Chapter 29

ICT, Unique Identity and Inclusive Growth: An Indian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Government of India has recently sought to establish identity of country’s each resident including migratory population from one state to another through IT-enabled unique identification (UID) numbers under the aegis of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), which shall lead to inclusive growth. UID numbers offer diverse benefits to each resident, such as quick opening of bank accounts, speedier issuance of passports, efficient administration of the PDS (public distribution system) for food grains at subsidized rates to the BPL (below poverty line) families by preventing ‘leakage’ to open markets, rapid enrollment to and efficient disbursal of wages under the ‘Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)’ for guaranteed employment for every household, et cetera. The chapter reviews the role of ICT and UID numbers in achieving inclusive growth, achieving food security, augmenting employment opportunities, efficiently accessing public services, and achieving higher standards of livelihood and quality-of-life sustained though different welfare schemes.

INTRODUCTION

Government of India has embarked upon an ambitious initiative to provide a UID to every resident of India for which it has created Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). The UID has been given an Indian name in Hindi (country’s official language) as Aadhaar (Foundation). According to the UIDAI Chairman, Mr. Nandan Nilekani, its new name was chosen to convey the scheme’s “transformational potential and its promise to residents”. UIDAI has opened head office in New Delhi and technology center in Bangalore. UIDAI plans to evolve the unique ID into an attractive brand to spread social awareness. The UIDAI has formed a media awareness and communication council that will spread awareness.
about the chosen UID brand name among masses (Sharma, 2010).

The UIDAI will provide each Indian resident a 12-digit unique number in phases beginning August 2010. UIDAI plans to assign the 12-digit universal identity numbers to more than 600 million citizens over next four years (Agarwal, 2010). UID is based on biometric attributes of the residents (face, all ten fingerprints and iris) to capture uniqueness of individuals. Demographic and biometric information of the residents are collected at the time of enrollment. UID number is unique and easily verifiable in an online cost-effective way. UID system is robust enough to eliminate large number of duplicate and fake identities in government and private databases.

The UID number will be stored in a centralized database and linked to the basic demographics biometric information photograph, ten fingerprints and iris of each individual. The number will be unique and would be available for online and offline verification, which will prevent the possibility of duplicate and fake identities from government as well as various private databases (TOI, October 4, 2010). By imparting unique identity to all individuals the UID Project aims to achieve multifarious objectives such as inclusive growth, social security, electoral reforms, monitoring of social schemes, minimizing wastages and pilferages under various socio-economic schemes, etc.

GOI plans to give a push to its ‘inclusive agenda’ by linking benefits of different welfare schemes with the 12-digit UID numbers for which the first UID number was issued only recently on September 29, 2010. Country is currently going on with a massive programme of enrollment of huge population with UID numbers. For instance, poor infrastructure and limited employment opportunities retards the growth of rural economy making rural habitants migrate to urban areas, and contributing to the growth of urban slums further. Government of India (GOI) plans to check such trends by providing urban amenities in rural areas (PURA).

The National e-Governance Program seeks to transform public delivery system in India by setting up one lakh common service centers (CSC) through private-public entrepreneurship. These centers run by rural entrepreneurs, not only generate employment opportunities, but also enable the government to deliver services such as making birth and death certificates and land records available at the doorstep, give relevant mandi (common market place) related information to the farming community, create online systems for filing IT returns, and facilitate judicial processes through electronic record keeping. By March 31, 2010 already 76,000 CSCs have been set up (Pilot, 2010).

GOI is improving infrastructural facilities in rural areas both through public investments and following public private partnership (PPP) route. PURA is basically a program to revamp infrastructure and public services in rural areas. Urban amenities that are equally vital for rural areas include: electric supply, drinking water, sanitation, drainage, solid waste management, transport, education, healthcare, fire services, etc. However, over and above this, the PURA also aims to promote skill development and vocational education, decentralized energy systems such as community biogas plants, solar street lighting systems, solar water pumps, wind pumps, solar ponds, solar crop dryers, solar lanterns, etc, which are typically more appropriate in a village setting.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is another important government initiative that aims to create minimal employment opportunity for each rural household. This new legislation is slowing down migration from rural to urban areas by improving employment opportunities in villages. There is dramatic turnaround in rural economy in favour of rural units which is evident with agriculture constituting bare 15 per cent and services 63 of the GDP as compared to scenario in 1950-51, when the situation was vice versa. However, decline of agriculture share in GDP is also a matter of concern than elation as