

Direct Benefit Transfer Portal: Improvement of Service Delivery for ST through IT

Introduction

To address the gaps that exist in educational status of STs, Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) operates dedicated schemes to provide educational and livelihood opportunities for the ST community. These schemes, especially the scholarship schemes, provide the underprivileged access to quality education from pre-matric to post-matric stage as well as to higher-level education. However, the implementation of these schemes, owing to their hitherto largely analogue nature, presented difficulties to the Ministry in terms of assessing their effectiveness and, parallelly, deprived the beneficiaries of swift disbursement of scholarships and, hence, support from the schemes.

Intervention

The Ministry, through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) portal, decided to formulate a comprehensive umbrella digital platform to bring in much greater transparency, accountability and ease of operation for all the stakeholders involved. The platform utilizes the prevailing best e-governance practices viz. Digi-Locker, Aadhaar, The Public Financial Management System (PFMS) to bring all the stakeholders together for better information flow and radically improves the citizen service delivery while reducing delays, and redundancies in a sustainable manner.

Through process re-engineering, the Ministry opted for a module-based approach to bring in transparency and enhanced efficacy in line with the prevailing best practices in the e- government sphere:

- **Integration of Universities with the Fellowship Portal:** To reduce process overhead and gaps, the universities have been integrated with the fellowship portal by utilizing the “Verification Module”. The registered nodal officer of the university can access documents available through Digi-Locker and process the applications digitally by issuance of approval or rejection. Through this integration, MoTA can regularly monitor the up-to- date process of verification and grievance redressal. Additionally, timely verification has resulted in MoTA disbursing the scholarships in the same academic year to the eligible students. This module integration has benefited 4,794 scholars pursuing fellowship programmes across 331 universities.
- **Digi-Locker Integration:** The application form requires the prospective students to upload documentation pertaining to Aadhaar, income, caste, marksheets etc. as required by MoTA and the respective institutes. Both the fellowships as well as the overseas portals have been integrated with Digi-Locker. Additionally, the students can upload documents that are not available on Digi-Locker.
- **Aadhaar Authentication:** The DBT mission mandates the capturing of beneficiary details through Aadhaar authentication for all central sector schemes. The Aadhaar capturing allows the tracking of a student’s lifecycle from pre-matric to Ph.D., while capturing information about the scholarships that they have opted for, drop-out rates as well as tracking those utilizing multiple schemes for their benefit.

- **Data Analytics and MIS Report Generation:** The onboarding of Centre of Excellence of Data Analytics (CEDA) and National Informatics Centre Services Incorporated (NICSI) for data analytics has led to a detailed data bank in two years. The data of 44 lakh student beneficiaries of Central Sector Scheme (CS) and Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) is now readily available. The database additionally allows various kinds of MIS report generation such as district-wise, state-wise, institute-wise, stream-wise, gender-wise disaggregated data for monitoring and evaluation with different stakeholders.
- **Communication and Grievance Redressal:** The centralized grievance module has been designed and implemented to handle the grievances of all the participating stakeholders – candidates, universities, state nodal officers, UT nodal officers and so on. Alerts and notifications are sent through SMS and e-mail to all concerned stakeholders. All states have been registered on the portal and the principal secretaries of the state, nodal officer for scholarships and nodal officer (technical) have been issued login details to administrative state activities.

The DBT Portal now facilitates two-way communication through its dedicated module:

- **Ministry with the States:** All important letters, announcements and notifications are uploaded on the portal for the consumption of the stakeholders. Provisions have also been made for state-specific correspondences.
- **States with the Ministry:** States now have the ability to raise technical queries and upload proposal documentation relating to Statements of Accounts Expenses (SOE) / Utilization Certificate (UC) and others. A dedicated team of experts has been deployed to timely address and resolve these queries. This module has facilitated the reduction of time taken for correspondence as physical correspondence has been minimized. Additionally, owing to the increased process efficiency, the state departments utilized the entire budget and cleared pending arrears up to 2018-19, while 25-50 per cent advance for 2019-20 was disbursed by September 2019.
- **States with States:** As the states can now effortlessly communicate with each other, exchanging inputs, best practices and insights are now easily facilitated.

Impact

As the platform embraces digitalization, the service delivery in terms of both processing and delivery has seen remarkable improvements as well as mitigation of risk and fraud. Timeline reduction has taken place as submission of UC and SOE are now online. Through Digi-Locker and PFMS respectively, the documentation is easily verified, and funds disbursed in an efficient and transparent manner. Finally, as the stakeholders are connected to each other, grievances can be swiftly addressed. With Key Performance Indicators (KPI) easily monitorable, a focused execution of scheme objectives can take place. Planning and monitoring of funds can now be done based on beneficiary data. Additionally, the performance of states and UTs can be easily tracked for better implementation and synergy. The enhancement of service delivery has led to a general improvement in the livelihood of the underprivileged groups, leading to upliftment of the tribal population and improved confidence.

Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs