



1. Project Data

Project ID P150308	Project Name Assam Citizen-Centric Service Delivery	
Country India	Practice Area(Lead) Governance	
L/C/TF Number(s) IBRD-87540	Closing Date (Original) 30-Jun-2022	Total Project Cost (USD) 32,080,000.00
Bank Approval Date 26-May-2017	Closing Date (Actual) 30-Jun-2023	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	39,200,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	32,080,000.00	0.00
Actual	32,080,000.00	0.00

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The Project Development Objective was to improve access in the delivery of selected public services in Assam, (PAD, p. 8).

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?



No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

The project, structured as an Investment Project Financing (IPF), featured two main components: Technical Assistance (TA) and Results-based Financing (RBF) utilizing Disbursement Linked Indicators (DLIs).

Component 1: Technical Assistance (Appraisal: US\$31.70 million, Actual: US\$18.58 million): Under Component 1, specialized TA was provided to strengthen Assam Right to Public Services Act (ARTPS) implementation, support process re-engineering in selected services, establish Public Facilitation Centres (PFCs), and foster citizen engagement. Reimbursement of eligible expenditures followed the World Bank's procurement guidelines and was contingent upon the submission of interim unaudited financial reports (IUFIR).

Component 2. Results-based Financing (Appraisal: US\$7.50 million, Actual: US\$13.50 million): Component 2 focused on bolstering reform processes related to timely delivery of public services under ARTPS, expanding service access, particularly in Sixth Scheduled tribal districts, increasing notified services under ARTPS, and incentivizing results orientation. Notably, the results-based approach was significantly bolstered, with financing for this component increasing from 19% to 42% of the project size, resulting in an increase in DLIs from four to seven, and recalibration of DLI targets. Disbursement occurred upon the achievement of DLIs and reporting of Eligible Expenditure Program (EEP).

The Project underwent three restructurings to adapt to evolving needs, capitalize on exchange rate gains and cost savings, and accommodate changes in the implementation schedule. These restructurings involved the following adjustments.

1. **Restructuring No. 1: 29 November 2019 – Level 2 restructuring which led to changes in Financial Management.** The changes sought to replace the earmarking of specific Government of Assam's (GOA) Head of Expenditure in the EEP to a DLI with a global link of the DLIs to the overall EEP as defined and to facilitate the disbursement of DLIs.
2. **Restructuring No. 2: 01 July 2021 – A level 2 restructuring led to several revisions as follows:**
 - a. Change in components and cost: Savings of US\$8.12 million was identified under Component 1 due to delayed implementation. Of this amount, US\$2.12 million was cancelled, and the remaining US\$6 million was reallocated from the TA to the RBF. The revised cost components were US\$18.6 million for Component 1 TA (compared to US\$31.7 million) and US\$13.5 million for Component 2 RBF (compared to US\$7.5 million).
 - b. Cancellation of financing: Total loan cancellation of US\$7.12 million was executed from the TA component, taking the total cost to US\$32.1 at project restructuring. This included the cancellation of US\$5 million was on account of exchange rate gains, and US\$2.12 million as in (a) above due to cost savings and delayed implementation.
 - c. Reallocation between disbursement categories. US\$6 million was reallocated from the TA to the disbursement linked categories (RBF).
 - d. Change in results framework: DLI#2: Inclusion of 1,500 accredited Common Service Centers (CSCs), to reflect the growth in service access points and thereby revising PDO indicator-2 to read as 'Operational Facilitation Centers comprising PFCs and CSCs to serve as points of access for ARTPS Services'. The target and values associated with existing



DLI#4 were raised to include notifying a total of 185 citizen centric public services under the ARTPS Act. In addition, to the enhancement of DLI targets, three new DLIs were added. The three additional DLIs aimed to: (i) incentivize making available RTPS services online on the ARTPS Portal; (ii) sustain and reinforce GoA's policy reform initiatives for improved public service delivery within the ambit of amended ARTPS Act; and (iii) encourage better compliance of time-bound service delivery under RTPS. DLI#5 was added to incentivize the integration and onboarding of these RTPS services through the ARTPS Portal as a single window access for citizens. DLI#6 was added to incentivize effective functioning of the Appellate mechanism for the RTPS, and would involve: (i) facility for citizens to file RTPS appeals through online Appeal Management System; (ii) framing of rules, procedures and regulations for efficient disposal of appeals; and (iii) robust penal provisions in the event of delinquency or failure. DLI#7 was added to incentivize improvement in the delivery of select ARTPS services within the stipulated time.

3. Restructuring No. 3: 10 May 2022 – Several changes as follows:

- a. Change in Loan Closing Date: The final restructuring extended the project period by one year to 30 June 2023. This was to compensate for initial delays and time lost due to Covid-19 related lockdowns and completion of all intended project activities to facilitate the attainment of the PDO.
- b. Change in Results Framework: The Results Framework was adjusted to reflect the extended implementation period of six years (2018-2023). The end targets for most of the indicators remained unchanged. The RF matrix was updated only to reflect the annual target for the extended period. The end targets for two intermediate results indicators (IRIs) were revised: IRI#1 (RTPS ICT platform is operational) and IRI#6 (improved processes for targeted services in Government departments).
- c. Change in Implementation Schedule: Adjustment to the disbursement estimates to reflect full disbursement of US\$32.08 million during the extended implementation period.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Cost: The total project cost was estimated at US\$49.0 million. The actual cost was US\$40.1 million or 81.8% of the appraisal estimate, (ICR p. 2).

This variance was influenced by exchange rate gains, savings due to delayed implementation and reallocation between components (see restructuring above). These adjustments collectively contributed to the reduction in the project's total cost.

Financing: The project was financed through an IBRD loan of US\$39.0 million. The actual amount disbursed was US\$32.08 million.

Borrower Contribution: The Borrower was expected to contribute US\$9.8 million. The Borrower actually contributed US\$8.02 million.

Dates: The project was approved on 26 May 2017. It became effective on 11 August 2017, approximately 2.6 months later. A Mid-Term Review (MTR) review was conducted on 27 June 2020. The project closed on 30 June 2023. The project duration from its effectiveness on 11 August 2017 to its closure on 30 June 2023 was approximately 5 years and 10 months.



3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

Context at Appraisal: Assam, with a population of 31 million, shared socioeconomic characteristics with other low-income Indian states. Despite its rich cultural diversity, Assam grappled with challenges such as susceptibility to natural disasters and historical ethnic tensions. However, the late 1980s brought about a period of sustained political stability, laying a foundation for development initiatives.

Assam's public service delivery system was marked by inefficiencies, limited accessibility, and a lack of user-friendly interfaces between citizens and government agencies, (ICR, p. 5). Outdated manual processes hindered operational efficiency, while frontline institutions lacked a citizen-centric approach. Geographical barriers and communication constraints in certain regions imposed significant costs and delays on citizens seeking government services. Additionally, Assam faced challenges in broadband connectivity (below the district level), inadequately developed ICT infrastructure for service delivery across the Government of Assam (GoA). While efforts under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) aimed to establish a statewide ICT network, reliable connectivity remained scarce beyond the district level. Moreover, essential ICT infrastructure such as the State Data Center and the State-Wide Area Network (SWAN) operated below optimal capacity, necessitating comprehensive upgrades for efficient service delivery through digital means.

In 2012, GoA adopted the ARTPS to ensure citizens' easy and affordable access to public services in an accountable manner. Although conducive policy and institutional contexts were facilitated by the enactment of the ARTPS, weak institutional capacity, poor inter-departmental collaboration, and changes in Government posed challenges in swiftly moving ahead with effective RTPS implementation.

Given these circumstances, improving the delivery of public services through digital means was deemed critical. This involved expanding the reach and ease of service access, establishing digital processes for tracking compliance with ARTPS, and strengthening service delivery institutions to facilitate equitable citizen access to services. Such measures aimed to enhance the overall citizen experience and promote transparency and accountability in public service delivery.

Previous Bank Experience: The Bank has implemented prior capacity building programs in India, as well as Assam, using Assam Rural Infrastructure and Agriculture Services Society (ARIAS), as its implementing agency in Assam, (PAD, p. 64).

Consistency with the Bank Strategies: The PDO aligns closely with the World Bank's (WBs) priorities in India, as outlined in the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) FY 2018-22. A key focus area identified in the CPF was "strengthening public sector institutions," which was integral to achieving the PDO. Through WB support, the GoA was able to revamp and digitize service delivery processes, enhance service accessibility, establish digital tracking mechanisms for compliance with Right to Public Services (RTPS) regulations, address demand-side considerations, and fortify service delivery institutions, thus ensuring equitable access to services for citizens. These interventions are also aligned with two other strategic areas highlighted in the CPF: (a) engaging with different levels of government in India to drive positive change at



the state level; and (b) fostering service delivery innovations and knowledge exchange, particularly across North-east India.

Alignment with Government Reform Strategies/Priorities: The PDO is in line with the reform priorities of the Government of India (GoI) and GoA. In addition to empowering citizens to demand timely services, the ARTPS framework provides avenues for addressing grievances arising from service delivery deficiencies or denials. The Prime Minister of India has consistently underscored the crucial role of efficient digital service delivery on numerous occasions. Moreover, the 'Strategy for New India@75' outlined by NITI Aayog emphasizes the imperative of strengthening public institutions and administration to enhance the availability and accessibility of e-services, aligning with GoI's developmental objectives for FY 22-23. Additionally, the GoA has set an ambitious target of achieving round-the-clock online delivery of all government services by 2026 through comprehensive digitization efforts across departments.

Summary of Relevance of Objectives Assessment. The PDO was pitched at an appropriate level of ambition, given the significant challenges faced by Assam's public service delivery system. The PDO was strongly aligned with Bank strategies, the reform priorities of the GoI and the GoA.

Therefore, Relevance of Objectives is rated High.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

To improve access in the delivery of selected public services in Assam

Rationale

The project did not initially incorporate a Theory of Change (ToC) within the PAD. However, the ICR subsequently reconstructed a credible ToC aimed at addressing the challenges of public service delivery in Assam. These challenges, encompassing complex administrative procedures, outdated processes, and limited digitization, were compounded by geographical and connectivity constraints.

To comprehensively tackle these obstacles, the ToC delineated a series of strategic activities. Primarily, it aimed to strengthen policy frameworks and extend the RTPS legislation to tribal districts, thereby expanding the scope of digitally accessible services. Additionally, efforts were directed towards overhauling departmental mechanisms through digitalization and streamlining service processes for enhanced efficiency. Moreover, the ToC included activities such as implementing a user-centric ARTPS Portal and multi-channel service delivery strategies to ensure inclusive access. Furthermore, comprehensive information campaigns and the establishment of grievance redress mechanisms were prioritized.



These interventions were anticipated to yield immediate outputs, such as simplified processes and improved digital access, paving the way for intermediate outcomes like enhanced service delivery efficiency and heightened citizen satisfaction. Ultimately, the overarching objective, as articulated in the PDO statement, was to ensure improved citizen access to public services in Assam. While critical assumptions were not explicitly outlined in the ToC, it was assumed that the extension of services to Tribal districts would be effective, and that the Tribal districts would agree to proposed changes, facilitated by political buy-in and cooperation.

Intermediate Results and Outputs:

The following key outputs were reported in the ICR (Annex 1, p. 21):

IRI#1: RTPS ICT Platform is operational: The multilingual ARTPS Portal was officially inaugurated in October 2021, and established to serve as gateway for online access of 310 RTPS services. By exceeding notification goals and achieving high compliance rates with service delivery timelines, the project contributed to strengthening governance mechanisms and regulatory compliance. The notification of a total of 119 services by Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils and the notification of 310 services under the Assam RTPS Act reflect improved transparency, accountability, and adherence to service standards. This outcome underscores the project's commitment to enhancing governance practices and ensuring regulatory compliance in public service delivery. (Baseline: Detailed project report and implementation plan to be approved by GoA; Annual Service Delivery Report based on MIS published. Revised target: Stabilization of RTPS portal, with RTPS MIS and performance monitoring mechanism in place). **Achieved.**

IRI#2: Access to RTPS Services expanded to targeted districts: at the end of the project, the Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils had notified a total of 119 services under the RTPS. Access to RTPS Services was expanded to targeted districts, surpassing notification goals. (Baseline: 0.00; Target: Notification of total 90 RTPS services in the targeted districts). **Achieved.**

IRI#3: Number of Services notified under RTPS Act: Cumulatively 310 services had been notified under the Assam RTPS Act at the end of the project. (Baseline: 55 RTPS services initially notified; Original target: A total of 95 services were notified; Revised target: cumulatively 185 services were notified). **Achieved.**

IRI#4: Number of applications for RTPS with women as beneficiaries: at the end of the project, more than 2.0 million women had drawn benefits of RTPS services, representing 27% women service recipients of total service applicants (Baseline: 20% of applications with women beneficiaries; Original target: Increase of 22% over baseline; Revised target: 42.5% of total applications for RTPS with women as beneficiaries). **Partially Acheived.**

IRI#5: Number of online services available at the ARTPS Portal: the ARTPS Portal provided citizens' access to 310 RTPS services at project completion date. More services have been onboarded to the Portal following the closure of the project. This IRI was added at Restructuring No. 2: Target: make cumulatively 95 services available. **Achieved.**

IRI#6: Improved processes for targeted services in Government departments: Through initiatives such as business process reengineering for targeted services, the project aimed to optimize processes and enhance operational efficiency. The successful completion of process improvements for 146 services indicates a higher-level outcome of streamlined service delivery processes. By eliminating redundant steps



and implementing end-to-end digitalization, the project contributed to improved efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of public services. **Achieved.**

IRI#7: ARTPS Policy framework and institutional mechanism strengthened: Establishment of Grievance Redressal Mechanism which was operational at the end of the project. The project's implementation of a grievance redressal mechanism plays a pivotal role within the broader framework of improved governance practices and citizen-centric service delivery. By operationalizing this mechanism, citizens are empowered to voice their concerns and seek resolution for issues encountered during their interaction with RTPS in Assam. With more than 39,000 grievances and 1,100 RTPS appeals resolved, the project ensures transparent and accessible channels for submitting complaints and feedback. This is likely to foster a culture of accountability and responsiveness, bolstering public trust in government institutions and services. Additionally, the continuous monitoring and analysis of grievances contribute to process improvement and efficiency, ensuring that service delivery remains responsive to citizen needs and expectations. Overall, this mechanism significantly boosts citizen engagement, trust, and satisfaction, aligning with the project's overarching goal of enhancing efficiency and transparency in public service delivery. Baseline: ARTPS Act 2012 enacted and ARTPS Rules 2012 framed; Target: Grievance Redress mechanism for the ARTPS is operational online. **Achieved.**

IRI#8: Compliant ARTPS applications related to 10 most availed services delivered within timeframe prescribed by ARTPS Act: at the end of the project, complied with notified service delivery timelines was ensured for 70 percent of the application for 10 most availed RTPS services. **Achieved.**

IRI#9: Increase in RTPS beneficiary feedback on service delivery: -improved Citizen-Centric Service Delivery- The project's emphasis on citizen engagement and satisfaction, as evidenced by the operationalization of beneficiary feedback mechanisms and grievance redressal mechanisms (as discussed above) underscores a higher-level outcome of citizen-centric service delivery. The recorded high satisfaction levels and positive feedback from citizens (with a recorded 95% satisfaction level, and 4.2 out of 5 rating in citizen satisfaction) reflect an increased focus on meeting citizen needs, enhancing service quality, and fostering trust between citizens and government institutions. Additionally, the endline impact evaluation survey, conducted by a third party, revealed that 94 percent of respondents from access-constrained districts reported overall satisfaction in service delivery. Notably, respondents from tribal hill districts of Karbi Anglong and the riverine island district of Majuli reported satisfaction levels of 99 percent. Moreover, respondents from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities exhibited a higher proportion of satisfaction as well. (ICR, p.11). **Achieved.**

Summary of Efficacy Assessment: Overall, the project's successful outcomes signify a significant improvement in the delivery of public services in Assam, characterized by increased digitalization, enhanced accessibility, streamlined processes, and heightened citizen satisfaction. The project exceeded its target for PDO #1. Additionally, PDO #2 was fully achieved. In assessing the overall efficacy of the project, it is also essential to acknowledge the initial delays in the development and integration of the ARTPS portal. These delays were attributed to a lack of agreement within the Government of Assam regarding the approach to the portal's development and integration with existing systems. Despite these challenges, once the ARTPS portal became fully operational, significant progress was achieved, as evidenced by the substantial uptake in digital interaction with RTPS services. All intermediate indicators were achieved, with the exception of meeting the target for women applicants. While this target was not met in relative terms, the project surpassed expectations in absolute numbers, benefiting almost 2 million women beneficiaries, demonstrating a



substantial stride towards gender inclusivity in service utilization. Based on the evidence provided in the ICR, the overall efficacy rating for Objective 1 is assessed as Substantial.

Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

Overall Efficacy is rated Substantial with significant achievements under both PDO indicators. The project exceeded the end targets for PDO outcome indicators #1 and fully achieved PDO indicator 2, as well as met or exceeded target values for nearly all IRIs. The evidence provided in the ICR points to the project's success in enhancing public service delivery in Assam, including significant institutional strengthening contributions, expansion of RTPS Act coverage to tribal areas, and important policy reforms.

The project catalyzed the expansion of the RTPS Act to include predominantly tribal Sixth Schedule Autonomous Council areas, thereby extending the coverage of essential public services to historically underserved communities. Moreover, the project facilitated crucial cross-cutting policy reforms, including amendments to the Assam Right to Public Services (ARTPS) Act to specify norms for service notification and delivery timelines. These reforms mandated the designation of Public Servants and Appellate Authorities for grievance redressal, establishing the Assam State Commission for Right to Public Services as a high-powered apex forum to enhance the effectiveness of ARTPS Act implementation, (ICR, p,13).

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

An economic analysis was conducted at Project Appraisal based on savings in transaction costs for citizens accessing select essential RTPS services. A citizen consultation, in six districts of Assam, reported in the PAD, had highlighted high intermediation and travel costs involving multiple visits to district government offices (20 km-150 km) as associated costs for accessing necessary Government certificates. The multiple visits also implied time and opportunity costs from lost wages. The economic analysis estimated minimum savings to citizens of US\$83.5 million over the five-year project period depending on the size of suggestive rents paid to intermediaries under four categories of services: (i) Land related services (US\$80 million); (ii) Disability Certificates (US\$3 million); (iii) Vital records certificates (US\$0.5 million), and (iv) Social category certificates. A secondary benefit from capacity building for electronic delivery of services was seen to accrue to GoA by improving efficiency and productivity. The identified benefits were two-fold in nature: (1) reduction in transaction cost for service applicants, and (2) improvement in government ability to meet service requests in a timely manner. The PAD, however, did not estimate the intangible efficiency gains to GoA from improved performance



through a combination of policy and administrative changes including new service deliver channels, connectivity, workflow simplification, higher productivity, and less paperwork. Besides, higher access to government social services and a more responsive administration may have contributed to a higher level of trust in public agencies.

Based on information available at the time of Project closing, a more robust and broad-based attempt has been made to compute efficiency gains from citizen savings in transaction and opportunity cost. The estimated efficiency gains from the 7.5 million RTPS applications processed on the portal could be as high as US\$97 million in the three years of the portal’s operation.

The gains are expected to continue to accrue much beyond the project’s close. The potential savings may be higher if other intermediation expenses are factored in addition to (i) the efficiency gains to GoA from higher administrative and processing throughput, and (ii) efficiency gains from non-RTPS services now hosted on the portal. The efficiency gains to Government cannot be estimated as performance of civil servants is not quantifiable. Government productivity improvement is evident in the increase in number of services delivered without commensurate increase in manpower. However, these have not been estimated for want of suitable data.

Additionally, the Project has resulted in environmental and social benefits. The process re-engineering and digitalization for many services has led to a reduction in supporting documentation for service application thereby reducing the consumption of paper. The reduction in multiple travel to Government offices for accessing these services has resulted in lowering the carbon footprint for these purposes. Moreover, the PFCs and CSCs have supported local employment and promoted entrepreneurship in the state besides facilitating timely access to a host of services that require documents provided under RTPS resulting in improved welfare for disadvantaged beneficiaries in remote rural and indigenous communities.

Efficiency Rating

High

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The outcome of the project is rated Satisfactory. Relevance of objectives was rated High. Furthermore, efficacy was rated Substantial, and efficiency was rated High. The economic analysis showed significant potential savings and efficiency gains, indicating positive outcomes. The economic analysis estimated significant savings



of US\$83.5 million to citizens over the project period, primarily from reduced transaction costs associated with accessing essential government services. Furthermore, the estimated efficiency gains from citizen savings in transaction and opportunity costs amounted to as much as US\$97 million in just three years of the portal's operation. Overall, the project demonstrated a high level of efficiency in achieving its objectives, delivering tangible benefits to citizens and the government, and fostering positive environmental and social outcomes, such as reduced paperwork and lower carbon footprint due to process re-engineering and digitalization. It also facilitated social benefits such as local employment generation, entrepreneurship promotion, and improved welfare for disadvantaged beneficiaries in remote rural and indigenous communities.

a. Outcome Rating
Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The key outcome achieved by the project was the successful enhancement of public service delivery efficiency in Assam through the establishment of the ARTPS Portal. The ICR notes that the GoA renamed the ARTPS Portal to Sewa Setu and designated it as the single unified interface for delivering all government services, both RTPS and non-RTPS, just before project closure. However, the transition to this new portal, poses a risk to the continuity of efficient service delivery momentum achieved thus far (ICR, p. 18-19). The shift from the existing Administrative Reforms and Training to the IT Department's new special purpose vehicle (SPV) raises concerns about potential disruptions in institutional knowledge and capacity.

Without effective management, this change could lead to delays or inefficiencies in service provision, undermining previous achievements. Moreover, the need for convening power and robust internal capacity within the SPV underscores the importance of ensuring adequate resources and expertise for successful implementation of CivicTech-oriented digital transformation. Failure to address these risks may relegate the Sewa Setu Portal to a mere IT services provider rather than a catalyst for enhancing public service delivery efficiency within the government's service delivery ecosystem.

This review adds the following Risk to Development Outcome: In addition to the risks associated with institutional changes and capacity building, other potential risks to the Sewa Setu Portal include technical challenges such as system failures, cybersecurity threats, and data privacy breaches. These risks could compromise the reliability and security of the portal, leading to disruptions in service delivery and erosion of public trust. Furthermore, inadequate user training and awareness programs may result in low adoption rates and dissatisfaction among citizens. Additionally, insufficient budget allocation and resource constraints may hinder the portal's maintenance and further development, limiting its effectiveness in the long run. Addressing these risks requires proactive measures, including robust cybersecurity protocols, comprehensive user education initiatives, and sustained investment in the portal's infrastructure and operations.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance



a. Quality-at-Entry

The quality of entry is deemed satisfactory. The Bank team took into account political, administrative, technical challenges, and global experiences in designing a project appropriate to the context. Extensive studies and dialogue were conducted to understand the Government's reasons for reform, IT infrastructure challenges, and political sensitivities. Lessons from similar projects informed the design, with a focus on beneficiary participation and citizen engagement. During consultations with civil society groups, it was observed that service delivery in the state often lacked beneficiary participation. Therefore, the Bank supported the development of a framework for citizen engagement and feedback related to service delivery in Assam as part of this project. This played a crucial role in shaping the project's design. Additionally, strong client engagement, facilitated by a Project Preparation Advance to the Government of Assam, ensured effective implementation by identifying motivated officials and establishing a realistic and measurable roadmap complemented by a robust monitoring and evaluation design.

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

The quality of supervision is deemed satisfactory, characterized by continuity in the task team, which fostered trust and stability in engagement with the Project management unit (PMU), particularly amidst frequent changes in project leadership. The task team possessed a good mix of implementation experience and technical expertise. (ICR, p. 18). Implementation support missions took place every six months, supplemented by regular project interactions. Project ratings were adjusted by the team to reflect implementation progress, initially downgraded to Moderately Unsatisfactory in November 2020 due to lack of progress, then restored to Moderately Satisfactory in July 2022 before upgrading to Satisfactory in March 2023. Open channels of communication facilitated issue identification and resolution, offering support as needed. As implementation advanced and key inputs were procured, the design transitioned to a substantially results-based approach, increasing the number of DLIs and readjusting targets, values, and financing share in the project from 19% to 42% to enhance outcomes. The original project closing date was timely extended to ensure implementation continuity and achieve satisfactory project closure. Despite COVID-19 travel restrictions, the Bank and PMU maintained virtual collaboration, coinciding with a surge in demand for digitalized services during the pandemic.

Quality of Supervision Rating
Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating
Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization



a. M&E Design

The Project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system was comprehensive, utilizing various instruments and data sources including baseline and endline surveys, quarterly and annual reports, data on citizen usage of the ARTPS Portal, administrative data from departments, remote monitoring of PFCs, and beneficiary feedback collected online and through the RTPS Call Centre. An elaborate ARTPS Management Information System (MIS) with a dashboard was developed to monitor progress, interfaced with the Appeal Management System and grievance redressal mechanisms. The M&E design also involved outbound calls from the Call Centre to gather beneficiary feedback on service access and satisfaction, facilitating real-time performance assessment and identification of areas needing attention to support project implementation effectively, (ICR, p. 15).

b. M&E Implementation

Once the ARTPS Portal became fully operational in October 2021, it facilitated the generation of real-time data on service delivery quality and compliance with statutory timelines, resolution of appeals, beneficiary feedback, and effectiveness of grievance redress mechanisms. The centralized ARTPS MIS repository consolidated this information for analytical insights and objective performance measurement. Baseline and endline surveys provided a comprehensive understanding of service access and quality, while an independent verification agency verified DLI achievements, enhancing the project's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework.

c. M&E Utilization

Quarterly and annual reports detailing progress against agreed results were prepared using the M&E system.

However, due to insufficient progress in the early project years, these reports served limited purpose until the end of FY2021.

With the commissioning of the ARTPS portal, the relevance of periodic M&E reports increased, contributing to tracking project results. The RTPS Performance Management Unit utilized M&E products to enhance ARTPS implementation quality. The Chief Minister's Dashboard facilitated data-driven policy formulation by closely tracking RTPS implementation effectiveness through API-based data exchange with RTPS MIS. Additionally, the M&E system provided geographic and socio-economic details of project interventions and micro-innovations, while the endline impact evaluation report offered evidentiary insights used in the GoA's Service Delivery Report at project closure.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues



a. Safeguards

Environment Safeguards: Although the Project was rated ‘substantial’ in terms of overall safeguard risk, the environmental risk has consistently been low, as the activities posed no risk to the environment, with only OP BP 4.01 Safeguard Policy - Environmental Assessment, being triggered. Activities primarily involved minor refurbishment and establishment of PFCs in existing structures, posing no significant environmental threat. Environmental screening of all planned sites was completed successfully, and capacity was built for environmental management. Solar rooftop feasibility assessments were conducted for rural sites with intermittent power supply, leading to installations in 15 PFCs. The project adhered to waste treatment guidelines, ensuring compliance with environmental regulations. Overall, the project had no direct environmental impact, maintaining a satisfactory safeguards rating throughout its duration.

Social safeguards: Social safeguard compliance was a priority for the project, particularly in tribal-dominated Sixth Schedule areas like Bodoland Territorial Council, North Cachar Hills, and Karbi Anglong. Meaningful consultations with tribal leaders informed the Tribal Development Plan (TDP), which emphasized social and cultural interventions. Workshops were conducted to disseminate the TDP and action plans to local citizens, SHGs, and frontline government functionaries. The TDP summary was translated and disseminated in local languages, fostering community engagement. All three ACs adopted the ARTPS, becoming legally accountable for service delivery within stipulated timelines. They notified 119 citizen-centric services under the RTPS and established PFCs with disabled-friendly access and essential amenities. The project engaged with tribal apex organizations, resulting in RTPS notification of Scheduled Tribe certificates. Over 400,000 online services were delivered to tribal people by June 2023, with initiatives like developing an abridged version of ARTPS in braille for visually impaired citizens. The grievance redress system was fully operational, with training provided to public grievance officers from 24 service delivery departments. Mission Sadbhavna utilized the GRM system to resolve pending grievances in a time-bound manner. The toll-free call center facilitated grievance lodging and received and addressed over 400 queries, while also collecting citizens' telephonic feedback on service access. These efforts contributed to more responsive and accountable governance and service delivery in tribal areas.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

The project's financial management arrangements, based on the use of country systems, were deemed adequate for ensuring fiduciary assurance. Double-entry cash-based accounting was utilized for the TA component, while the Treasury system was employed for the underlying Eligible Expenditure Program (EEP) for the DLIs. The PMU maintained proper records and submitted quarterly reports, disbursement claims, and audit reports to the Bank on time. With no major audit findings, the project's financial management performance was satisfactory, supported by simplified arrangements and qualified staff.

However, finalizing the procurement strategy for major procurements, including PFC service providers and ARTPS portal development, faced delays, mainly due to challenges in selecting providers fluent in the local language. The procurement of computers for departments was also delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, once contracts were awarded, project momentum and disbursement improved. The project adhered to procurement guidelines, with the New Procurement Framework not applicable.



c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

The project had unintended outcomes and impacts, notably reinforcing trust between citizens and the state by facilitating efficient and accountable service delivery. Following the inauguration of the ARTPS Portal in October 2021, there was a remarkable increase in service applications, accompanied by high levels of citizen satisfaction.

Additionally, the project drove service delivery innovation, including automated instant delivery of select services and composite delivery of service packages, leading to up to 50% reduction in service delivery timelines. The surge in service requests surpassed expectations, with approximately 1.5 million RTPS services applied through various channels. Interestingly, the endline impact evaluation revealed that many of these service applications were handled by informal facilitators or submitted in private establishments, with applicants incurring modest expenses. This unanticipated trend could be formalized as a rural entrepreneurship initiative for delivering last-mile services to citizens, mitigating risks associated with informality and intermediary dependence, (ICR, p. 14).

d. Other

n/a

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Highly Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Project implementation delays, i.e. delays in implementation of ARTPS portal.
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The ICR identifies several lessons, with which this review adopts. The key lessons are extracted below:

- 1. Comprehensive Citizen-Centric Approach:** The Project demonstrated the effectiveness of engaging communities and leveraging technology to enhance service delivery. By involving stakeholders through targeted efforts and community consultations, the project aligned government services with traditional community systems, fostering mutual trust between citizens and the state. Additionally, the implementation of multi-channel service delivery, including human-assisted and direct digital channels, facilitated ease of access for citizens.



Policy reforms and institutional arrangements further strengthened accountability and responsiveness in service delivery.

2. **Integration of Technology and Human Interaction:** While technology played a pivotal role in streamlining processes and expanding access to services, the project recognized the continued importance of human interaction, especially through physical access points like PFCs. These centers provided essential support for individuals requiring in-person assistance, complementing digital service delivery efforts. Moreover, the involvement of trusted intermediaries, similar to the 'Tax Return Preparer' model, offered opportunities for rural entrepreneurship and improved service accessibility, particularly in remote areas.
3. **Streamlining Procurement Processes:** The project's experience highlighted the importance of finalizing procurement strategies early on, particularly for major procurements. Delays in procurement strategy formulation, especially for PFC service providers and IT services, led to project delays. However, once these contracts were awarded, momentum increased, reflecting the critical role of streamlined procurement processes in project implementation. This underscores the need for proactive planning and efficient execution of procurement activities to ensure timely project delivery.

In summary, the Project provides valuable lessons for replicable models in other regions facing similar challenges. These lessons underscore the significance of community engagement, technological innovation, policy reform, and streamlined procurement processes in achieving efficient, accountable, and citizen-responsive governance.

This review adds the following:

- **Proactive stakeholder engagement for timely project implementation:** The project's initial delays in developing and integrating the ARTPS portal highlight the critical need for proactive stakeholder engagement. Early involvement of the Government of Assam and key stakeholders could have facilitated consensus-building on the portal's development approach and integration with existing systems. Comprehensive feasibility studies and risk assessments should be conducted early to anticipate and mitigate potential challenges.
- **Ensuring inclusive service delivery through Indigenous community engagement:** The project's success in tribal-dominated areas underscores the importance of engaging tribal communities in the service delivery process. Meaningful consultations with tribal leaders and traditional village councils facilitated the development of tailored interventions aligned with community needs and cultural sensitivities. The translation and dissemination of service information in local languages enhanced accessibility and participation among tribal populations. Moreover, initiatives such as the Tribal Development Plan (TDP) addressed specific challenges faced by tribal communities, fostering trust and accountability in governance. This highlights the necessity of adopting culturally sensitive approaches and actively involving marginalized communities to ensure equitable and inclusive service delivery outcomes.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No



14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR is clear, well-written, logically structured and comprehensive. It includes key information about the background of the project, its objectives and outcomes. The ICR effectively links evidence to findings and articulates arguments across different sections, particularly in discussing outcomes. The lessons derived from the project experience are well-supported by evidence and analysis, enhancing the credibility and relevance of the ICR's insights.

a. Quality of ICR Rating Substantial