

## District e-Service Centre @ Jessore: TAKING SERVICES TO THE CITIZEN'S DOORSTEPS

### ISSUE

Public service delivery in Bangladesh remains largely framed through century-old processes that are labour and time-intensive for both service providers and seekers. Predominantly a paper-based system that is often inflexible, it not only creates frequent delays, but also gives rise to corruption and abuse. It can also prohibit access by the poor, marginalized and vulnerable.

As part of the government's Digital Bangladesh vision, Ministries across the government have been devising innovative ways to improve the efficiency, accessibility and transparency of public service delivery. UNDP, through the Access to Information programme (A2i) has been supporting the government in this endeavour. The District e-Service Centre at Jessore DC Office is one such innovation deployed in collaboration with several government agencies such as the Cabinet Division, Ministry of Establishment and Bangladesh Computer Council. This centre will be replicated to all 64 DC offices by June 2011.

### ACTION

#### WHAT IS A DISTRICT E-SERVICE CENTRE?

The District e-Service Centre is located at the Jessore Deputy Commissioner's office. It is primarily a one-stop service point for specialized services of DC office that is government owned and run. Services available at the DC office can be requested and accessed either online, by phone, by post, or by fax. Government officers are also ready to receive applications and official letters from citizens over-the-counter at the centre.



### HOW DOES IT WORK?

**SUBMISSION:** Citizens can submit applications and official letters in three ways: Over-the-counter, by post, and online at the Jessore District Portal ([www.dcjessore.gov.bd](http://www.dcjessore.gov.bd)). Service applications and applicants' details are recorded on e-Centre computers. Details are sent, online, to relevant officials, and applicants provided with a receipt and tracking number, to follow their applications through the process. Applications can also be submitted from the office of Upazila Nirbahi Officers, removing the need to travel to District HQ.

Citizens who provide their information online instantly receive a receipt with their 'Receive Number' both online, as well as to their mobile phones by SMS.

**PROCESSING:** Government officers log into a password-protected system and access a dashboard where they view their day's task lists, as well as those of their colleagues. Case files sent to government officers include relevant case information, including case history

Service Description	Before	After
<b>Avg. number: requests received for certified copy of land records/day</b>	150-200	230-240
<b>Avg. number: requests processed for certified copy of land records/day</b>	120-130	180-200
<b>Avg. time: DC disposal of applications</b>	3-4 hrs up to 1 day	Max. 1 hr
<b>Avg. time: decision making (full cycle)</b>	2 -7 days	1 hr to 2 days
<b>Total number: applications received online</b>	0 (no provision)	16,000 in 5 months
<b>Total number: applications received by post</b>	0 (no provision)	400 in 5 months

#### Access to Information

- TIMEFRAME: 1 Oct 2006 - 31 Dec 2010
- DEVELOPMENT PARTNER: UNDP
- IMPLEMENTING PARTNER: Prime Minister's Office
- BUDGET: USD 3.89M

## WAY FORWARD: UPSCALING @ DISTRICTS, ROLL-OUT @ UPAZILLAS

The District e-Service Centres and upcoming Upazilla e-Service Centres offer an unprecedented opportunity to make the civil service more pro-citizen, pro-poor, and implement the citizen charters of government organizations more effectively. In 2011, the Access to Information Programme proposes two ways to build from the current success in Jessore DC office:

1. Up-scaling of District e-Service Centres across all 64 districts of the country
2. Introducing e-Services at the Upazila level

Feedback from Jessore is being used to make the system more user-friendly, and experience so far suggests that upscaling to all Districts and Upazilas will require integration of the National e-Governance Architecture (NEA), providing integrated and interoperable citizen services across government agencies. This will be developed in iterations, based on feedback from all stakeholders.

up to that point. An officer cannot forward applications to other officers without making the required preliminary decision. Once processing of an application is complete, all notes and decisions regarding the case are stored in hard copy in the main file.

**TRACKING:** Citizens in Jessore can call the dedicated e-Centre numbers (0421-65044 or 01753171797) and track the status of their applications by giving their "Receive Numbers". They can also track the status through SMS to 16345 (presently limited Teletalk subscribers with other operators to be included soon). Citizens can use the online Jessore District Portal to track the status of applications

**COPIES OF RECORDS:** All applications for certified copies of land records are entered into the e-Centre's computers. In case of any change in the delivery date, applicants are notified through SMS. Citizen then have 30 days to send the required fee to the DC Office from any Bank. Once this fee is received, applicants receive the delivery date. Citizens can also receive certified copies of land records by post by sending a self-addressed envelope along with the fee.

### IMPACT

The Jessore District e-Service Centre currently provides 147 services across 27 categories. This has transformed the DC office from a static and often lethargic point of service request to a responsive one-stop shop. Categories of services that have proved most popular in this early phase included: certified copies of public records from

District Record Rooms; land related complaints and redress services; applications related to civil suits; general complaints and redress; freedom fighter services; public examination; grants and payments by local trusts; licenses; NGO affairs; disaster relief services; and food, seed, and fertilizer related agricultural services.

The availability of services like these has dramatically increased citizen's access. But the benefit is beyond simple access issues, and is reaching into areas of empowerment and good governance. Through the Jessore model, citizens, especially women, are now able to deal with Government officers directly in an environment that is more comfortable and respectable. Petty corruption, which is rife at lower tiers of administration and which has traditionally been a major source of frustration has been reduced by cutting out the middle-man. Women and elderly citizens no longer have to travel to District HQ from their villages but rather get services through postal services which have cut down on unnecessary expenses and wasted time. Core benefits can be categorised in the following ways:

### EXPANDED ACCESS

The availability of online and postal submission (in addition to over-the-counter) reduces the time and money it takes citizens to submit, track and receive a service. The number of applications that have been received over the internet is expected to grow rapidly with more publicity and as the Union Information and Service Centres

are engaged more actively in submitting applications online. This increase in access has also meant a breaking down barriers of culture, class and distance in the delivery of public services.

### ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

The tracking systems increase accountability and transparency in the delivery of public services. Citizens can see exactly where their application is and can demand services. Government officers are better held to account for services, a transformation that puts the onus of delivery squarely on their shoulders. The Performance Management Dashboard is a key component. Officers can track performance of officers down in the hierarchy. Cabinet Division and Ministry of Establishment can track performance of all officers at the DC office.

### IMPROVED EFFICIENCY

Century-old processes have been transformed from heavily bureaucratic, manual model, to an ICT-enabled model, cutting layers of red-tape, and time spent on finding files.

This small and 'under the radar' initiative has the potential to break the 'vicious cycle' of inefficiency and corruption by prompting gradual changes in service production processes. Already, the traditional process of provided certified copies of land record has changed. Now, every record that is supplied is also digitized. In the long term this means digitization of all active land records.