Ensuring Services to the Poor: Learning from LLPMS

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Abstract: The government of Bangladesh is providing basic facilities to the people to address the income and non-income dimension of poverty and to meet constitutional obligation. But poverty remains central piece of development agenda. It was found that limited access to information to the people living at the rural areas and lack of information about poverty situation at local level limits the initiative to provide services to the targeted group by the provider as well getting support services from the development organizations by the clients. Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) is conducting a research project namely Local Level Poverty Monitoring System (LLPMS) to develop a regular mechanism to collect and classify data at local level and use this data in preparing local level plan under the auspices of IDRC through CBMS. It was observed that service providers and the clients are facing some problems related to scarce resources, lack of information, inadequate logistic support etc. that limits the initiative of ensuring support services to the poor. LLPMS is proved a very effective mechanism in providing services to the poor efficiently by developing management capacity of the service providers as well as intensifying the voices of service receivers. It was understood that the nature of data requirement for providing services at different levels varies widely. By using Natural Resource Database (NRDB) the information needs of different level can be met. In that way service providers can be made more accountable to the poor and local government authority would be able to perform their development functions efficiently, ultimately services to the poor will be ensured.

I. Introduction

All over the world, the government of each country is very much pledge bound to ensure basic facilities to meet its constitutional obligation. Bangladesh is not exception to it and the government provides wide range of basic services for socio economic development and benefiting to its toiling masses. Article 15 of the constitution of Bangladesh articulates that it shall be fundamental responsibility of the state to make the provision of basic necessities of life including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care; ensure the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard the quantity and quality of work and the right to social security that is to say, to public assistance in case of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement of suffered by widows or orphans or in the old age or in other such case. Article 17 of the constitution has made obligatory to the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children and removing illiteracy. For meeting these mandatory responsibilities the government of

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Bangladesh is providing services to the people by its line departments. Although the government is very much aware of these constitutional obligation and taking necessary steps to delivery services to ensure providing basic facilities but poverty remains central piece of development agenda now a days.

Poverty in Bangladesh has many routes as well as many dimensions. For its multidimensional nature it is very difficult to identify the causes of poverty by illustrating it in one sentence. Poverty literature in Bangladesh indicates that the low economic growth, inequitable distribution of income, unequal distribution of productive asset, unemployment and underemployment, low level of human resource development, natural disaster and limited access to public services are the most important reasons of poverty in Bangladesh (GOB 1995). The services provided by government and non-government organization aims to increasing productivity, generating employment opportunity, developing infrastructure, enabling people, reducing vulnerability, and maintaining law and order situation etc. Extension services, technological transfer, imparting training, input supply within reasonable cost in the field of agriculture & small and cottage industry and price support are the main services provided for increasing productivity as well as equity. For employment generation, government and NGOs are providing training, credit, information, various technological supports & services and carrying out public works programme etc. Construction of roads, culverts, irrigation facility, arrangements for electricity, telecommunications facilities fall under the purview of infrastructural development. Providing education, ensuring health facility, safe drinking water, and sanitation helps to develop capacity of the people that enable to survive in the competitive world. Provision of safety net programme for the disadvantaged sections of people is the example of support services to reduce vulnerability of the people. Government has now encouraged NGOs involvement in some of the major development undertakings as well as poverty alleviation programmes of Bangladesh.

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The shape of support services also varies in relation to the nature of services. Some support services are directed towards individual (safety net programme, support under targeted poverty alleviation programme) while others are intended to community as a whole. The support services channelized through community is expected to share all persons equally irrespective of their social status but the targeted services are mainly for disadvantaged sections of people. The line departments of the government and NGOs are providing support services through their field level offices. The local government at the grassroots level is supposed to play the catalytic role to receive the demand based service and delivery those services to targeted group of people. This paper describes the problems of ensuring support services to the poor and explains the lessons learned from Local Level Poverty Monitoring System (LLPMs) for ensuring services to the poor efficiently. Personal observations of the author during fieldwork of LLPMS and feedback from different stakeholders have also been articulated in preparing this paper.

II. Existing scenario of support services at rural areas

Article 16 of Bangladesh constitution has recognized that the state shall adopt effective measure to bring about radical transformation in rural areas through the promotion of an agricultural revolution, the provision of rural electrification, the development of cottage and other industries and the improvement of education, communication and public health in those areas so as progressively to remove the disparity in the standards of living between the urban and rural areas. For addressing these issues as many as 22 different government departments at Upazila level are providing services to the people. Services provided by some of the departments e.g. Department of Agricultural Extension, Forestry, Department of Health and Family Planning, Department of Mass Education, Non Formal Education, Department of Fishery and Department of Livestock can significantly contribute to poverty alleviation (UNDP 1996). Services provided by some other government department located at upazila level are Bangladesh Rural Development Board, Directorate of Youth, Directorate of Social Service, Relief and Rehabilitation,
Department of Cooperative, Local government Engineering Department, Department of Women Affairs, Department of Public health Engineering are very much relevant in poverty alleviation. Along with these government Organizations some NGOs are also delivering services to the people. Most of the organisations are delivering the support services through their extension agents to the people. UNDP also found that these departments have resources and services that are intended for delivering to the villagers especially to the poor. However, most of the time it is impractical and inconvenient as well for the government machinery to properly select and reach the recipients and beneficiaries their services due to lack of manpower, logistic service and facilities and absence of inadequate receiving mechanism. The same is true for non-governmental and private sector as well (UNDP 1995). Local government authority located at the grassroots level is assumed to play a vital role for ensuring distributive justice of resources, ensure accountability of the service delivery agency, and quality of the services. But this organization is hardly able to do this work efficiently due to poor capacity of local government.

**Matrix 01: Nature of services provided by NBDs and NGOs posted at Upazila Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Department</th>
<th>Nature of Services</th>
<th>Channel of service delivery</th>
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| Department of agricultural Extension (DAE) | ➢ Extension support  
➢ Transfer of technology  
➢ Imparting training  
➢ Responding problem of farmers  
➢ Motivating to use balance and qualitative inputs, practice crop diversity, through demonstration plot | Officials, extension agents posted at Union level |
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<th>Name of Department</th>
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| Department of Fisheries (DOF) | ➢ Establish Demonstration plot  
➢ Provide extension services to fish farm  
➢ Imparting training on fish culture and nursing  
➢ Provide consultation service to the private farm and  
➢ Biological management of khash water bodies | Officials, Extension workers and Project staff posted at Upazila level |
| Department of Livestock (DOL) | ➢ Control of infectious disease of cattle  
➢ Free treatment of cattle and poultry birds  
➢ Artificial insemination of animals  
➢ Improvement of local breed cattle and poultry  
➢ Imparting training  
➢ Transfer of technology to farmers | Officials, Supporting staffs posted at Upazila level |
| Department of Family Planning (DFP) | ➢ Motivating to practice various contraceptive methods and provides clinical support  
➢ Mobilize child immunization programme | Officials, door to door services by family welfare assistants |
| Department of Health (DOH) | ➢ Control of infectious disease  
➢ Creating awareness about health sanitation | Doctors and Assistant of Upazila and union Health Centre |
| Department of Primary Education (DPE) | ➢ Distribution of Books to primary students  
➢ Assistance under food for education  
➢ Ensuring quality education through inspection and supervision | Officials at upazila level and primary school teachers |
| Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) | ➢ Credit support  
➢ Capacity building through awareness development and imparting training  
➢ Developing network of the disadvantaged | Officials and field staff |
| Local Government Engineering department (LGED) | ➢ Constructing Physical Infrastructure (school, bridge, culverts, irrigation structure etc.) | Engineers, supporting staff with the help of local government |
| Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) | ➢ Ensure safe drinking water through sinking tube well  
➢ Construction and distribution of sealed latrines  
➢ Construction of pipe lines for water | Engineers, supporting staff with the help of local government |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of social Welfare (DSW)</td>
<td>Providing support to the disadvantaged section of people, Providing credit</td>
<td>Officials, supporting staff with the help of local organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Department (SD)</td>
<td>Conduct census or sample survey for gathering information</td>
<td>Officials of Upazila level with the help of field staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upazila cooperative Office (UCO)</td>
<td>Protecting the cooperators accumulated capital and other assets</td>
<td>Officials, supporting staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Non Formal Education (DNFE)</td>
<td>Provide mass education services</td>
<td>Upazila official in collaboration with NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA)</td>
<td>Provide skill training to women, Provide credit</td>
<td>Field staff and training institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Youth (DYD)</td>
<td>Provide skill training to youth, Provide credit</td>
<td>Field staff and training institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Relief and Rehabilitation (DRR)</td>
<td>Provide direct support (cash, food) to the vulnerable people</td>
<td>Official of upazila level with the support of local governemnr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non government Organizations (NGOs)</td>
<td>Provide skill training, Motivation and awareness building, Education, primary health services, Involve in income generating activities and marketing facility, Provide credit, Developing Networking of the people</td>
<td>Officials, Field staff</td>
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Source: South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme Bangladesh Annual Report 1996

The government of Bangladesh has given utmost priority to deliver services for the disadvantaged section of people and enhancing productivity. Primary education has made compulsory for all while government is committed to ensure primary health care to everyone and admirable success already has been achieved to this end. Expanded programme for Immunization (EPI) is very successful programme in Bangladesh for its wider acceptance of every stakeholder in the process. Among the countries of South Asia, Bangladesh achieved a commendable
success in supplying safe drinking water in rural areas but recently problem of arsenic has emerged a new challenge in that issue. Government also has designed some safety net programmes i.e. Vulnerable Group Development Programme (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Test Relief (TR) Food for works Programme (FWP) to support the underprivileged sections of people. Although, the people feel that the support services are not quite enough as per need of the locality and there is discrepancy in delivering support services both in rural and urban area and poor and non poor. UNDP 1998 articulated that poorest 10% in the rural areas have access to 13% of the total health benefits. Bottom 20% households have access to only 14% public spending on rural education while upper 20% enjoy 29%. In primary education top 20% get 21% benefit and bottom 20% get 19% benefit. The support services focused to targeted people also have some problems. Although the poor are gearing benefit but the complain is that sometimes actual beneficiaries are overlooked. Support services related to increase productivity also in favor of well off people although the disadvantaged section of people gets indirect benefit from these initiatives. W.B. (2004) found that too often service fail poor people in access, in quantity and in quality.

III. Problems of ensuring support services to poor

To ensure the support services to the poor there exists problems in delivering and receiving mechanism. From the delivery side two actors are very important i.e. Service providers and local governments authority and receiving side the beneficiaries or the people is very important:

A. Service Delivery Mechanism

A.1 From the side of service delivery agency

A.1.1. Absence of database

Absence of database at local level limits the initiative in providing support services to the target people. It is really difficult to identify the real needy person of
service receiver as well as to identify the nature of support services required to meet requirements of the communities people.

A.1.2. Weak relationship between service provider and receiver

The service receivers especially the disadvantaged sections of people don’t fell free to make contact the service provider. In that context a statement by a service provider is worth mentioning. During the planning workshop organized after successful completion of the pilot phase the chief executive at the local level indicated that People always hesitate to consult to their problems with the officials although the officials are paid for providing services to the village people. As a result it is difficult to assess their problem and respond to meet their demand.

A.1.3. Lack of strong institution at grassroots level

The extension agents also feel that it is very difficult to go every household to serve the people. It would be easier to serve all members by one visit if they have any strong institution at the grassroots level. But unfortunately, strong and healthy institution at every village is non-existence.

A.1.4. Negligence in taking responsibility

For ensuring quality services the community or the local government would have to take responsibility. Because, it is not possible for the line departments to ensure quality services if the people of local area don’t take responsibility to monitor activities and provide feedback. The service delivery agencies are facing problem of lack of manpower and inadequate logistic services to serve the people.

A.1.5. Mentality of the poor

From the experience of service providers it was learnt that the poor have developed a mentality to cope with the situation by accumulating experience of living under perpetuate poverty. The attitude of conformism, fatalistic worldview, superstitious beliefs, skeptical, ignorance and prevailing mindset against alteration
creates hindrances to identify their problem as well as take necessary action to serve them.

A.2 From the side of local government

A.2.1. Lack of coordination among government and non-government organization

The functionaries of local government feel that they are not consulted for taking any development initiative in their locality. They don’t have access to information about how many organizations are working for the development of rural poor. Specially, due to lot of interventions by GO and NGO there are duplication and overlapping of activities in the rural areas. They also informed that one person is getting loan from different programmes and organisations due to lack of coordination and ultimately their suffering that arising out is increasing from this uncoordinated distribution of such benefits and support services. Another problem they raised that many people get training but the utilisation of gained knowledge is frustrating as the selection of trainees done by the implementing agency without considering their attitude, resources and enthusiasm.

A.2.2. Lack of information

The functionaries of local government are not aware about the situation of the local areas. As the authority is not equipped to collect information they have to take decision on the basis of assumption. When they are requested by the line agency to select some vulnerable persons for providing support services, the functionaries of Union Parishad sometimes consult with the people having good relation with them and finally select the beneficiaries leaving out the really deserving people. In that case there is chance of nepotism and favoritism for giving support services.

A.2.3. Poor quality secretarial support

The Union parishad is poorly equipped with secretarial support services. There is only one supporting staff at union Parishad called secretary. The secretary is not well equipped to help the functionaries of Union Parisad by providing information. Moreover, the Functionaries of Union Parishad are elected for five
years. So, if they don’t get any support from the officials of local government it is very difficult to respond as per need of people.

A.2.4. Absence of need base support services
In absence of database the functionaries of Union Parishad is hardly able to place their demand to the service provider. So they have to depend on the supply based support services by the service provider. In most cases the support services provided by the service delivery agency does not match with their requirements and the services are very minimal as per their requirements.

A.2.5. Individualistic development mentality
People in the rural areas are becoming more individualistic than that of ever before. The social capital and bondage of the society are becoming weaker as a result of globalizations. Earlier days, community response during crisis was the main strength of the society. Now a day’s sense of groups, group cohesion and solidarity has declined a lot. Although community response in catastrophic situation is very strong but extending cooperation to individual family for meeting his crisis is not so strong. It is learnt that earlier practices of borrowing without interest from the neighbors to meet up any untoward incidents was very much common but now a days borrowing without interest is unthinkable.

B. From the side of Service Receiver

B.1. Extension agents are not responsive
The common criticism made by the people, specially disadvantaged section of people that the extension agents are not very much responsive to the need of poor people. They are very much interested to serve the well off people as a means develop good relation them with a view to ensure security of their service. It was observed during the pilot phase of the project that the people don’t know how many extension agents are working in their locality. But the functionaries of local government said that they are available at least two days in the Union parishad.

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B.2. **Lack of quality services**

People also feel that the quality of support services provided by the public sector is deteriorating day by day. As the poor have very limited freedom of choice they have to enjoy public facilities of education, health services. But absenteeism of the service provider, unqualified service provider always inhibits to get quality services. People who are able to get services from the private services are getting quality services.

B.3. **Lack of transparency and accountability**

At the grassroots level people are not very much clear about nature of support services are available from the service delivery agency. So they are not in a position to monitor as well as make those agency or person to be accountable.

B.4. **Affinity with the power structure**

The support services directed to poor also suffered from the problem of distributive justice by the functionaries of local government. The complain is that the people having good relation with the functionaries of local government are getting priority than the actual beneficiaries. The functionaries of local government also partially agree to this complain by saying that they have to take quick decision in this regard as they are lacking information they have to select this beneficiaries from their memory.

B.5. **Lack of flexibility in the system**

The people expressed their grievances that there is some problem in the system of service delivery mechanism. Specifically they told that during crisis they are not able to get credit from GO and NGOs. Sharing their experience they said that some sorts of formalities are required to get credit support from public sector as well as NGO sector. Then they don’t have any alternative way other than going to moneylender with a very high rate of interest.

IV. How this gap can be reduced?
This is clear from above discussion that every actors involved in the process of service delivery mechanism is right and they have lot of rationale to their argument. Now the challenge is how to reduce this gap. WB (2004) articulated that by putting poor people at the center of service provision by enabling them to monitor and discipline service provider by amplifying their voices in policymaking and strengthening the incentives for provider to serve people would ensure services to the poor. Field experiences indicate that ensuring support services would require adequate resources for the service delivery agency. On the other hand, the government of third world countries is not able to pour adequate money to satisfy all people. In that context following measures can be taken to ensure proper utilization of available resources:

**IV.1. Empowering people and strengthening local government**

People specially the disadvantaged section of people and the functionaries of local government must be empowered for making accountable service delivery agency as well as service provider. Providing necessary information to the people and accumulating necessary information by the local government is one of the way for empowering the poor and local government. Thus the voices of the poor can be reflected in designing and providing services. Total community would be able to create pressure for the service delivery agency to provide quality service according to their need.

**IV.2. Formulation of need based planning**

Formulation of local level plan on the basis of actual need of the people will be helpful to sensitize the service provider to respond according to the demands and aspiration of the people.

**IV.3. Introducing feedback mechanism**

A mechanism for getting feedback from the grassroots level about the quality of services, efficiency of extension agents would be helpful for taking corrective measure for providing services efficiently. Local organizations or local government
at the grassroots level can take the responsibility to give time-to-time feedback by disseminating information. For that reason generation of information time to time and consultation with the service receiver should be regular phenomena for local government and people.

**IV.4. Identification of vulnerable group**

The support services directed to the poor can be channalised in a proper way if the vulnerable groups are identified. This database will encourage for taking decision on the basis of information rather than supposition. If this system can be introduced transparency and accountability of the local government can be ensured.

**IV.5. Making service provider: pro poor responsive**

Encouraging the service provider to design and delivery services as per needs of the poor may help to provide services efficiently. For that reason the service provider should be equipped with proper information about the need of the locality. Local government at the grassroots level can play a pivotal role in this respect.

**IV.6. GO and NGO collaboration**

Initiatives taken by GO and NGO for addressing the poverty should be fine-tuned. Coordinated efforts are required to condense overlapping and misuse of the resources. After identification of the potential areas for development, GO and NGO should come forward to supply the services as per their areas of specialization. If the local government at the grassroots level were capable enough to coordinate this mater then this would be helpful to ensure services to the people.

**IV.7. Bridging the gap of Information**

From earlier discussion it is clear that lack of information is one of the major problems for providing as well as receiving services efficiently. Field experience shows that nature of information requirements for ensuring support services to the

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people varies from service delivery agency, local government and receiver. During a workshop organised to get feedback on the methodology of LLPMS the officials of nation building department expressed that they need consolidated information in the field of education, health, productivity, and employment status of a specific area. While the local government authority informed that they need consolidate information along with the information of individual household and problems and potential areas of development. The service receivers need information related to the service provider and where they would receive these services, what is the service available at what cost. The service provider also clarified that if they got the consolidated information of each sector, it would be easier to identify the most needy area. While the authority of local government informed that they would be able to sensitize the service delivery agency by explaining consolidate data and further would be able to ensure support services to the most needy person if they have information of individual households.

V. What is doing under LLPMS?

Local level Poverty Monitoring System (LLPMS) was piloted under MIMAP-Bangladesh by Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) with a view to develop a user friendly mechanism for poverty monitoring at local level. The local level poverty monitoring system (LLPMS), pilot tested in Bangladesh, has three major components i.e. Participatory Poverty and Development Monitoring (PPDM); Resource Profile Monitoring (RPM); and Village Development Planning (VDP). The first two components generate the database while the third one utilizes the information for preparing village development plans and programs. As a strategy Local government at the grassroots level was involved in the whole process while the trained local people were involved in data collection. Data was collected by using PRA and household survey. After data collection village information book was prepared incorporating the information of each households. On he basis of
information a planning workshop was organized in presence of service delivery agency, local government and villagers. The villagers were provided some information on the basis of their requirement. On the basis of pilot survey BARD is now implementing the design in all villages under one Union. In that phase using NRDB will develop a database and some meetings will be organized at the grassroots level to disseminate the findings of survey as well as providing some necessary information to the people. From the experience of pilot survey and second phase it can be said that LLPMS has developed a mechanism for providing support services to the poor in following ways:

V.1. List of Poor households

Through LLPMS the functionaries of local government has prepared a data book where the poor families has been identified along with their other information. So, the local government authority has a database for identifying the prospective candidates for getting support services. On the other hand overlapping and duplication of activities can be avoided by consulting the database.

V.2. Consolidated Information

Part A of the data book contains the consolidated information of various sectors of the villages. This information can further be consolidated for getting the picture of ward/Union for meeting the information requirement of the local authority as well as service provider.

V.3. Plan Book

On the basis of collected information and identified priorities area of development, the functionaries of Union Pariashad has placed their demand to the service provider and the service provider had also responded to provide support services with their available resources.

V.4. Sensitization of the Functionaries of UP

After the field works the attitude of the functionaries of local government has changed a lot. As the Chairman was present during the PRA exercise he said that although he is living in the locality but the information gathered through PRA was
new to him. At the planning workshop the Chairman of the Union Parishad confessed that this was very much unexplored area to him. Now they are aware about the problems of their area and they would try to utilize this knowledge for benefiting the people.

V.5. Enhancing voice of the poor

people of the study area are very much aware about their problems and the role of service provider in their locality as the information was provided during field works. Especially they know the extension agents of development in their area. The functionaries of Union Parishad also requested to inform them if the service provider doesn’t work properly. In that way a feedback mechanism has been developed under the project villages and there is a scope for raising voices of the poor.

V.6. Poverty Mapping

In the second phase an attempt would be taken to explain poverty both income and human poverty by using map. Natural Resources Database (NRDB) will be used to sensitize the policy planner and service provider by showing consolidated information on health, education, and poverty of the respective Ward. While another map will be developed to identify every deprived family of each villages to ensure support services to the needy people. Figure 01 shows the consolidated literacy rate of different Ward while figure 02 shows the individual households who have drop out students. This is very easy to sensitize the policy planner and service providers to provide services to the disadvantaged Ward by showing figure 01. On the overhand the functionaries of Union Parishad would be able to supply services to the target beneficiary by observing Fig 02.

Fig 01: Literacy Rate of different Wards Under Muhammapur Union
This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)-funded Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) research network [www.pep-net.org].

VI. Conclusion

Local Level Poverty Monitoring system has developed a mechanism for poverty monitoring at local level ensuring participation of all stakeholders. The
functionaries of local government and officials of nation building departments have admired this initiative. Earlier discussion provoked that the system developed under LLPMS has enormous potential for its user-friendly nature. But its potential usages depend on the positive attitude of all stakeholders and innovativeness of its user. However, it was felt in the pilot test that manual database developed under pilot survey also limits its potential usages. The experience shows that computer-based database will expedite its potential usage because the database developed through manually is time consuming for taking decision. The research team of Bangladesh is quite able to develop a very simple computer based database but the challenge is to transfer this knowledge at the local level. In the second phase we have taken this challenge to develop a user-friendly database by the initiative of local people. The selected Union Parishad has a computer but it remains under and unutilized due to shortage of technical manpower. To overcome the problem a young boy having very little knowledge of computer has been selected as supervisor. An initiative will be taken to transfer the technical know how at local level by imparting training to this supervisor. If this can be done as per plan it might be an innovative model for developing database at the local level as well as ensuring support services to the poor by increasing managerial capacity of the local government. Finally, the system will not be able to increase resources for delivering services rather it will ensure optimum utilization of existing resources by increasing management capacity of the services provider.

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