
v5	47.07	23.995	.668	.663	.825
v6	47.45	27.042	.512	.456	.839
v7	47.72	25.064	.687	.729	.823
v8	47.79	26.099	.709	.642	.823
v9	48.00	28.071	.467	.623	.842
v10	47.90	28.382	.425	.495	.845
v11	48.31	30.722	.222	.288	.855
v12	47.90	27.382	.562	.467	.835

It is observed that there is fairly high cronbach alpha value in all three cases of deconcentration, delegation and devolution.

So, it is found that the items satisfy the reliability tests.

Then the questionnaire was piloted using 9 respondents (in Panchmahal district ZP office, Godhra taluk "Mamlatar" office and a gram panchayat in Godhra taluk) from a mix of respondents to do with deconcentration, delegation and devolution. Based on this, the sets of items administered for deconcentration,

delegation and devolution were made similar. This was necessitated because it was realised that the same kind of authority/power will be transferred across the different levels and for different kinds of decentralisation. A new construct called "Agencification" with the same set of items as deconcentration was also added to capture the power transfer from government bureaucracy at same/higher levels to "Agencies" like DRDA. All the questionnaire items for all the four constructs were then modified to incorporate the connotation of decentralisation explicitly while



retaining the meaning of empowerment due to e-governance. This new questionnaire is given in the annexure.

The questionnaire was administered across the three tier panchayat system in Panchmahal to different actors who respectively stand for deconcentration, delegation, devolution and agencification. Equal weights are given for deconcentration, delegation, devolution and agencification. The reason for this is that though the nature of different actors in the governance structure is different, all of these actors can contribute in different ways to the decentralisation process. For example, an employee of an "Agency", an elected representative of a local self-governance unit, a low level government employee and an entrepreneur who delivers ICT enabled government services all can contribute to the decentralisation process in a different but coequal manner. The decision to give equal weights has also been influenced by similar studies by academic institutes, consultancies and international agencies (GITR, 2013; Kochhar & Dhanjal, 2005; Shah, 2006; Rao et al, 2005) which have also given equal weights.

**Sampling:** The sampling was basically a convenience sampling. So, statistical description or inference cannot be made from these samples. Only qualitative inferences can be made.

To find out the extent of decentralisation at the gram panchayat level, 5 gram panchayats

were chosen out of 650 GPs in the district. These 5 GPs were distributed across 2 taluks (out of 11 taluks) and these sample taluks as well as sample GPs were chosen by convenience sampling.

To find out the extent of deconcentration at the gram panchayat level, 4 government employees found across the 5 sample gram panchayat offices who were Talati or Gram Mitra or Clerk/Panchayat Secretary were interviewed. To find out the extent of delegation at the gram panchayat level, 2 VCEs (or whoever were doing the role of VCE) found across the 5 sample gram panchayat offices were interviewed. To find out the extent of devolution at the gram panchayat level, 3 Sarpanches or Dy. Sarpanches found across the 5 sample gram panchayat offices were interviewed. To find out the extent of agencification at the gram panchayat level, DRDA employees were sought but none were found across the 5 sample gram panchayat offices.

To find out the extent of decentralisation at the taluk panchayat level, 4 taluk HQs were chosen out of 11 taluks and these 4 were a mix of developed and backward taluks.

To find out the extent of deconcentration at the taluk panchayat level, 6 government employees found across the 4 sample taluk panchayat offices who were TDO/Dy.TDO were interviewed. To find out the extent of delegation at the taluk panchayat level, 7 outsourced computer operators and taluk level executives for E-Gram (an e-governance project) found

across the 4 sample taluk panchayat offices, were interviewed. To find out the extent of devolution at the taluk panchayat level, 1 Pramukh (elected representative) found in one of the 4 sample taluk panchayat offices was interviewed. To find out the extent of agencification at the taluk panchayat level, 3 DRDA employees found across the 4 sample taluk panchayat offices were interviewed.

To find out the extent of decentralisation at the district panchayat level, the sample respondents were chosen from the zilla (district) panchayat office.

To find out the extent of deconcentration at the zilla panchayat level, 2 government employees, DDO and Dy.DDO were interviewed. To find out the extent of delegation at the zilla panchayat level, 1 computer operator and district level executive for E-Gram were interviewed. To find out the extent of devolution at the zilla panchayat level, the zilla panchayat pramukh (elected representative) was interviewed. To find out the extent of agencification at the zilla panchayat level, 2 DRDA employees were interviewed.

### **Case Study**

For testing the framework given in Figure 1, the State of Gujarat in India has been chosen. This State has been chosen because Gujarat is one of the most advanced States in India in the sphere of e-governance. In Gujarat, Panchmahal district has been chosen.

It is now instructive to describe all the e-Governance initiatives that were happening in this district. The first e-Governance project in the district was Mahiti Shakthi. Mahiti Shakthi was a collector-driven, district level e-Governance project launched in Panchmahal district on 4th October, 2001. Eighty Mahiti Shakti Kendras (MSKs) which are nothing but "Information Kiosks/Tele-centres" were established across Godhra city. Primarily, the project envisioned a portal providing a single window to all relevant information and services. In respect of transactions of citizens with government, as many as 200 forms had been made available along with checklist giving details of documents to be attached with the form at the time of submission. There was provision for service delivery through submission and online processing of forms by the MSK. This project has been currently subsumed under other projects like CSC, E-Gram, E-Dhara, etc.

E-Dhara is the LRC (Land Records Computerisation) project of Gujarat Government. The primary objective of E-Dhara project (Ramachandran, 2007) was to achieve complete computerisation of land records across the State by elimination of all manual records, computer-controlled mutation process and self-sustainability. Other objectives of the system include visible improvement in quality of services provided to citizens including allowing farmers/citizens easy access to their records, infuse transparency in providing services to citizens,

ease of administration including facilitating easy maintenance, prompt updation of land records, making land records tamper-proof, reduction in service delivery time, i.e., to speed up delivery of land records without delays, harassment or bribery, to provide a platform for facilitating more citizen-centric services and finally generating land-use data for planning purpose.

The two major processes that form the backbone of the land record system are the RoR issuance process and the mutation process. At some villages, "Kiosk machines" are there to deliver information to citizens at the grassroots. E-Dhara is at the Mamlatar office and is separate from the taluk panchayat system. The LRC (Land Records Computerisation) centre's name is the "E-Dhara centre" which is situated at the Mamlatar's office. It is under the control of a deputy Mamlatar. Because of E-Dhara, the Talati's revenue powers have reduced to a large extent. The manual process has been closed in the village and the Talati has his work reduced by nearly 80 per cent. In an E-Dhara centre, revenue collection can range from a few hundred to a few thousand per day.

Another important e-Governance initiative in the district is the Common Service Centres (CSC) project. From the year 2007, the CSC scheme has been started. The scheme aims to set-up information kiosks at the rural grassroots level through PPP mode and to deliver

B2C and G2C services through these kiosks. Broadly, for every 3 revenue villages, one CSC is being planned. There is a Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE) who for every CSC and he/she will be chosen by the SCA.

CSC computers are of a higher version technology than the GP computers and so sometimes the GP computers cannot use applications like E-Dhara while the CSC computers can. The CSC will mandatorily be situated at the GP office but is meant to function independently of the GP. The CSC will give a rent of ₹1000/- (₹500 as rent, ₹500 as electricity bill) to the GP and will not give its extra revenue to the panchayats. CSCs are mainly for B2C services like railways, mobile card recharging, university information, insurance, etc. They offer electricity billing at some 238 GPs in the State of Gujarat. CSCs are also meant to offer G2C services like E-Dhara, etc. In Panchmahal, when this study was done, the CSC project was yet to take off in a substantial sense due to inadequate demand.

There are other e-Governance projects in Panchmahal district like E-Gram (for the gram panchayats), the NREGA software used by DRDA at district office, a DRDA IRD cell at taluk panchayat and in selected GPs and GRAM double entry accounting software used at taluk panchayat and in selected gram panchayats. Regular video conferencing happens between DDOs and State HQ (Sachivalaya) (about 3-4

times per month) for review of work done at district level. For this purpose, TDOs, Mamlatars and other officials come to the District collectorate. This helps to do different works at one go. Even in a backward district like Panchmahal, at the taluk level, two video conferences have been conducted like this.

The health department under the panchayat system gets lot of funds through NRHM (National Rural Health Mission). So, it is able to spend more on e-Governance and ipso facto, it has better e-Governance systems in place. Under the NRHM, there are different e-Governance schemes. One of them is D-HISP – District Health Information Systems Project – implemented from 2007. Central government is responsible for this project. This has software programmes for processing forms and enables report generation at all levels. As reported by a District Health Programme Officer, who is the head of District Health Programme Management Unit in Panchmahal, the HISP (Health Information Systems Project) helps to decrease under-reporting/over-reporting and has made the

health data more perfect. Another e-Governance project under NRHM is RIMS - Routine Immunisation Management Software. This programme takes the report from the PHC and makes it available online so that the data can be seen from a central level.

Another e-Governance project is CRS, viz., Civil Registration Software. The birth/death registration software from E-Gram is connected with the CRS. Birth/death reports come to the perusal of the CDHO (Chief District Health Officer) but as far as issuing birth/death certificates are concerned, there is no change in powers to ZP officers like the CDHO. Everything in this regard is handled by the revenue department.

For this study, only the panchayati raj institutions in Panchmahal district viz., the ZP, TPs and GPs, including the DRDA units embedded within them were taken up for doing the survey.

The samples from Panchmahal district are given in the following Table 5.

**Table 5: Panchmahal District Samples**

Stratification	Sample size	Respondent Offices	Type of Decentralisation	Respondents	Respondent Sample size
Gram panchayat level	5 gram panchayats were chosen out of 650 GPs in the district. These 5 GPs were distributed across 2 taluks (out of 11 taluks) and they were chosen by convenience sampling	Gram panchayat office	Deconcentration	Government employees (Talati, Gram Mitra, Clerk/ Panchayat Secretary)	4
			Delegation	Vce (or whoever is doing the role of VCE)	2
			Devolution	Sarpanch (elected representative), Dy. Sarpanch	3
			Agencification	DRDA employees	0
Taluk HQ level data	4 Taluk HQ were chosen out of 11 taluks – a mix of developed and backward taluks	Taluk panchayat office and DRDA office at taluk level	Deconcentration	TDO, Dy, TDO	6
			Delegation	Outsourced Computer operators, taluk Level Executives for E-Gram (an e-governance project)	7
			Devolution	Pramukh (elected representative)	1
			Agencification	DRDA employees at TP	3

(Contd.....)

**Table 5 (Contd.....)**

Stratification	Sample size	Respondent Offices	Type of Decentralisation	Respondents	Respondent Sample size
District level	Panchmahal district	Zilla panchayat office, DRDA office	Deconcentration	DDO, Dy. DDO, (Class I officers in ZP)	2
				Computer operator, District Level Executives for E-Gram	2
			Delegation		
			Devolution	Pramukh	1
			Agencification	DRDA employees	2

Then the framework shown in Figure 1 is applied. Since power transfer to gram panchayat level has a higher philosophical value than power transfer to taluk and district levels, gram panchayat level empowerment is given a high weight of 3, taluk panchayat level empowerment is given a weight of 2 and district panchayat level empowerment is given the least weight of 1.

Deconcentration for entire district =  $3 * (\text{Deconcentration at gram panchayat level}) + 2 * (\text{Deconcentration at taluk level}) + 1 * (\text{Deconcentration at district level})$

Delegation for entire district =  $3 * (\text{Delegation at gram panchayat level}) + 2 * (\text{Delegation at taluk level}) + 1 * (\text{Delegation at district level})$

Devolution for entire district =  $3 * (\text{Devolution at gram panchayat level}) + 2 * (\text{Devolution at taluk level}) + 1 * (\text{Devolution at district level})$

Agencification for entire district =  $3 * (\text{Agencification at gram panchayat level}) + 2 * (\text{Agencification at taluk level}) + 1 * (\text{Agencification at district level})$

Decentralisation for entire district =  $1/4 * (\text{Deconcentration for entire district}) + 1/4 * (\text{Delegation for entire district}) + 1/4 * (\text{Devolution for entire district}) + 1/4 * (\text{Agencification for entire district})$

The data can be represented in a tabular form as shown in Table 3.

**Table 6: Magnitude of Decentralisation in Panchmahal District**

Levels /Kinds of Decentralisation	Gram Panchayat Level (0-1 scale)	Taluk Panchayat Level (0-1 scale)	District Panchayat Level (0-1 scale)	Overall District (0-6 scale)
Deconcentration	0.6563	0.6736	0.7153	4.0314
Delegation	0.553	0.5833	0.6111	3.4367
Devolution	0.4899	0.5	0.2879	2.7576
Agencification	0	0.6736	0.75	2.0972
Overall Decentralisation				3.0808

### Discussion

Deconcentration at the gram panchayat level (on a scale of 0-1) is 0.6563, deconcentration at taluk panchayat level is 0.6736 and at district level it is 0.7153. It is observed that the extent of deconcentration progressively increases from the gram panchayat level through the taluk panchayat level to the district level and thus it apparently appears as if deconcentration is happening more at the higher tiers of the district administration vis-a-vis the lower tiers. But here it has to be understood that whatever small empowerment due to the deconcentration aspect of decentralisation that is happening at the lower levels like the gram panchayat level has a higher relevance than that happening at the higher levels.

When we compare this result with that of other e-Governance projects in the district like E-Dhara which is effecting a reverse kind of deconcentration, then it is realised that

panchayat computerisation projects are more democratic as far as deconcentration is concerned.

Delegation at the gram panchayat level (on a scale of 0-1) is 0.553, delegation at taluk panchayat level is 0.5833 and at district level it is 0.6111. It is found that the delegation to extra State actors is the highest at the district level followed by that at the taluk level followed by that at the gram panchayat level. The district level ESAs like the DLEs (District Level Executives) for E-Gram, the outsourced statistics department programming assistant at the district level (who controls one outsourced statistics department computer operator each at the taluk panchayat) as well as the other outsourced operators at the zilla panchayat office have been delegated substantially high powers.

The delegation at the taluk level in the taluk panchayat to the private outsourced

employees like the MIS-in-charge for NREGA at the DRDA cell, outsourced computer operators at the DRDA-IRD (Integrated Rural Development) cell of taluk panchayat office and the outsourced TLE (Taluk Level Executives) for E-Gram is not as high as the delegation at the district level.

The delegation to the ESAs at the GP level, viz., the VCE is the least due to the less number of full-time or even part-time VCEs at the GP level. In fact, in many GPs, there are no VCEs. For example, it was seen that in the entire block of Halol, there was not even a single full-time VCE. Here also, it is understood that whatever small empowerment due to decentralisation that is happening at the lower levels, like the gram panchayat level, has a higher relevance than that happening at the upper levels.

The common service centres are essentially run by ESAs. So, if the CSC project gets operational in a full-fledged manner at the village grassroots and it gets dovetailed with the gram panchayat computerisation projects like E-Gram, then there is a lot of scope for increase in the level of delegation to the ESAs at the GP level.

Devolution at the gram panchayat level (on a scale of 0-1) is 0.4899, at taluk panchayat level it is 0.5 and at district level it is 0.2879. So, it is seen that the devolution of power is higher at the taluk panchayat than at the gram panchayat level. This may be due to the fact that the elected representatives at the taluk panchayat are better equipped at a personal

level through their enhanced skill sets to reap the benefit of computers as well as could be attributed to the presence of more robust e-governance systems at the taluk panchayat level than those at the gram panchayat level.

The devolution of power at the zilla panchayat level is the least in this district. One reason for this can be attributed to the lack of personal interest about computers of the particularly elected members of the ZP apart from other systemic reasons. Here also, it is understood that whatever small devolution that is happening to the lower levels like the gram panchayat level has a higher relevance than that happening to the upper levels.

Here it is seen that personal interest of the concerned individuals plays a big role in the uptake of an e-governance project. Like in the original Mahiti Shakthi project which was driven by the personal interest of the district collector, the uptake and the resultant benefit of the e-governance project depends on the personal interest of the respective elected representatives at the three levels of the panchayat system.

Agencification at the gram panchayat level (on a scale of 0-1) is 0, at the taluk panchayat level it is 0.6736 and at the district level it is 0.75. The reason for the null value for agencification at the GP level is that very few Gram Rozgar Sewaks of the NREGA (who constitute the DRDA's workforce at the GP level) have been appointed for doing data entry work as of now. The plan to appoint them is in the pipeline but is yet to take off. The reason



for the higher value of agencification at the district level, again, could be due to higher maturity of e-governance systems at the district DRDA office and the higher skill of the district DRDA APOs (Assistant Programme Officers) than those at the taluk DRDA cell.

Just as the agencification value is higher at the district level as compared to the taluk level due to better IT systems, the NRHM e-governance projects also perform better due to the availability of better IT systems.

As measured through this framework, throughout the district, on a scale of 0 to 6, deconcentration is 4.0314, delegation is 3.4367, devolution is 2.7576 and agencification is 2.0972. As it is seen, the highest magnitude is for deconcentration. The reason for this is that it is the government bureaucrats who use and control the e-governance systems to the maximum extent and hence derive the maximum power from e-governance. The higher score for delegation as compared to devolution is due to the fact that ESAs are located closer to the technical aspects of e-governance and thus are able to get the benefit of e-governance in a better way than the elected representatives, who due to their inadequate skills are not able to use e-governance to the extent that is possible. Also, the fact that no e-governance system or project has been specifically designed for the purpose of empowering elected representatives is also a reason. Agencification is the least as its overall presence itself is low when seen across the three levels. This is also

because crucial e-governance projects like E-Gram and E-Dhara are not used by the DRDA components across all levels of the rural local self-governance system.

The value for deconcentration being highest is consistent with other e-governance projects like E-Dhara, NRHM & Mahiti Shakthi which also empowered the government employees or bureaucrats.

The overall decentralisation score for the entire district, on a scale of 0-6 is 3.0808 which indicates that decentralisation is happening in the district to a considerable extent. Since the study has been done only in one district, it is not possible to make a judgement as to whether the extent of this decentralisation is higher or lower than that in other districts.

A further analysis of these results on governance and decentralisation yields the following results:

a. In a relative sense, within the governance structure, prominent governance interventions are driven by the bureaucracy and who also reap the maximum benefits from these interventions.

b. In a relative sense, the decentralisation process is empowering the higher levels of the governance structure more than the lower levels.

Some studies have found out that e-Governance can have a positive effect on reducing corruption in developing countries like

India (Singh et al, 2010). But studies on how e-Governance can enhance the decentralisation process are few and far in between. The logic of decentralisation of power is that by taking power closer to the lower echelons of the government and ipso facto one step closer to the people, greater transparency and accountability is promoted. And this has a positive effect on reducing corruption. Thus by promoting decentralisation, at an indirect level e-Governance can help to reduce corruption.

There is a need to increase inclusiveness in the government, which along with civil society initiatives, constitute a counterforce to neo-liberal-oriented e-government trend (Charag & Ahmad, 2013). Decentralisation of power within the government structure will definitely contribute to greater inclusiveness.

### **Conclusion**

In general, the presence of better e-governance systems and better skilled people at the higher levels of the local self-governance units of the district administration enables those tiers to get better empowered.

The government bureaucrats are the ones who benefit the maximum from the power derived through e-governance at all levels. Within the rural local self-governance system, they are already enjoying a lot of power and e-governance becomes a potent tool in their hands for enhancing their powers.

There is a lacuna in terms of non-availability of computer operators/VCEs at the gram panchayat level on a full-time or even part-

time basis. This situation in terms of lack of numbers, as well as the generic weakness of the e-governance system at the lowest tier, results in the low empowerment of the ESAs as a whole at this lowest tier.

As compared to elected representatives, ESAs, are located closer to the technical aspects of e-governance and thus are able to get the benefit of e-governance in a better way. Elected representatives, due to their inadequate training and skills, are not able to use and benefit from e-governance. No e-governance system or project has been specifically designed for the purpose of empowering elected representatives and this aspect is not conducive for their real empowerment. Also, empowerment due to devolution is determined to a substantial extent by the personal interest about computers of the particular elected members. This is largely true irrespective of the tier of the local-self-governance administration in which these elected members are located.

The agencification process is not at all happening at the gram panchayat level due to non-availability of computer operators. This problem can be overcome by having a single computer operator who will do the work of both the VCE as well as the Gram Rozgar Sewak (of the DRDA) aiding both the processes of delegation as well as agencification. So, there is a need for convergence between different arms of local self-governance at this lowest level of rural governance.

There is a need to bring the agencification process within the control of the panchayat system and the panchayat system itself to be brought under the control of the elected representatives. This will make the whole system more democratic. So, the e-Governance policy at the State and national levels has to emphasise a GPR (Government Process Reengineering) of the systems related to the panchayats. This GPR has to bring the panchayats to the centre of the rural development process and further bring the panchayat related service delivery under the control of the panchayat elected representatives.

Decentralisation as such is happening within the district as seen by the quantitative result, though it may not be obviously apparent. The framework suggested here could be incorporated in the attribute of "Critical governance needs of the region" referred in the "Regional Characteristics" construct of the

Citizen-Centric Model (IIPA, 2010). The results from this study can be generalised to the State of Gujarat as such. The framework suggested here can be applied on any other State (province) of India or onto any other such provincial administrative unit of a country or to even to a small country anywhere in the developing world.

The findings of this study may not stand the rigour of statistical scrutiny. The quantitative aspect of the study stops with the evolution of the interview schedule items. After that a case study using qualitative methodology has been done. The quantitative aspect of this study is to buttress the qualitative findings. As an extension of this study in the future, a model for capturing e-governance enabled decentralisation can be evolved from the framework that has been discussed here and from the findings of this study.

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