

Analytical study of ecops: e-governance project by government of andhra pradesh e...

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The police force in Andhra Pradesh (AP) state, India, introduced a network-based system (eCOPS) in 2002 to help, among other things, improve the openness with which criminal cases are handled.

Introduction

The concept of e-governance has made its way with Andhra Pradesh leading the country in the field of technological advances. With the launch of eCOPS in June 2002 and later its state-wide deployment on the web-enabled platform in 2008, Andhra Pradesh became the first state in India to introduce a state-wide online police network to improve the performance of state police units in controlling crime, maintaining law and order, and in administration. The connectivity across each of the police locations helps in saving of time on record maintenance, in minimization of duplicated work and in smoothening of processes to reduce the workload of the A. P. police while making it a more friendly organization with better output. What is more of an achievement in equipping the police force to access and deploy data anywhere, anytime and analyse them on real time basis is the extremely cost effective manner in which the process got developed and the wise use of technology and existing infrastructure that kept the maintenance expenses minimum.

The fact that the ventures of AP Police have become an inspiration in e-governance has been confirmed by the recent initiatives of the police forces of Karnataka and West Bengal, who have come a good deal forward on a similar road, completing some pilot projects. Other state governments have also planned developments in this direction. E-governance is touted by many

as the next great Indian revolution. Beyond the hype, however, is a growing movement in India and other Asian countries to experiment with governance through Internet. Governments of all political persuasions will feel the pressure to adapt their machinery to advances in ICT. The e-government environment meaning- less red tape, more transparent regulations, easier interactions-is where all will need to go and A P Police, through visionary steps and incessant work at all levels, have managed to inculcate the “ why” of IT in the minds of the police force all over the state.

Application Description

In India, if a crime is committed, the victim (or a witness) must go to the police station where they live, and report the crime which is then said to be registered. The duty officer in the station fills in a First Information Report (FIR): a statement of details as recalled by the victim. Previously, this has been a paper-based process, and paper records were easily manipulated or lost. With the eCOPS system, a victim could go to any police station (not just their local one) and the duty officer can register the crime direct onto the system. eCOPS' contribution to transparency would arise from that fact that, once a case has been registered on the system server database it cannot easily be changed. The person who registered the case could also get access to case details and progress at any point, either by going to any police station and requesting an officer to access their case on eCOPS, or by accessing their case details online via the AP Police Web site using an FIR code number that is issued at the time of registration.

Available case details would include the FIR, actions taken, actions pending, other crime details, etc. The victim could lodge a complaint if they see from accessing case details that the case has not been registered properly, or that there has been no progress made on the case since it was last accessed. Finally, senior officers in the police service could also use eCOPS to monitor case details and progress. All of this affects the transparency of case handling, and the accountability of police officers. The system is still at a relatively formative stage. At present, it only covers a limited number of functions, and only four pilot locations in the state. There are planned expansions to deal with mobile data gathering, traffic management, analysis of gang activity, police training, and other facets of police work; and a planned roll-out to the whole state.

Hope Page of enterprise version of eCOPS

Role of ICT

The eCOPS system was developed and is maintained by the Police Computer Services department, in collaboration with two private vendors: Sun Systems and Pioneer Systems. Sun provided the AP State Police with multiple E450 Sun servers to run this project across the whole state. A core focus of eCOPS is its Oracle-based crime databases. It maintains a database of listed offenders in all criminal cases reported in four initial locations: Hyderabad, Vijaywada, and Vishakapatnam cities, and Srikakulam district. During six months of operation, the department generated information on 11, 000 people accused in various cases in Hyderabad alone, while it collected data

on 4, 000 other offenders listed in Vijaywada, Vishakapatnam and Srikakulam.

Once eCOPS is extended to other districts in Andhra Pradesh state, the department hopes to have India's largest criminal database. The database can be accessed at a number of individual police stations through a computer network, thus assisting police officers in their investigations, for example to check a criminal's details during interrogation. A user-friendly interface has been developed that enables the system to be handled even at constable level. The main role of ICTs in transparency would be in providing members of the public with dis-intermediated access to information on case progress via the Web without the need to have any contact with a police officer. There is a plan to take this disintermediation further by allowing online registration of cases.

Application Drivers/Purpose

The main purpose behind the eCOPS system was to improve the effectiveness of policy performance; to improve the efficiency of police procedures; for example, by eliminating redundant processes in the registration of criminal cases; and to improve the quality of management information provided for senior policy decision-making, particularly through integration of previously separate information systems. Within the focus on effectiveness, there was a concern about the non-transparent, even dishonest nature of police work, which had become synonymous with corruption and delay. The intention was that the new system - through its automation of previously human processes and through its state-wide and

online accessibility - would make the registration, processing and follow-up of criminal cases more open. Under the existing regime, many police require a bribe before they are willing to register a case, and also require a bribe to be paid before they answer any query about the case, such as its progress, or other information held on file. It was partly this poor image of police functioning, that led the Chief Minister of the State to impose the system on the police service. There were also drivers from the failure of police to properly prosecute some high-profile criminal cases that had political overtones; something which was politically-damaging and seen as requiring an equally high-profile reaction.

Stages of Police Datacenter

Stakeholders

Major Stakeholders

Police officers at all levels are the key stakeholders.

Victims of crime are the other main group who have consciously been included in the stakeholder map for the system
Criminals

Minor stakeholders

Other players in the criminal justice system such as the judiciary and prison systems represent the minor stakeholders of system.

Awareness:

A survey was conducted among a group of 250 randomly selected people in Hyderabad. Out of those 250 people, only 53 were aware of the project eCOPS. This gives the awareness percentage of just 21.2%.

Also this survey was conducted with city people who are educated and much more aware about the things than the uneducated people. The awareness percentage among the village and uneducated people will be a lot less than this. As one of the intentions of this project is to help those people who do not have the police stations nearby their living place, it is proving to be effective to cater that goal because of lack of awareness. Total no of visitors to the website of apstatepolice from inception in 2009 till date are 3409839.

Survey Reports:

Transparency and the Poor

There has been no specific effort to address the needs of the poor in the eCOPS project. However, the poor are victims of crime and their needs are therefore indirectly addressed in the ability to register and follow-up a criminal case at any police station (thus saving both time and transport costs), to follow-up cases online, and in the intended reductions in bribe-paying and delays. Any cost savings have a disproportionately beneficial impact on the poor since they represent a much higher proportion of income. Greater equality of treatment will equally bring a disproportionate benefit to the poor, who lack political and social capital, and can often find themselves the subject of police harassment. Nevertheless, some aspects of the system are still unequal, since the poor face barriers to making use of the online facilities, including widespread illiteracy and lack of access to computing facilities.

Impact: Costs and Benefits

The original cost estimate for eCOPS was something over US\$3m in direct costs. Using eCOPS leads to a significant reduction in time required to register a criminal case, and to locate relevant information; this can also enable a cost saving for the police and for crime victims. For example, it would previously typically take a victim some days to get their First Information Report properly recorded; with eCOPS this process would take just an hour or so.

Theoretically, those who are victims of crime away from their home can now register the crime immediately, rather than having to return home as they would have in the past. eCOPSs should also save labour costs in the automation of many file transfer and data-gathering activities, and should improve the quality of police management decision making. By dis-intermediating police officers from some criminal case processes, the system could improve the transparency and reduce the corruption of police activity. It could also have an internal transparency role, by enabling senior officers to monitor case performance. However, these benefits are presently prospective rather than actual since the eCOPS system has run into several implementation challenges, described below. The pilot scheme has proven the theoretical worth of the system, but the ability to scale-up to a full implementation is currently unknown because the pilot system has not been properly implementable in practice.

Gaps in Current System

Data Collection System: - The major gap recorded in the current system is

that currently the computer systems are not installed at every police station so the data collection process is manual. This may lead to various discrepancies and in the system and may also cause delay in information processing. Verification process of Online FIR registration: – When the FIR's are registered online; they need to be verified for their authenticity. The procedure for that needs to be full proof and should not be much time consuming. This is a very big challenge which needs to be overcome. Else this may lead to negation of all the benefits offered by the system.

Evaluation: Failure or Success?

There has been no formal evaluation of the project, and its future success or failure is, at the present stage, unclear. However, its current status is largely unsuccessful: although the central databases have been populated with some records, there has been no real impact to date on the processes or transparency of case registration.

Enterprise eCOPS: The RoadAhead

The PCS is now planning a consolidation of various applications that it has developed over the last few years and increase its effectiveness. For example, a synergizing of eCOPS and 3rd eye is already in the pilot phase. Through this, the details given in an FIR would also search the 3rd eye data bank and give details of the vehicle/person involved without any manual involvement. Thus the PCS is moving towards unifying the various applications that have been developed through single access points at the interface and also through synergizing various applications. Such an “

enterprise' model of eCOPS will further add to the pace and exactitude of the system.

For eCOPS, it is now a phase of extension and rebranding by integrating it with other already functioning applications, so as to have a single platform for the delivery of multiple diverse services. The Intranet portal that encompasses all applications will thus emerge into " enterprise eCOPS". The AP Police has already embarked on providing total information exchange capability across all its units. Some of these units are the AP Special Police, the CID and the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau. We also envision the linking of Police Department with other departments such as the Passport Office, the Regional Transport Authority, etc. In the long-term, we hope to link the APPD with the Police Departments of other states in the country and even link the eCOPS database with national databases on crime and law and order.