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mericity.in

an inclusive citizen-government  
engagement platform

developed by  
Gram Vaani Community Media

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# MeriCity: Speak.Act.Engage.

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## **vision**

Can technology give citizens a platform to raise their voice on governance issues that concern them and ensure it is heard by the right people? mericity.in is an attempt to initiate a 2-way dialogue between the government and citizens, and achieve greater citizen participation in local governance by generating information from the bottom-up using accessible technologies.

The platform provides an affordable and easy way for communities to express thoughts, give reports, and monitor public spending. This brings empowerment, generates data as inputs for local governance, and mass membership of the platform forces institutions to be responsive.

The first level of direct engagement is a voice-based platform accessible from any mobile phone that can enable citizens, citizen-bodies, and governments to engage in dialogues over unstructured free-flow channels to better communicate their needs, and structured crowd-sourced data collection to offer quantitative insights.

All services will be available free of cost for citizens to participate. We will initially build out the project in Delhi and then find partners for expansion to other cities.

## **mericity: bridging technologies**

There are three parts to our technology platform:

1. ***IVR in the cloud:*** IVR-based applications allow callers to leave messages, listen to messages left by others, make callouts and solicit feedback on micro-surveys, etc.  
These applications will be used by the citizens to submit their views and demands, take surveys to collect quantitative data, and thus help even poorly literate low-income communities to participate.
2. ***Mobile applications:*** Android applications through which citizens can geo-tag and upload photographs/videos they would want to bring to the government's attention. Going forward, other platforms will be supported as appropriate.
3. ***Internet social media integration:*** The data submitted by citizens will be automatically shared via Facebook and Twitter, to make the service viral and bring more users to participate on the platform.

## **initial services to be offered**

- Communities are provided information about how MLALADS/Councillor funds were utilized by their political representatives, and inputs are sought for current needs to be conveyed to the politicians
- Reporting tools are provided to track the status of various works initiated by different government departments, and to similarly monitor the performance of various public services e.g., garbage cleaning, road maintenance, electricity supply
- Communities are enabled to raise issues and complaints that are conveyed to appropriate government departments, and their status is tracked and displayed publicly
- Inputs are sought from community members on policy referendums
- Statistics for 1-4 above engagement aspects, are gathered and sliced on different themes: crime, sanitation, electricity, etc, one at a time in a topic-of-the-month manner

All of the above services are accessible over mobile so anybody can access them anywhere. There is also seamless integration with a web/mobile app interface where all the information and reports can be utilized at any time.

## **step-by-step: how it works**

The mericity platform is available on phone and the web, and ties together several components, explained below.

### **citizen feedback on public services**

1. *Training of contractors/providers:* Contractors providers of various services such as waste disposal, public sanitation etc will be trained in inputting the status of service delivery over SMS or automated phonecall
2. *IVR + Social Media outreach:* The reported status of public service delivery is posted on a public website, a publicly accessible phone line and social media, where citizen feedback is invited
3. *Government agency response:* Government agencies log in to the system check the reported status of service delivery and citizen feedback on those services

### **citizen monitoring of public facilities**

1. *RTI data collection:* Data on fund utilization for various ward-wise projects mined and analyzed, formatted for easy access over web and phone.
2. *Information sharing:* Community members will be informed of the current fund utilization pattern for various means through community meetings held by partner NGOs such as Satark Nagrik Sangathan (public works), CRY (education) and others. This information will also be easily available on the mericity platform.
3. *Opinion solicitation:* The mericity platform will present polls and surveys around various aspects of fund allocation, and collect citizen opinion on use of funds and suggestions for allocations to be made.
4. *Summary report:* Based on the statistics and inputs gathered during the opinion solicitation phase, a report will be put together summarizing the community's wishes towards fund allocation. This will be conveyed to the Ward-level political representative or concerned government authority

5. *Government feedback*: Public servants can post their responses for citizens over the platform

### **community interaction**

The mericity platform offers several possible interactions using its unique web + phone format for citizen engagement

1. *Government-citizen forum*: Through the mericity platform, elected representatives can present their ideas and activities, and citizens can feed back. Polls and surveys allows quantitative data collection, voice interaction allows for qualitative data collection.
2. *Community + NGO forum*: The web + phone platform allows a wide spectrum of users to interact and discuss issues important to each local area. NGOs and civil society groups working in each area on issues of local governance can use the platform to further their work in the area.
3. *Local activity forum*: Local organizations from each ward can contribute to local forums with events and initiatives in the area. Local advertising offers a potential opportunity to make the platform financially sustainable at the local level.

## **gram vaani: building citizen technologies**

mericity.in is the latest evolution of bottom-up information generation platforms developed by Gram Vaani's IIT-Delhi research facility in recent years. Earlier successes include:

**Jharkhand Mobile Radio:** We started a news-over-mobile service in the state of Jharkhand. People can call into a number and leave a piece of local news. This is validated and edited by our team, and published for anyone to listen over a mobile phone. The network logged nearly 60,000 calls from nearly 20,000 repeat users last month, clearly indicating the need for an alternate media platform at the grassroots. Most of the news items dealt with local issues of corruption in delivery of government schemes and human rights violation - stuff that is usually not covered by mainstream media. We also partnered with local activists to take up some of the issues and were able to achieve significant impact in a few cases e.g., government officials fined by BDO for asking bribes for UID enrollment, salaries paid to government school teachers that had been unpaid for 5 months, mobile ambulance dispatched to a village to counter a malaria outbreak

**MCD Modelward Project:** We started a garbage-site monitoring service in the Punjabi Bagh of New Delhi, for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. MCD contractors report on the cleanliness status of garbage collection sites, and citizens can query and dispute this status using SMS or IVR tools. The intervention has had very visible impact - the garbage sites are now cleaner, and MCD appreciates the monthly reports generated by the system and are keen to expand it to all across Delhi.

**GRINS Community Radio Automation Platform:** We built a pioneering automation system for community radio stations that seamlessly integrates radio with telephony. Stations using GRINS can engage better with their communities by having people call the station, put them on air, archive the conversation, leave a message, and send/receive SMSes to build a community database. The system is deployed in over 25 community radio stations in India and 5 in Africa, and growing rapidly.

### **For more information**

**<http://mericity.in>      <http://www.gramvaani.org>**

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