

Sustainable Healthcare – Pandemic & Beyond

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COVID-19 outbreak has wreaked havoc across the world with ramifications poised to surpass any catastrophe in our living memory. More than 5.4 million people have already been affected by it and the number continues to increase with every passing minute.

The people globally, particularly in rural and remote areas are found struggling to access timely medical treatment. Densely populated communities spread over vast distances, where there is a lack of qualified personnel as well as non availability of effective diagnostic equipments in certain sectors of the health service. In addition to that, COVID-19 is having an enormous impact on people, especially on children, women & elderly, as the existing health systems become overloaded and facilities close, or provide a limited set of services which they need. At the same time people are skipping important medical check-ups for fear of contracting the virus.

Impact on global economy

COVID-19 pandemic has not only exposed the so called best of healthcare systems around the world, but in fact has brought the whole world to its knees. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic all over the world has disturbed the political, social, economic, religious and financial structures globally. World's topmost economies such as the US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and many others are at the verge of collapse.

No one knows when the COVID-19 pandemic will end. But one is certain that nothing shall remain the same after this. One needs to explore and brainstorm best methods to revive the global economy. More importantly, effective and robust strategies need to be made in order to withstand occurrence of any such pandemic in near future. Any individual, corporate or Government alone cannot help. Along with the role of Government, it is people's participation that can turn around things. However, more than being a regulator, the Governments around the world need to switch its role to that of an enabler. It is equally important.

Need of the hour: Switch to local

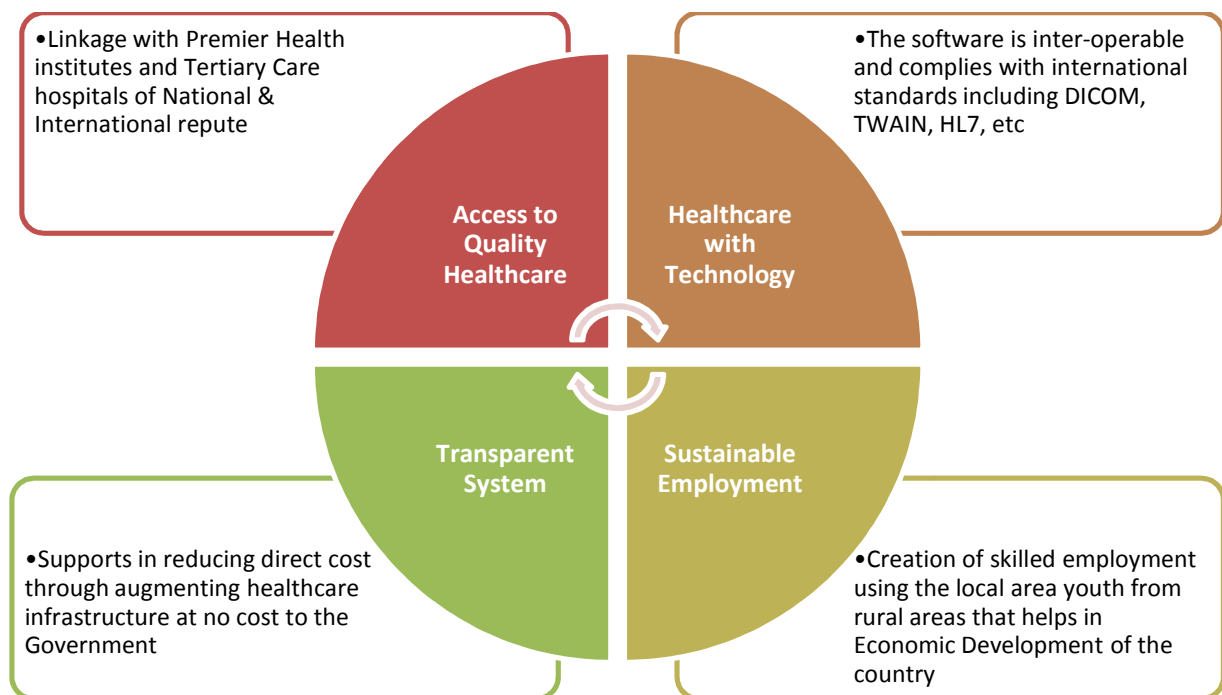
Social Distancing is the *Mantra* and effective game changer. Even timely lockdowns have played an effective role to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, though it has had dire implications on economic activities. But what about people who are in need of healthcare services not related to it? In future, the occurrence of many such pandemics cannot be ruled out and one needs to be prepared for it. This pandemic has taught us the essence & need of local! During the time of crisis, if anyone could help, if there is anyone on whom you can depend, it's the people around you. We definitely need to think globally, and act locally. A multipronged approach that targets local human resource development through IT skill building and engagement of local micro

entrepreneurs leading to employment generation and poverty alleviation is more likely to lead to sustained success of any project. Thus the mindset of youths should change and they should be encouraged to become job providers in place of job seekers.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for sustainable development

Even during these testing times, Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have great potential to address some of the challenges faced by both developed and developing countries in providing accessible, cost effective, high-quality health care services. Telemedicine uses ICTs to overcome geographical barriers, and increase access to health care services. This is particularly beneficial for rural and underserved communities in developing countries – groups that traditionally suffer from lack of access to health care.

The eHealth & Telemedicine model of OTTET showcases the benefits of the people’s participation in a public private partnership (PPP) model in implementing ICT-based sustainable development. OTTET leveraged this partnership to successfully implement a comprehensive strategy that combined IT implementation with development of skilled human resources at the local level, and poverty alleviation through stimulation of micro-entrepreneurship.



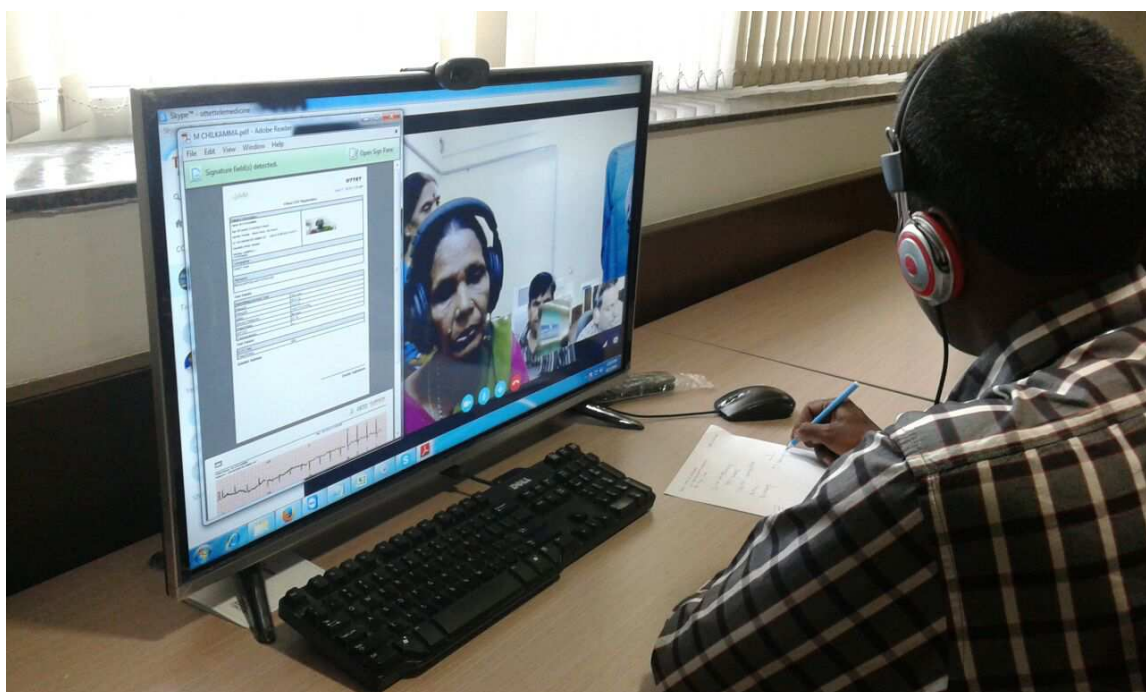
Inclusive Model for Transformational Economic Growth

The model exemplifies the power of the public private partnership (PPP) model and active engagement of local level stakeholders, thus creating the environment for long term success. While attempting to deliver healthcare to the rural poor, it also generates employment opportunities and promotes economic growth in resource starved regions. It, thus, contributes to two of the sustainable development goals set by the United Nations, namely, Goal 3: ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing of all, and Goal 8: promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all (UN 2016).

The OTTET Model

OTTET model is a transparent and well tested model of resource convergence with zero capital investment of Govt. for establishment of eHealth & telemedicine nodes with facilities for Electronic Health Record, Tele-consultation & Diagnostic Services. The cost towards services being rendered is fixed by the Govt. as per pre-existing Govt. rates or as per different Govt. schemes approved time to time. Thus, the model not only reduces direct cost to Govt., but also reduces the out of pocket expense of the common man.

Providing healthcare to its citizens and creating jobs are two primary goals of any Government. Expanding health coverage, especially in rural areas, poses two major challenges. First, it requires significant financial investment to set up and staff medical facilities. Second, skilled healthcare professionals prefer to live in urban areas, and are thus scarce in rural areas.



Doctor at Central Site Counseling the Patient at Remote Site

Promoting micro-entrepreneurship at the local level is a key aspect of our implementation strategy. Large projects require big donors. When the donor leaves, the project fails because it is unable to self-sustain due to a lack of local ownership. Rural areas have limited financial as well as skilled human resources. The financial model of the eHealth & telemedicine center promotes local ownership and develops human capital in the form of trained eHealth & telemedicine technicians at the local level. This precludes the need for large investment by a donor agency and allows incremental growth, thus, ensuring scalability of the project. Local ownership also reduces the risk of capital and human resource flight from rural to urban areas, which has been the bane of many projects implemented in rural areas. This guarantees long term sustainability of the project.

During the current crisis, it is the doctors & the nurses who have put their lives on the line to ensure that we are protected and cared for adequately. While expressing solidarity with COVID-19 warriors, the OTTET eHealth & Telemedicine model provides an additional support system through which availability of health care could be further assured.

Model based on five success pillars:

Access of Quality Healthcare

- Non-availability of proper healthcare infrastructure and lack of trained professionals serve as serious bottlenecks across platforms in India. We cut across both these problems and provides specialist consultation even in places that are devoid of proper infrastructure or manpower.
- The project reduces the pressure on tertiary care requirement through providing better primary and secondary care and even supporting various tertiary care platforms.

Technology Integration with Healthcare

- Our model ensures that the patient is NOT required to travel far off; rather his data travels across to the specialist consultant.
- Enables creation of accurate Electronic Health Record (EHR) of patients through deployment of highly reliable biomedical equipments

Low Cost Model

- Supports Government in reducing direct cost by existing augmenting healthcare infrastructure at no additional cost
- Reduces the out of pocket and travel expenses of citizens through timely delivery of healthcare access at grassroots level.

Transparent System

- **CapEx** – No cost to the Government, as necessary equipments, hardware and software would be borne by OTTET and its associates.
- **OpEx** – Further divided into Manpower and Consumables is again at No cost to the Government.

All Round Socio-economic Development

- Creation of skilled employment using the local area youth from rural areas that helps in Economic Development of our country.

The resource convergence model of OTTET, thus, helps the Government realize its twin goals of providing healthcare and generating employment while saving it the trouble of having to make significant financial investment in rural health projects. Thus, OTTET eHealth & Telemedicine exemplifies the power of the PPP model in creating ICT-based sustainable development.

Conclusion

ICT-based development holds enormous potential to bring sustainable healthcare, and open government within the reach of people living in resource starved regions of the world. However, they also run the risk of not realizing their full potential due to high risk of failure because of factors such as, governmental policies, cultural beliefs about healthcare practices, lack of preparedness to face such pandemics, etc. In this context, an inclusive model of resource convergence with people's participation for delivery of ICT-based sustainable healthcare, such as that of OTTET, could showcase a viable approach to incremental and sustainable implementation of ICT-based development projects based on local ownership and the PPP model of governance. It could definitely shine a light on the path to Sustainable Healthcare during COVID-19 pandemic and beyond it as well.