

See Hindi Version of [Query](#)  
See Hindi Version of [Summary](#) (available from 25 April 2007)  
See [PDF](#) (Size: 231 KB) of this Consolidated Reply



## Decentralization Community



## ICT for Development Community



## Decentralization Community ICT for Development Community

### Consolidated Reply

*Query: Wikipedia on Decentralization in India- Experiences; Advice*

Compiled by [Alok Srivastava](#) and [Sajan Venniyoor](#), Resource Persons and [Jeevan Mohanty](#) and [Gitanjali Sah](#), Research Associates  
23 April 2007

---

From [K. Rajasekharan](#), Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), Thrissur

Posted 15 March 2007

I work in the Library of the Kerala Institute of Local Administration. My interest in Information Technologies (IT) and Wikipedia technologies leads me to think about creating a Wikipedia on Decentralization in India.

The objective of such a proposed Wiki site should be to collect, organise, maintain, edit further and disseminate the growing body of information/knowledge pertaining to decentralization and local governance in India as a whole, and states in particular in a systematic way. In that Wiki, you can have pages for each State and under each State any number of subject headings such as planning, accountability measures, finances, resource mobilization, local body elections etc. can be included as linked pages.

Wiki, as the word denotes, is a collective website created in a participatory manner. The Wiki software/Wiki engine required to create a Wikipedia is available free. In Wiki, any remote user can write/edit any matter. To ensure authenticity, it is possible that the permission to contribute write-ups can be restricted to a group of registered contributors or editors to ensure the quality of content. The

Wiki technology offers excellent opportunity for information gathering, storage, maintenance and dissemination aiming at information empowerment of all the stakeholders in decentralization.

Such a site would lead to capacity building of all actors in decentralization process. The training institutions, training faculties, researchers and academics engaged in the subject of decentralization can have access to more information without ease, if we maintain a Wiki. Non-users of IT can also benefit from information indirectly from Wiki, through direct users of the site. Enhanced information access can lead to higher quality in training, research, writing and various actions with regard to decentralization. Wiki site would be far better than any ordinary portal on decentralization as it allows the enthusiastic volunteers to contribute content such as documents, presentations reports etc.

Responses from the members, particularly those who are familiar with IT, are solicited on:

- Feasibility of this idea with regard to the complexities in maintaining such a site, and the user friendliness of the software
- Funds required in continuing with a Wiki site on Decentralization and Local Governance in India and whether users would be willing to share the financial burden of maintaining such a site.
- Inherent drawbacks in the idea.

### Responses were received, with thanks, from

1. T. R. Raghunandan, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
2. Rama Hariharan, Panchayat Informatics Division, National Informatics Centre (NIC), New Delhi ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
3. [Nidhi Prabha Tewari](#), Resource Centre for Legislators, New Delhi
4. [Anurag Srivastava](#), Centre for Budget Governance and Accountability, New Delhi
5. [Dipendra Manocha](#), Saksham, New Delhi
6. [Megha Phansalkar](#), Water Supply and Sanitation Department, Mumbai
7. [Subhash Mendhapurkar](#), SUTRA, Solan
8. [Joya Chakraborty](#), University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad
9. [Surendra Nath Tripathi](#), Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar
10. [Venkatesh Chandrasekaran](#), Schools for India Trust, Chennai
11. [Somya Dave](#), Ministry of Environment and Forest, New Delhi
12. [Varun Rattan Singh](#), IRMA, Anand
13. [D. C. Mishra](#), National Informatics Centre (NIC), New Delhi
14. [Maalan](#), The Hunger Project, New Delhi
15. [K. Rajasekharan](#), Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), Thrissur
16. [Shirish Sinha](#), PricewaterhouseCoopers, New Delhi
17. Frederick Noronha, BytesForAll, Saligao ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#); [Response 3](#))
18. [Ranjan Dwivedi](#), UNAIDS, New Delhi
19. [Biswajit Padhi](#), SRUSTI, Khariar

*Further contributions are welcome!*

[Summary of Responses](#)  
[Comparative Experiences](#)  
[Related Resources](#)  
[Responses in Full](#)

## Summary of Responses

Members responded enthusiastically to the query that sought to know the feasibility of creating a Wikipedia on Decentralization, the complexities involved in maintaining the site, user friendliness of the software, funds for maintaining the site, sharing financial burden with the user and pointed out any inherent drawbacks in the idea.

Underscoring the need for [valid knowledge](#) on the subject to be made available at one point, members said the Wikipedia would be a one-stop source, which could help in building a dynamic knowledge repository providing invaluable, high quality and authentic information on decentralization and Panchayati Raj in India. They added that such a repository would facilitate presentation of information from all the states with diverse languages, and stressed that it would be a fruitful way of engaging scholars, professionals and grass root people in the process.

### Technical Strengths and Advantages

Deliberating further on the issue, contributors stated that it gives the option of creating research templates, writing style guidelines and other methods of recording sources of information, and allows editing rights to an interested individual. Outlining the technical strengths and advantages of another online repository like [Wikipedia](#), discussants highlighted the example of [eNRICH](#) (developed by [UNESCO](#) and [NIC](#)) which facilitates extensive search across languages, subjects and authors and provides good feedback through content generating threads of discussion. They added that this software is also helpful in providing content wise separate pages and fully supports UNICODE compliant fonts. Further, articulating other positive points, respondents underlined that one can configure the software for different levels of users, allowing attachment of number of files to a particular content on a live and interactive platform, and is amenable to easy administration without the requirement of intricate technical knowledge.

### Complexities involved in maintaining the site

Contributors stressed on the importance of high quality information for making the site viable and useful, and underscored moderation of the content. They insisted on the need of competent editorial staff to do such tasks and talked about problems in maintenance of the site, the facility of editing provided to the contributors obviously multiplying the effort. Expanding further on the complexities involved, members mentioned the need for content differentiation to deal with a heterogeneous and diverse community of contributors, as also the requirement of careful distinction of informal experiences shared by contributors from official and [authentic information](#).

### Requirement of Funds for maintaining a Wiki Site on Decentralization

Noting that people could undertake this enterprise without any monetary motive, respondents mentioned that government agencies like [Ministry of Panchayati Raj](#), [National Informatics Centre](#) (NIC), and NGOs working in the area of decentralization and panchayati raj could provide good and valid contributions for hosting and maintaining the proposed site. Members felt the cost of hosting a wiki software (on a co-hosted server), is not prohibitive (one estimate put it at about Rupees 6000-8000 per annum). Expatiating further, respondents clarified that to set up and run a wiki, we would need server space, while the software will come free of cost. They, inter alia, suggested that NIC could be a technical solution provider and [individuals](#) and [organizations](#) specialising in panchayati raj and decentralization could provide content, maintain quality and ensure applicability across the country. Contributors noted that a dedicated team of editors involves cost; in addition finding dedicated volunteers to manage the project will also add to the project cost.

### Inherent Drawbacks of the idea

Members felt the scope of participation of grassroot level functionaries in the process of developing the Wikipedia is remote, since most of them do not have [access](#) to internet facilities. Therefore, their voice

may go unrepresented. They also noted it would be a challenge to get the knowledge holders to share information, who would mostly be from the public institutions and therefore may be wary of sharing information on a public platform.

### Suggestions

Members urged development of the idea as a combination of IT and development perspective, and proposed working on its institutional aspect, in order to make it a grassroots initiative. They suggested the domain name of the proposed knowledge bank in wiki to be 'Local Governance in India' rather than 'Decentralization in India'. Respondents also presented varied suggestions to make the site more useful:

- Encourage the proponents/promoters of local governance to build up or bring out more information and knowledge materials in digital form (e.g. on history of decentralization)
- Give free access to Gram Panchayats/Block Panchayats/Zilla Parishads; levy a nominal fee for private users, NGOs and trusts
- Post online content of the Solution Exchange's Decentralization Community along with relevant Consolidated Replies of other SE communities on the site
- Incorporate translated content available in regional languages and content available on state government websites (see [Konkani Wikipedia](#)).
- Enable direct uploading of some contents, updates, projects or documents along with facilitating direct interaction between users and directory with contact addresses
- Create resource centres and helplines in each block by embedding the idea of Wikipedia in the [Backward Regions Grant Fund](#) (BRGF); a Helpdesk to answer queries posed by official or non-official users and a toll free call centre as a back up support could be a worthwhile addition to this project

In brief, a majority of respondents found the idea of developing a knowledge resource (like a Wikipedia) on Decentralization in India very attractive, and technically and financially feasible. Many of the contributors pledged [support](#) in its development, should such an enterprise be undertaken.

## Comparative Experiences

### New Delhi

**Information Collection on Panchayati Raj** (from [TR Raghunandan](#), Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi)

During the last six years of engagement and learning in Panchayati Raj, electronic information on the subject has been stored and backups created simultaneously. State and sector wise documentation has been done and hard copies of the document have been kept along with. They have proved to be helpful for recapitulation on issues concerning Panchayati Raj whenever required and have turned out to be a good knowledge base.

**Open eNRICH Content Management and Portal Framework** (from [Rama Hariharan](#), NIC, New Delhi)

The software facilitates uploading, editing and publishing after due moderation. The content can be in the form of typed content, URL and attached files. It is UNICODE-supported and can be accessed and used in all UNICODE supported languages. The classified software facilitates extensive search across languages, subjects and authors and provides different views on the content available in the site. This is very simple and more powerful than Wikipedia. Read [more](#)

### Maharashtra

**Reform Initiative by Water and Sanitation Department** (from [Dr. Megha Phansalkar](#), Water Supply and Sanitation Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai)

As part of the reforms approach initiated by Department of Water Supply and Sanitation, a lot of resources and material on Decentralization is available to be used for community driven development. The materials are based on experiences of the people involved in the project. It is not clear as to how to utilize the material for public use as no people have no idea about online portals apart from the department's website. A Wiki may provide a site to do all this.

## Himachal Pradesh

### **Under-utilization of Computers and Lack of Knowledge on Internet** (from [Subhash Mendhapurkar](#), SUTRA, Solan)

Villagers in Himachal Pradesh do not know the use of computers, as there is hardly any training programme that is organized before the computers are supplied to panchayats. Though most of the panchayat offices have telephone connections, panchayat functionaries are unaware about internet and its access. Getting telephone connection in villages is problematic, and therefore unavailability of computers and internet facilities will be a hurdle in the use of Wikipedia.

## Related Resources

### *Recommended Documentation*

#### **Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) Scheme** (from T. R. Raghunandan, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi; [response 1](#))

[www.panchayat.nic.in](http://www.panchayat.nic.in)

*A scheme to harmonize development in backward regions, it aims to set up resource centres and help lines in blocks, integrate collection/ collation of information on PR for capacity development*

### *Recommended Organizations*

From T. R. Raghunandan, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi ([response 1](#))

#### **Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, New Delhi**

[nicmpr@nic.in](mailto:nicmpr@nic.in); <http://panchayat.nic.in/>

*A Ministry of Government of India that has mandate to work with PRI's for its promotion, it could facilitate creation of Wikipedia on Decentralization in India.*

#### **Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), Thrissur**

Mulagunnathukavu P.O., Thrissur 680581 Kerala; Tel: 0487-2201312/2201768/2201061/2200244; Fax: 0487-2201062; [mail@kilaonline.org](mailto:mail@kilaonline.org); <http://www.kilaonline.org/>

*Addresses emerging issues of local governance at the grass roots through various activities, it has shown interest in collection of knowledge and information on PR through a Wikipedia*

#### **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), New Delhi**

UNESCO House, B-5/29, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi 110029; Tel: 91-11-26713000; Fax: 91-11-26-13001/713002; [newdelhi@unesco.org](mailto:newdelhi@unesco.org); <http://www.unesco.org/newdelhi>

*Supports state wide ICT networks in building local community websites, using Free and Open Source Software for interactive online information sharing.*

#### **National Informatics Centre (NIC), New Delhi** (from [D. C. Mishra](#), NIC, New Delhi)

Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, A-Block, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003; Fax: 91-11-24362628; <http://home.nic.in/>

*Developed the eNRICH software in collaboration with UNESCO and could provide technical solution in the creation of the Wikipedia on Decentralization.*

**Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, New Delhi** (from [Dipendra Manocha](#), Saksham, New Delhi)

Electronics Niketan, 6, CGO Complex, Lodi Road, New Delhi 110003; <http://www.mit.gov.in/>

*Unicode based fonts for web content in Indian languages, can be downloaded from the Ministry website, which could be used for the Wikipedia on Decentralization.*

**PRIA, New Delhi** (from [Surendra N Tripathi](#), Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar)

42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi 110062; Tel: 91-11-29956908, 29960931/32/33; Fax: 91-11-29955183; [info@pria.org](mailto:info@pria.org); <http://www.pria.org/cgi-bin/index.htm>

*PRIA has worked in activity mapping and information collection on decentralization from all over the country, this could be the starting point for the proposed Wikipedia.*

**Schools for India Trust, Chennai** (from [Venkatesh Chandrasekaran](#), Schools for India Trust, Chennai)

83, Alwarthirunagar Annexe, Chennai 6000087; Tel: 91-44-2377-4889; [contactus@schoolsforindia.org](mailto:contactus@schoolsforindia.org); <http://www.schoolsforindia.org/IN/index.html>

*Developing an online village information portal 'Myvillage.com' which will provide data on all Indian villages by 2010, including on local governance and decentralization progress*

### ***Recommended Portals and Information Bases***

**National Panchayat Portal, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India** (from [D. C. Mishra](#), National Informatics Centre (NIC), New Delhi)

<http://Panchayat.nic.in>

*Has rich content on matters relating to Panchayati Raj and Panchayati Raj Institutions in India that could be used for the proposed Wikipedia through the eNRICH browser.*

**'eNRICH'** (from Rama Hariharan, Panchayat Informatics Division, NIC, New Delhi; [response 1](#))

<http://enrich.nic.in/>

*Web-based community information, communications and knowledge management browser that could be used as a browser for the Wikipedia on Decentralization*

From [Nidhi Prabha Tewari](#), Resource Centre for Legislators, New Delhi

### **Wikipedia**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>

*Web-based, free content encyclopaedia project, written collaboratively by volunteers from all around the world, provides vast information and knowledge in most languages*

### **Wikispaces**

<http://www.wikispaces.com/>

*The proposed Wikipedia on Decentralization could come under a private space using Wikispaces, by paying a fee.*

### **YouTube**

<http://www.youtube.com/>

*YouTube allows people to easily upload and share video clips across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs, and email*

### **Wikimedia Commons**

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

*Media repository that is created and maintained by volunteers; it provides a central repository for freely licensed photographs, music, spoken text, video clips, media etc.*

**Konkani Wikipedia** (from Frederick Noronha, BytesForAll, Saliago; [response 1](#))

<http://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wp/kok>

*Konkani Wikipedia/incubator, translates articles of relevance to Goa, and to generally building the body of knowledge in Konkani.*

From Frederick Noronha, BytesForAll, Saliago ([response 3](#))

**WIKIA**

<http://www.wikia.com/wiki/Wikia>

*Wikia is a collection of communities with websites that you can edit.*

**Goapeoplesagenda**

<http://scratchpad.wikia.com/wiki/Goapeoplesagenda>

*Example of a free Wiki, which has been created through people's participation on issues of common interest.*

**Water Supply Sanitation Department, Government of Maharashtra** (from [Dr. Megha Phansalkar](#), Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai)

<http://mahawssd.gov.in/>

*Recommended for possible contributions to a Wikipedia on community driven development in water supply and sanitation sector through implementation of "decentralized reforms approach"*

From Rama Hariharan, Panchayat Informatics Division, NIC, New Delhi ([response 2](#))

**Open Knowledge Network (OKN)**

<http://www.openknowledge.net/>

*Supports the creation and exchange of local content in local languages, open eNRICH v4.0 is being used in the OKN.*

**i-Community Project, Thailand**

<http://www.icomthailand.org/>

*An example of online information sharing project where open eNRICH v4.0 is being used for collection and display of information in a user friendly manner*

**LAO PDR National Portal**

<http://www.laopdr.gov.la/>

*Example of online information sharing, particularly on governance and legislation issues, open eNRICH v4.0 is being used in the LAO PDR National Portal*

**Town Panchayat Portal, Tamil Nadu**

<http://townpanchayats.tn.nic.in/>

*Amongst other information, the portal has online information on town Panchayats of different district. Open eNRICH v4.0 is being used in the LAO PDR National Portal*

**HimVani.Com** (from [Varun Rattan Singh](#), IRMA, Anand)

<http://www.himvani.com>

*Initiative of Voice of Himachal, it is an online citizen journalism project to generate public awareness and responsiveness towards sustainable living in the state of Himachal Pradesh*

***Recommended Contacts and Experts***

From [Alok Srivastava](#) and [Sajan Venniyoor](#), Resource Persons

**Frederick Noronha, Independent Journalist, Goa**

House No 784, Near Lourdes Convent, Sonarbhat, Saligao 403511 Bardez Goa India; Tel: 0832-2409490; [fred@bytesforall.org](mailto:fred@bytesforall.org); [www.bytesforall.org](http://www.bytesforall.org)

*A co-founder of BytesForAll, he writes extensively on technology and computing issues in India, especially on Free and Open Source Software*

**T. R. Raghunandan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, New Delhi**

A Wing, Ground Floor, Krishi Bhavan, New Delhi 110001; Tel: 91-11-23388977; [trraghu@yahoo.com](mailto:trraghu@yahoo.com)

*In charge of the Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) Scheme, interested in facilitating the initiation of a Wikipedia on Decentralization with suitable collaborations*

**D. C. Mishra, Senior Director, National Informatics Centre, New Delhi**

A – Block, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003; Tel: 91-11-24360563; [dcmisra@nic.in](mailto:dcmisra@nic.in)

*He has suggested that with suitable collaborations the National Informatics Centre could provide technical solutions for creating the proposed Wikipedia in Decentralization*

**Rama Hariharan, Technical Director National Informatics Centre, New Delhi**

A - Block, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road New Delhi 110003; Tel: 011-2436-0563; [rama.h@nic.in](mailto:rama.h@nic.in)

*Conceptualizes, designs and develops software solutions for rural development and Panchayats particularly in the e-Governance context.*

**Maalan, National Media Advisor, The Hunger Project, New Delhi**

Shaheed Bhawan 18/1, Aruna Asaf Ali Rd New Delhi 110067; 0944385426; [maalan@gmail.com](mailto:maalan@gmail.com)

*He has volunteered to convert content of the proposed Wikipedia to Tamil*

**Nidhi Prabha Tiwari, Coordinator, Democracy Connect, New Delhi**

E-56, Saket, New Delhi 110017; Tel: 9350025912; [www.democracyconnect.org](http://www.democracyconnect.org)

*She has offered to provide volunteers for technical support to develop the proposed Wikipedia on Decentralization*

## Responses in Full

**T. R. Raghunandan, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi (response 1)**

An excellent idea! However, to be of any use, it must be in all Indian languages. Why don't we take this idea forward, through a collaboration between the Ministry, the Solution Exchange and KILA?

I have my own means of collecting information on Panchayati Raj, which consists of:

(a) My own directory tree, which has grown over the past six years that I have spent in this field, in which I store all my electronic information. I periodically create backups too, but not at the frequency I should.

(b) Simple box files for every State and Sector, into which I store most hard copies. These box files are the equivalent of a ruminant's stomach - I can chew the cud when I have time!

Why don't we marry the Wikipedia idea with our current initiatives under BRGF of having resource centres and helplines in each Block?

---

**Rama Hariharan, Panchayat Informatics Division, National Informatics Centre (NIC), New Delhi** (*response 1*)

This is really a very good idea for building a knowledge network on Panchayati Raj.

NIC has developed a software named Open eNRICH which is a content management and portal framework solution, developed in collaboration with UNESCO. The software facilitates uploading, editing and publishing of content after due moderation. Content can be in the form of typed content, URL, attached files etc.

It is UNICODE supported so it can be accessed and used in all UNICODE supported languages.

One of the best features of the software is the classification of content based on certain metadata such as subject, type of item, author, audience etc. This classification facilitates extensive search across languages, subjects, authors etc. and also into different types of attached files such as pdf, doc, ppt etc.

Visitors to the site can provide feedback on each content, thereby generating threads of discussion on each item.

The software also provides different views of the content available in the site. For eg., there could be a separate page on Decentralized Planning, another page on Devolution etc.

Last, but not the least, each state, if required, could have its own site while at the same time, having the facility to seamlessly exchange content with one another.

The software is very, very simple to use and far more powerful than Wikipedia. The software was developed in collaboration with UNESCO and is already in use in many countries in South Asia and Africa.

NIC would like to be part of this knowledge endeavour as a technical solution provider.

---

**Nidhi Prabha Tewari, Resource Centre for Legislators, New Delhi**

A quick search at [wikipedia.com](http://wikipedia.com) shows that there are no documents on PRIs/panchayats. However decentralisation is listed as an article. You could search for all the topics that you wish to see there and if they don't exist you can create them for free. Assuming several other people working on the issue of decentralisation would also do the same, very soon a repository of knowledge will be created. This would be free and very democratic in both creation and usage.

Alternatively, you could create your own space free, especially if you want to keep it public at <http://www.wikispaces.com/>

It allows you to control editing rights. You could create your own:

- a) Research templates
- b) Writing style guidelines
- c) How to record sources of information

In case you wish to create a private space not viewable to everybody, you will have to pay around US\$ 50 a year (<http://www.wikispaces.com/site/pricing>)

If this is coupled with [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) where you can upload all the video documentation. The same could also be done at: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

Regional languages <http://hi.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%95%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%AA%E0%A5%80%E0%A4%A1%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%AF%E0%A4%BE:%E0%A4%9A%E0%A5%8C%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B2>

There are options already available for various Indian languages, like Marathi, Gujarati etc.

Mr. Raghunandan's idea is also very good. The spirit of Wikipedia is that it can all happen through people creating this knowledge resource of their own accord with no monetary motive.

I could help in providing a few tech savvy volunteers for giving it an initial push.

### **Anurag Srivastava, Centre for Budget Governance and Accountability, New Delhi**

This is a good idea, however it maybe important to note that recently a renowned college in the US has restricted citations for its student papers from Wikipedia because of the dubious authenticity of sources/lack of information.

Secondly, insofar as I think Wikipedia puts information on one aspect and not on mixed terms- like it may list for 'Decentralisation' but not for "Decentralisation in India ".

It is important to record the history of Decentralisation in India as well. The beginnings come from before the Mehta committee or the actual amendments. This is perhaps the only 'idea' related to transfer of power which found resonance in the elite of the country- whether political or otherwise, in the colonial or the post colonial era.

Then we must have some record of 'milestones' for collective memory and appreciation - steps which helped develop a dialogue on the essential merits of Decentralisation. Like the MP story when Ekta Parishad was involved with the CM to alter the local equations, or the changes over which Karnataka claims first consummation'- overall these historical 'conjectures' are also important when we evaluate governance in a comparative perspective especially when it seems autonomy to the "States' over the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment is not working too well.

I may state that these examples are my views.

Mr. Raghunandan's idea of e-reach for BRGF is not contestable as a good idea but if we had a situation where the expected e-reach could precede the expected BRGF operational bottlenecks, we would probably have not had a "BR"- the practical aspect of the idea hence is as contestable as the 'battles' over whims, whips and wits between the traditional establishment and expected constitutional allottees of funds, functions and finances.

Especially if we are speaking of likes of Kalahandi and Araria.

### **Dipendra Manocha, Saksham, New Delhi**

Whenever we talk about any web content in Indian languages, please (and I repeat, please) choose only the Unicode based fonts.

I am a person with vision impairment and use access technology to access materials and it is impossible to design and access technology including Braille production for non-standard font coding system.

There are a lot of Unicode based fonts now available which can be downloaded free of cost from the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology web site.

I am sure every member on this list would be able to understand my frustrations with non-standard code based fonts and the trouble we have to go through due to this reason.

**Megha Phansalkar, Water Supply and Sanitation Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai**

Great idea of making a one stop place for information on a particular topic, because we have enough on internet, but when we require to focus on a particular topic, we find a dearth of material. I have personally experienced this many times. I am working as Knowledge Management Advisor in Water Supply Sanitation Department of Government of Maharashtra. We are implementing the reforms approach, where we have so much material on decentralization to contribute based on our experiences in propagating the community driven development but we don't know where to put it, apart from our website or some online web portals.

Let's take this idea forward - we shall have to work on institutional aspect of taking this idea forward - which shall have to be a combination of agency with IT and development perspective. This has to made a grass root initiative where things pore directly from the field. Lot of systematic thinking is required. Am ready to contribute and support how so ever it is required.

**Subhash Mendhapurkar, SUTRA, Solan**

I agree with Raghunandan. The site should be in Indian language and Ministry should come forward to contribute the cost. The private users - NGOs, trusts - should pay a nominal fee. The Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats and ZPs should have free access - in Himachal Pradesh most of Gram Panchayats got the BOX (we call it PC) but they don't know what to do with it - there is hardly any training program organized before sending the BOX to GPs. Hopefully the Ministry/Department shall undertake some training now.

Most of GP offices have no telephone connections - so how do they access internet? There has to be massive efforts o convince the GP Functionary first for its importance to have the BOX functional and also to have telephone connections. Getting a telephone connection in rural areas of HP is still a problem because BSNL has no more vacant lines left - but again, hopefully this would be sorted out.

Once the system takes shape and becomes functional the Wiki would be good for functionaries to access the information and build up their own capacities with self learning.

**Joya Chakraborty, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad**

It is a fantastic idea to develop a bank of information on decentralization where all can contribute. It is also a great proposition to create scope for representation of all states with their linguistic and regional

variation. And I believe that as suggested by some members the technology to facilitate the same is also at hand.

This would initiate the setting up of a knowledge repository which can be accessed, referred and used by policy planners, executives, researchers and public at large; and facilitate better understanding, advocacy and debate on Panchayati Raj Institutions.

However, I am a little worried about the scope of participation of the grass root level functionary in the process of developing the Wikipedia. If we are to understand decentralization and facilitate inclusion of tail-end functionary, or give representation to his/her voice, we will have to think of a mechanism to create this opportunity in the technology itself.

There is also a large segment of people who do not have access internet facilities and their voice will go unrepresented.

I hope some members will propose adequate solution to this so as to make technology representative of the individual who is most affected by decentralization or the lack of it.

**Surendra Nath Tripathi, Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar**

This Wikipedia is a very bright idea. We can take it forward from where PRIA left.

I feel that Mr. Raghunandan can really initiate this process with other stakeholders having right to comment and even amend so that at least one MOST updated version on state of affairs is available to all.

**Venkatesh Chandrasekaran, Schools for India Trust, Chennai**

This is an excellent idea. We at Schools for India are working on similar initiative called My [Village.com](http://Village.com), a village information portal which will bring the data of all the Indian Villages on line by 2010.

Recently I attended the Wikipedia Un-conference in Chennai and during the deliberations we discussed about creating a Village Wiki or develop a custom solution. (the idea is to keep the data within the country).

We received very enthusiastic response from the audience and many later came back to us for volunteering for the content. The portal is primarily aimed at NGOs who need data to plan their development programs. The key functionalities are: The Origin and History of the Village, Current development projects, Tourist attractions, list of local businesses etc. This is the basic building block on which we can create other functionalities. We offer to extend all technical support for this concept as it is a natural extension of our portal.

**Somya Dave, Ministry of Environment and Forest, New Delhi**

The requirements sought to be addressed could perhaps be very effectively handled through a web portal which, while technically sophisticated at the back end, would be sufficiently user friendly at the front end and available in several languages. NIC may be a very useful partner in such an initiative.

Some issues which may be considered include the following:

- The user community is quite heterogeneous and the content may have to be differentiated accordingly. Easy content uploading access for users has to be moderated by some editorial staff to avoid any incorrect information being made available, which would receive credibility merely because it was available on the web portal. This has been a problem in using Wikipedia content as already pointed out by some members. Thus the Wikipedia feature of "anyone can edit" may have to be handled a little differently.
- An experience sharing portion, which may be very useful and could be very informal, would have to be carefully distinguished from the portion conveying official information. The official section would need to be validated by the officials / concerned Ministries which may sponsor specific sections relating to their areas of work. In case of the official section, responsibility of providing translated content in regional languages could also be considered. Content available on state government websites could be easily incorporated.
- It may be useful to have a Helpdesk to which queries could be addressed by users, which would be sorted before a response is provided either by non official users or by the official users. A toll free call centre back up may be considered at a later stage if required and found feasible.
- A facility of downloading documents in different languages (PDF files) would be very helpful.
- Specific non official sub communities, considered to be of interest to all, could be afforded the facility of directly uploading some contents on a more sustained basis- e.g. updates of projects or photographs or documents
- Sub groups could be created on the portal for direct interaction between users - i.e. facilitating a more detailed and segregated interaction relevant for users interested in specific issues, which though important, may not be relevant to all users.
- A directory, with contact addresses/phone/email ids of various categories of users could be included to facilitate direct interaction.
- The web portal could also enable access to the content already available with the Solution Exchange communities - including Consolidated Replies and hyperlinks to relevant documents.
- A section for researchers requiring form based feedback from specific users/institutions may also be useful.

### **Varun Rattan Singh, IRMA, Anand**

What I understand from your query is that you are looking for a hosting a wiki under your own domain name. I have had some exposure to hosting a wiki software under my own domain name. I will rate the software to be extremely user friendly for end users. At admin level the difficulty level is medium for a person who has worked on open source content management solutions for 2 - 3 years.

Once the site is hosted (on a remote server) there is not much requirement of a person who understands coding. Once in while issues may arise but that will be rare as the WIKI software is quite stable.

The hosting of wiki software (on a co-hosted server) should not exceed more that Rs 6000 to 8000 per annum with a domain name. You can see services like <http://www.bluehost.com> which are cheap and give excellent service.

You also need a dedicated team of editors who is constantly looking for updated sections of the site and ensure that facts are right and the facility to edit is not being misused. This will be the costliest

component. Even finding such dedicated volunteers will add cost to the project.

Since you intend to work on information which mostly resides in government institutions the biggest challenge will be to get the knowledge holders to share the information. In this case it will be bureaucrats, politicians, research institutions and civil society organizations. I am involved with a citizen journalism initiative in Himachal Pradesh (<http://www.himvani.com>) but we don't see much on-line participation from such users.

I hope this helpful to you

---

#### **D. C. Mishra, National Informatics Centre, New Delhi**

The idea is good and a technical solution, with the capacity to classify & maintain content in Indian languages, is already available with NIC in form of Open eNRICH (<http://enrich.nic.in>) as indicated by Mrs. Rama Hariharan. The solution could be made available with its link through National Panchayat Portal (<http://Panchayat.nic.in>). The tool was prepared with the help of UNESCO and OWIF and is being used in many national and international projects.

The crucial point is effective moderation and to sustain quality of content. There could be some generic issues which are applicable to entire country or state and on the other side there are likely to be PRI (ZP/IP/GP) specific issues and should be classified accordingly.

The policy of moderation could be decided by participants & MOPR. One of the popular approaches is to publish everything automatically as uploaded and withdraw in case of objection and, alternatively, check/clear everything before it gets published.

The contributor shall be required to specify the essential meta-data for each upload and new facilities like social-tagging by viewer could also be extended using Open eNRICH tool.

NIC could only provide technical solution and will require many other domain organisations like KILA, PRIA etc to associate themselves with endeavour to ensure flow of content, maintain quality and its applicability to PRIs across the country.

---

#### **Maalan, The Hunger Project, New Delhi**

I welcome this idea and am willing to pledge my support to it. I will be able to share information on how decentralization has brought women and marginalised into the decision making process.

I fully agree with Mr. Raghunandan's view that it should be in Indian languages. But if we first create a template in English, we can replicate in Indian languages. It shouldn't be very difficult, with Unicode available in the net. I will be able to give my bit in this for Tamil

---

#### **K. Rajasekharan, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur**

The proposal to create a Wikipedia on Decentralisation has been well taken. Thank you all. If we have to put this idea into action we need to do the following:

In order to make the Wikipedia a meaningful source of high quality information/knowledge, we have to entrust someone to plan it on fulltime basis for some time. Unless we plan it qualitatively, we cannot achieve to have a good end-product.

The existence of the excellent framework for the National Panchayat Portal of NIC, which is yet to take off, has been pointed out as an alternative to Wikipedia. It seems that the purpose of both could be different - Panchayat Portal seems to be good for putting current data and information on local governance, whereas the Wikipedia can be conceptualised as a one-stop resource for comparatively stable body of information or knowledge on local governance. Both can exist simultaneously with different purposes.

As a pre-requisite in building up a Wikipedia, we need to encourage the proponents and promoters of local governance to build up or bring out more information/knowledge materials in digital form, initially in English on many aspects. Those materials can be used as building blocks in the creation of the proposed Wikipedia.

It seems better if we name the subject for Wikipedia as "Local Governance in India" rather than "Decentralisation in India" even though we may include information on emerging decentralisation process in the Wikipedia.

The draft objectives of the Wikipedia on Local Governance in India can be: -

- to gather high quality information/knowledge in digital form at one place
- to create the information or knowledge materials where there are gaps
- to update the body of knowledge without any lapse of time
- to serve as an encyclopaedic source material that can be accessed by anyone, from anywhere, at any time.

Now we need to think of the modalities of putting the idea into action, including content creation in digital form, as pointed out by Shri T R Raghunandan of Ministry of Panchayati Raj. It would also be important to find a sponsor for this project. I wonder if someone from the Decentralization Community, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, a donor agency or funding organization would be in a position to provide funding support to this venture.

### **Sirish Sinha, PricewaterhouseCoopers, New Delhi**

The idea of Wikipedia on Local Governance is very interesting and is also going to be useful. In terms of online content, I feel that Solution Exchange on Decentralisation in the last one year or so, itself provides a repository of information and could be a good starting point.

### **Frederick Noronha, BytesForAll, Saligao (response 1)**

Let us start where we can. And why wait for officialdom to give the lead? In this world of social software, the people are fairly empowered to start their own initiatives.

For information I am giving the work we did for the Konkani wikipedia:

Over the past few weeks, we have been working to build a Konkani wikipedia. You might know that Konkani is the smallest Indian "national" language. It has about 1.5 to 5.5 million speakers (depends on whom you ask).

See the appeal below:

What you can do to help the Konkani Wikipedia:

- \* Translate articles of relevance to Goa, and to generally building the body of knowledge in Konkani. There are tonnes of copyright-free articles which you can translate into Konkani at <http://en.wikipedia.org> This is specially suited for people with linguistic and translation skills (whatever script).
- \* Play around with the Wikipedia and see how it works. It's not complex. The starting point is to create a login for yourself. Then, everything follows. This is specially suited for tech people. But don't believe it's a complicated tech job!
- \* Build awareness about the attempt to build the Konkani Wikipedia, and tell others about it. It will only work if there is enough "critical mass" and interest around it.
- \* Above all, promote the language of your choice (any script!) using this tool of the 21st century. It's a powerful tool, so let's make use of it.

Starting points:

- \* <http://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wp/kok> (Konkani Wikipedia/incubator)
- \* <http://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wp/kok/contributors> (List yourself as a contributor)
- \* <http://incubator.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Wp/kok> (See Deepak's tutorial on Devanagari)

The best thing here is: you can promote any script you want via the Konkani Wikipedia. Romi, Devanagari, Kannada (and I guess even Malayalam or Perso-Arabic). So instead of clashing swords, let's sharpen our pens, and increase the amount of sharable Konkani information in cyberspace. The Wikipedia (for a number of reasons) is a great place to do it. And all this knowledge becomes sharable.

A special thanks to Deepak D'Souza for his persistence, Sangeeta Naik (Sangeeta Diwar) for persistently working on it, Isidore Dantas for his meticulous Konkani translations from Mumbai, and Equinox for signing up as one of the early contributors.

**Frederick Noronha, BytesForAll, Saligao** (*response 2*)

I am giving below something I had written on the subject. The people from Bangladesh (with some help from West Bengal, I think) did the task by using scripts that created {{stub}} entries on their Wikipedia, if I recall right. They are willing to share the software, which created these entries (and in fact have sent me a copy). We could perhaps look at means of replicating it.

**Ranjan Dwivedi, UNAIDS, New Delhi**

Both eNRICH and Wiki (or associated tools like *joomla*) have their respective advantages and disadvantages, some of which we are aware of.

To be able to decide through a discussion, it will help if some one familiar with both could list the various advantages and limitations on the following criteria:

1. Multilingual capability
2. Easy to understand

3. Ease of use
4. Efficiency of download
5. Availability of source code for the community to tweak in case at any time, support stops
6. Capability to handle attachments (formats and size)
7. Ease of administration
8. Live examples of the platforms- so that users can navigate and opine on the basis of actual use.

It may then be possible for us to close the discussion and start the planning, meta data, thesaurus for key-words, processes etc.

---

**Frederick Noronha, BytesForAll, Saligao** (*response 3*)

Well, it's not difficult or costly to set up and run a wiki. You would need server space and the software is Free Software (not just free-of-cost software, but offering you the freedom to run, study, copy and improve the software).

You could set it up on your server. Or, you could go to [wikia.com](http://www.wikia.com) where you would get free space if you set up a useful wiki. See <http://www.wikia.com/wiki/Wikia> and an example of a free Wiki at <http://scratchpad.wikia.com/wiki/Goapeoplesagenda>

---

**Biswajit Padhi, SRUSTI, Khariar**

The idea is good. But there has to be information on every aspect of the village. Most importantly it should be very use friendly so that people with very little knowledge of computer can also extract the small tit bits of information they need from it. Otherwise it may be confined to a few internet savvy people. ( I am not one of them)

---

**Rama Hariharan, Panchayat Informatics Division, National Informatics Centre, New Delhi**  
(*response 2*)

Being part of the team which has designed and developed eNRICH, I would like to update everybody about the capability of Open eNRICH vis-a-vis the criteria specified by [Mr. Ranjan Dwivedi](#).

To begin with, Open eNRICH v4.0 is the fourth version of eNRICH software. Open eNRICH was developed on an Open Source platform and is available for free download and modification as was required by UNESCO. It has the following features:

1. **Multilingual capability** - Open eNRICH fully supports UNICODE enabled fonts. In fact, the user can seamlessly switch languages during a single session.
2. **Easy to understand** - The software can be configured for different levels of users by assigning different roles to the users. The roles include content contributor, editor, content manager and site administrator so that a common man would just be looking at the content uploaded by the content manager and providing feedback on the content while at the same time we could establish elaborate workflows among the other roles. In summary, the complexity can be exposed or hidden as per user's capability and requirement.

3. **Ease of use** - The basic philosophy outlined in 2 above makes the software very simple and easy to use for people with low skill levels/requirement and very flexible and comprehensive for people with high skill level/requirement
4. **Efficiency of Download** - The Open eNRICH v4.0 can be downloaded from <http://enrich.nic.in>. The software can also be downloaded from UNESCO's web site.
5. **Availability of source code** - The source code is available in public domain.
6. **Capability to handle attachments** - Open eNRICH allows any number of files to be attached to a particular content item. In fact, a content item could be typed in by the contributor (with full formatting facility), files (except .exe files) can be attached or the content itself could be a reference to an external URL.
7. **Ease of Administration** - The software can be easily administered by a local administrator without requiring much technical knowledge. For eg., the portal page (the page which the visiting user sees) is rendered based on rules on the metadata of the content and can be designed in less than 5 minutes.
8. **Live Platforms** - Please visit <http://enrich.nic.in> and click on any of the following links in "Case Studies" : a. Open Knowledge Network b. i-Community Project, Thailand c. LAO PDR National Portal d. Town Panchayat Portal, Tamil Nadu

Since the software is based on a strong metadata framework for the content, it would be necessary to define content classifications in the context of PRIs. Since we are working with Ministry of Panchayati Raj, we ourselves can offer some classifications to begin with which may be refined as we go along.

**T. R. Raghunandan, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, New Delhi** (*response 2*)

MoPR could facilitate this initiative, in collaboration with the Solution Exchange and NIC - if all of you agree to make the promised contributions. I will meet with Alok and his team and work out the modalities.

***Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!***

*If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the Decentralization Community and ICT for Development Community in India at [se-decn\\_se-ictd@solutionexchange-un.net.in](mailto:se-decn_se-ictd@solutionexchange-un.net.in) with the subject reading "Re: [se-decn] [se-ictd] Query: Wikipedia on Decentralization in India- Experiences; Advice. Additional Reply"*

***Disclaimer:*** *In posting messages or incorporating these messages into synthesized responses, the UN accepts no responsibility for their veracity or authenticity. Members intending to use or transmit the information contained in these messages should be aware that they are relying on their own judgment.*



*Copyrighted under Creative Commons License "[Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)". Re-users of this material must cite as their source Solution Exchange as well as the item's recommender, if relevant, and must share any derivative work with the Solution Exchange Community.*



*Solution Exchange is a UN initiative for development practitioners in India. For more information please visit [www.solutionexchange-un.net.in](http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in)*