Pointer – Eyes and Ears of Project Supervision for KP-Southern Area Development Project

{This article is an abridged version of the submission on "Eyes and Ears of Supervision by Bank Procurement Team for KP-Southern Area Development Project" made by Mr. Ghulam Habib, Project Director, Southern Area Development Project, Dera Ismail Khan, KPK, Pakistan, for the South Asia Procurement Innovation Awards.}

Summary

Pointer, a web-based application that captures geo-tagged images of works being implemented and an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system in local languages, allowing resident communities to tell what is going on in the field in KP-Southern Area Development Project in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, has turned out to be an effective tool in monitoring projects in this remote and security-sensitive region. Keeping in mind difficulties involved while implementing the KP-Southern Area Development Project (SADP), the Project teams came up with a solution by developing "Eyes and Ears of Supervision". This enabled the teams to "listen and see" as to what is actually happening on the field while the development project is being implemented. Pointer has thus proved to be a cost effective and time-efficient solution to ensure completion of tasks and physical existence of activities being implemented under KP-SADP.

Background

Pointer is a tool developed to capture geo-tagged images of physical progress, which serves as "Eyes" of a project under implementation. It comes with an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system

- Significantly reduced the turnaround time for resolution of complaints.
- Helped the teams to complete tasks in a timely manner.
- The system has turned into a Citizen Engagement Tool.
- Communities are recording their needs on the field, like requirement of water facility or paving of streets.

available in local languages, which allows resident communities to tell what is going on in the field. This serves as "Ears" for the project. The web-based tool thus remotely tracks the physical progress of any project. It allows the Government agency responsible for implementing the project, to capture geo-tagged images of assets / facilities created under the project, which are then displayed on a GIS-based platform. The images are captured through a smart phone and automatically tagged with the GPS coordinates. This enables sequenced monitoring, as it captures the different phases of the project. For example, the before, during, and after images of a road construction project in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), or a community shelter in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), can be uploaded to Pointer, which allows the task team to remotely monitor physical progress. Even something as simple as office furniture procured through Project funds can be included in the Pointer.

Challenges Addressed

The Project teams were unable to travel to certain project areas, particular in FATA and KP, primarily due to security concerns. The resultant travel restrictions constrained periodic field supervision of activities being financed by the Project and Bank teams. Thus, frequent monitoring and validation of the project's physical progress, particularly projects with a wide geographic span / foot-print, became a challenge. This led to an innovative solution in the form of Pointer, which was utilized to track 1,189 activities. Around 500 complaints were reported and resolved using the IVR system. The system also enabled females in remote areas to access the system directly from their homes. Project and Bank teams could thus get weekly status of the project through calls / complaints received, leading to resolution of the complaints.

Impacts Generated

The online monitoring of complaints by the Project has significantly reduced the turnaround time for resolution of complaints. Tracking

of physical progress of activities using Pointer has helped the teams to complete tasks in a timely manner and ensure physical existence of the activities being implemented. With time, the system has even turned into a Citizen Engagement Tool, where communities are recording their needs on the field, like requirement of a water facility, paving of streets and so on.

Level of Innovation

Any good software must respond to the needs of the user. While developing Pointer and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, it has been ensured that in addition to responding to the needs of Bank teams, requirements of the Government as well as Third Parties are also adequately addressed. The design of functional specifications of Pointer was finalized following several consultations with implementing agencies, private sector, and community beneficiaries. The IVR-based Complaint Redressal Mechanism is an automated system, which can be accessed by anyone from the field dialing from a common phone. This is different from an SMS-based system, which is limited only to people who can read and write messages. The Pointer system requires merely an understanding of how to make a call. The rest is taken care by the system automatically. The system is multilingual and supports local languages.

Replicability

The development of Pointer had been for the KP-SADP project. However, the tool also found utility in implementation of the Punjab Land Record Management Information System Project by way of tracking construction of field data centers. The tool also helped implement the Electricity Distribution and Transmission Improvement Project, and Disaster and Climate Resilience Project. Further, the IVR model found replication in the Sindh Agriculture Growth Project for getting feedback from farmers with regard to agricultural equipment supplied to them.

Scalability and Sustainability

Pointer is on an open source platform. Thus, there is no licensing fee for software. The only expenses are web-hosting charges, which are less than USD 150 per year. Pointer has been

developed in a way that any project, either financed by the Bank or Government, can easily be configured in just a few clicks. Since it has been developed using a web platform, anyone from around the globe can use it to upload images and see the progress. IVR is ported on a toll free number and has a web-based platform. Any new project within Pakistan can easily be ported with some customization in voice menu. There are though subscription charges of approximately USD 6,000 per year.

Lessons Learned

The system has paved the way for KP-SADP to easily track the physical progress of community projects in an efficient and effective manner.

It is one of the best systems for asset monitoring and management through uploading of pictures of assets purchased under World Bank financing.

The system is very user friendly and can be utilized by all community people. It is not limited to any specific language.

Communities can submit their issues regarding their schemes at any stage. This system has provided an easy way and window of opportunity to all local communities for submitting their needs as per their priorities.

It has also provided access to females in remote areas for connecting with the system directly from their homes via mobiles.

Using Pointer, Project teams have been able to track physical progress efficiently, effectively, and economically.

This has also ensured physical existence of activities being implemented and timely completion of tasks.