

**Ni-On Project : An Exemplary
Horizontal Transfer of ICT Based Best
Practice for Other Open Distance
Learning Systems**

Dinesh Singh Bist



National Institute of Open Schooling
A-24/25, Institutional Area, Sector-62, Noida (U.P.)

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National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS): Its Role, Functions And Organizational Structure

National Institute of Open Schooling, formerly known as National Open School, is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, set up in November 1989. Its three fold mission is to assist Government of India in achieving its goal of Universalisation of Education in promoting greater equity and justice in society and helping in evolution of learning society by providing relevant, continuing and developmental education upto the pre-degree level through open distance system through its prioritized group as an alternative arrangement to formal school system. In short its one line charter is to reach the “unreached” comprising of school drop outs, rural youth, urban poor, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Minorities and other sections of society, who have been left out of the mainstream formal school system.

Functioning of NIOS and situation before the initiative

NIOS is one of the three National Examination Boards, the other two being CBSE and ICSE. It conducts its public examinations twice a year for secondary and senior secondary levels and for vocational courses developed by it. It develops its own curriculum for Academic and Vocational courses and is supposed to maintain standards with quality inputs coupled with easy entry, flexibility in selection of courses, pace of study, place of study with multiple attempts for qualifying examinations at learner’s own pace. Critical review of its functioning before the launching of the Ni-On Project initiative shows the following drawbacks:-

- (i) **Inadequate Access:-** Under its present organizational set up, NIOS operates through the network of its Accredited Institutions (AIs)/Study Centres, both for Academic and Vocational Courses all over the country and abroad. It is supposed to have pan Indian network for providing access to those who have been left out from mainstream education. A closer scrutiny of the geographical dispersal of NIOS study centers (AIs) makes it clear that it is highly skewed. Majority of AIs of NIOS at present are scattered in and around Northern India including Delhi. Its reach in remote areas of the country like North Eastern States and other hilly areas like Jammu & Kashmir,

Uttarakhand etc, is very less. Similarly, the presence of AIs in areas inhabited by SCs, STs, Minorities, far-flung rural areas with rural poor, some urban areas having urban poor and school dropouts are very low. Thereby the very purpose of providing access to the unreached sections of the society, which is the main target group for NIOS becomes difficult to achieve.

- (ii) **Poor Quality of Access:-** Most of the Educational Institutions (formal schools, NGOs and other organizations), which are accredited by NIOS as its study centres for its Academic and Vocational Programmes are lacking severely in terms of infrastructural and teaching resources. They are severely under staffed and lack other physical infrastructure, due to which they are not able to provide timely, adequate and comprehensive support services to the students of NIOS, who are enrolled through them. The entire activity right from the stage of the distribution of prospectus, collection of admission applications, their tabulation and their dispatch to the Regional Centres for data entry etc., is done manually. As a result it has errors and is delayed causing great inconvenience to the students of the NIOS. A large number of learners frequently approach the Regional Directors at Regional Centres and NIOS Headquarters for redressal of their problems. The situation becomes more pitiable as these students have to travel great distances to reach Delhi and most of them belong to financially disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society, who were supposed to be served better through NIOS for meeting their educational needs. This makes NIOS a poor service provider to them.
- (iii) **One time Admission Policy:-** Although NIOS conducts two Public Examinations, yet it admits learners only once a year usually in the month of July-August. The admission period normally spreads over a period of 45 to 60 days. This limited time period of admissions creates pressure both on the learners and also on the study centres to complete the admission process within the stipulated time of 60 days. This limited admission period also effectively blocks large number of potential learners of NIOS from entering the educational stream offered by NIOS. In addition to this, it gives ample opportunities to some unscrupulous study centres of NIOS to indulge in malpractices by blocking and restricting the seats to the learners in general and then charging extra money for giving admissions towards the end of

the Admission Session. It has led to large number of malpractices in terms of admission process in NIOS. It may also be noted that all these errors and malpractices generated admission data, which is not only faulty but at times has deliberately errors, which leads to further malpractices during examination. Admission data is the basic data for the entire NIOS system as this data is subsequently used by the Evaluation Department, by Student Support Services Department, by Material Distribution Unit and by the Academic Department. The errors which occur inadvertently or deliberately thus get further compounded at various stages in the service delivery mechanism of NIOS creating multi dimensional problems for the organization and also for the learners. All this severely hinders the efficacy of NIOS as Open Distance Learning System in terms of quality of education imparted to the learners along-with attendant support services.

- (iv) **Lack of Administrative Control of NIOS over its Study Centres:-** All the dimensions of the functioning of NIOS as an Educational Service provider are heavily dependent on its collaborating institutions (which are formal schools, NGOs and other institutions). The basic philosophy of NIOS is to provide education at low cost by entering into a collaborative mode with these institutions, due to which there is no well defined administrative framework to regulate the functioning of these study centres. In majority of the cases, these study centres do not hold Personal Contact Programmes (PCPs) for learners at all or hold them in lesser number than required. Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) which are the only tools of mid-term assessment learning achievement of learners of NIOS are also not used effectively by them. Other than administrative aspects, the Academic content, SSS content of these institutions is also lacking because some of them are over burdened with the administration related work of admission and examinations of NIOS. They are unable to provide the required Academic and Non-Academic support even if they sincerely want to do so (which is true only for few of them).
- (v) **Manual Processing of Data by Regional Centres and NIOS Headquarters through its Departments:-** From the above it is clear that NIOS generates huge amount of complex, heterogeneous data. It's cumulative enrolment (enrolment valid over a period of 5 years) is more than 1.5 million, thereby making it largest open schooling

system in the world. All this data related to the learners is processed manually at Regional Centres or by concerned Departments of NIOS Headquarters, allowing a large scope of errors at various levels. Each error creates inconvenience for the learners and its rectification becomes a major issue for them, thereby reducing the credibility of NIOS as a good service provider in the domain of Open & Distance Learning (ODL). This frequently leads to break down in some of the major activities of NIOS. Problem is further complicated by the issue of equivalence of the certificates of NIOS with other Examination Boards. Large numbers of learners in NIOS are those who have dropped out or opted out by other Examination Boards to appear in Public Examinations at Secondary and Senior Secondary level of NIOS. They are allotted the facility of Transfer of Credit (TOC) in few subjects of their previous Boards. All this multiplies the complexity of the data related to the learners in NIOS, which has to be maintained over '5' years. Conduct of two Public Examinations in between Academic Year further reduces the time frame available with NIOS to collect, collate and rectify the errors in the entire process starting from admissions till certification of the learners.

Strategy adopted : Ni-On – A Unique Initiative on E-Governance in the field of education

On the basis of his experience of working in the system, the owner of this Project conceptualized the idea of the Ni-On Project. The concept was outlined in a paper entitled as “Towards Universalisation of Secondary Education Through NIOS” which was subsequently published in the reputed Journal, “Indian Journal of Open Learning, Volume 17, No. 1, January 2008 published by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

The basic thrust of the paper was to provide a policy perspective for NIOS that allowed it leapfrog to higher levels of flexibility, transparency and efficiency as an Open Distance Learning Institution and to establish itself as a true leader in the field of Distance Learning at School level. It emphasized the need for NIOS to move in the direction of e-governance so that NIOS could not only provide better educational services to its learners as a service provider but also improve efficiency, transparency, accountability, cost effectiveness with high quality. It was felt that such an e-governance initiative would help not only to bring about the structural

transformation of NIOS to a higher level of openness in education but also allow NIOS to play a lead role in the horizontal transfer of this technology to other State Open Schools and Open and Distance learning institutions of the developing world. This e governance initiative would thus make an effective contribution to the national and global agenda of Universalisation of Education.

The strategy adopted for Reaching the Unreached was through the NIOS Online(Ni On) project which introduced policy level changes in the Admissions system as well as effective use of technology in governance of NIOS operations. This Project was launched by Hon'ble Sh. Arjun Singh, Minister of HRD, on 3rd July 2007. Some significant initiatives taken under Ni On are as follows:

- (i) **NIOS online (Ni On) Project launched:**– This project initiated online admissions to NIOS based upon online admission application form available at the NIOS website. This gave learners the freedom to educational access NIOS admission from anywhere in India, at any time, without involving any outside agents/ AIs.

General Objectives

- (i) To promote e governance and better governance as directed by government of India from time to time.
- (ii) To ensure transparency and improving the efficiency in operations of NIOS in its key areas of functioning like admissions, accreditation and examinations and other activities.
- (iii) To assist government's goal of Universalisation of Secondary Education (USE) by improving and enhancing the reach of NIOS to its potential learners of NIOS.
- (iv) To bridge the digital divide in between the learners of NIOS and formal system by providing them

opportunity to use ICT for accessing NIOS for the purpose of admission and availing benefits associated with it.

- (v) To facilitate the structural functional transformation of NIOS as ODL institutions by imparting it greater flexibility, openness, superior quality and reliable services, as service provider – to its marginalized target group of learners.

Specific Objectives related to e-Governance

- (i) Restructuring the Operations of NIOS through innovative use of ICT
- (ii) Simplification of procedures and cutting down irrelevant ones.
- (iii) Cost effective and time saving both for NIOS and its learner.
- (iv) Improvement in quality of student support services.
- (v) System improvement with reliable and accurate data base.

The salient features of the Online Admissions are as follows:

- Faster and Simpler Admission: Direct access to NIOS Admission;
- Choice of Study Centre: Freedom to select Study Centre of his/her choice;
- Admission Open 24x7: Admission opened round the year for the learners for On Demand Examination of Secondary Course;
- Better support services: Direct interaction of learners with NIOS and faster redressal of all problems;
- Easy Payment: Payment of fee online through credit card else by Bank Draft.

- (ii) **Opening and Expanding the Existing Admission Streams and also reducing the Digital Divide:-** Under Ni On , new streams of admission were opened in addition to the existing stream(which were now referred to as Offline Admissions). These Online streams were as follows:

Stream 1- Online Admission for all learners:- This stream for Online Admission was opened for all the learners as per the laid down criteria for Secondary and Senior Secondary levels. These learners were eligible to appear in public examination first time in April-May, 2008.

Stream 2 -Online Admission for learners wanting to appear in October-November, 2007 Examinations:- This stream for Online admission was opened for all those learners who had appeared but could not clear the Public Examination of Secondary /Senior Secondary levels from any recognized Examination Board for the same subject combination in which they had appeared. The learners of this stream were eligible to appear in the October-November, 2007 Public Examinations of NIOS in Secondary/Senior Secondary, on the basis of marksheet/admit card of the respective Boards.(thereby , thus allowing such learners to save one precious year)

Stream 3- Online Admission for learners wanting to appear in On Demand Examination System (ODES) of NIOS for Secondary Level:- This stream for Online admission was opened throughout the year for those learners who had appeared but could not clear the public examination of Secondary level from any recognized examination Board and want to appear through On Demand Examination System of NIOS for Secondary level only. The admission under this stream was limited to the availability of seats in ODES. The scheme was available through On Demand Examination at NIOS Headquarter at Noida.

Stream 4- Online Admission for learners wanting to appear in On Demand Examination System (ODES) of NIOS for Senior Secondary Level:- This stream for Online admission was opened throughout the year for those learners who had appeared already passed Senior Secondary or above from any recognized Board/

University and want to take part admission in one subject or upto four subjects for updating their qualifications for learners who had appeared but could not clear the public examination of Senior Secondary level from any recognized examination Board in the same subject combination in which they had appeared and want to appear through On Demand Examination System of NIOS for Senior Secondary level only. The scheme was available through On Demand Examination at NIOS Headquarter at Noida.

- (iii) **Bringing about Transparency in Admissions:-** As a part of Ni On, a unique exercise called **Capacity Data** was undertaken . This calculated the total enrolment capacity of NIOS through its AIs. It was seen that many AIs were enrolling learners below capacity. Moreover there were many geographical areas that remained unreached as there were no AIs there. Through online admissions, NIOS now sought information from the learners for their choice of AIs (indicating those close to his/her residence). This facility was on First Come First Served Basis. Learners could now get the AI of their choice through a computerized system. Thus no AI could choose a particular set of learners as it was the computer that decided which learners should be placed in which AI. This not only reduced the distance of learners from their homes to the AI but also ensured that AI did not indulge in any malpractice during admissions. Further each AI was allocated learners as per their designated capacity thus ensuring that AI: learner ratio was corrected maintained.
- (iv) **Enhanced Efficiency due to simultaneously Admission Data Transfer:-** In NIOS, the admission data is the basic cornerstone upon which all other transactions are dependent. This data is the basis for the confirmation of student enrolment, generation of Student Identity card, dispatch of Study Materials, financial transactions between related to payment of Personal Contact Classes/other Student services by NIOS to AI, allocation of examination Centres etc. In the earlier system as has been stated earlier , this was being done manually leading to delays in all the processes of NIOS. Most importantly the study time available to the learner for the April Examination was too little and further there was no scope for introducing any innovative flexible admission scheme for failures who wanted to appear/reappear in examinations at an early date.

The chances of the data having errors was also considerable and once this happened the errors were compounded in every learner related transaction. Thus the overall quality of Student services was adversely affected due to erroneous admission data.

Under Ni On, the strategy adopted to increase efficiency has been to place the Admission form online on the official website of NIOS. The form is redesigned to make it more user friendly and this enables learners to punch their data themselves. The process is designed in such a way that learners have the facility to edit their own data prior to sending it to NIOS. The online facility is able to show them what they have filled, and send it only when they are fully satisfied. Hence the chances of errors in data are reduced. Moreover since the data is available online it is easier and faster for NIOS to provide Student Support Services as well as to transfer the common learner data to Material Distribution Unit for onward mailing of course materials to learners. Every other department is able to plan its activities as it has a concrete admission figure much faster. The gestation period of data processing is thus reduced greatly due to effective use of technology.

Result achieved/value delivered to beneficiary of the Project

The Ni On project has had many positive effects. From a policy point of view, it has enhanced the value of NIOS as an institution that is able to meet the objectives for which it was set up i.e. reaching the unreached learners. The Openness and flexibility of the system demand that admission policy should be as open as possible. The earlier One time admission barrier has been somewhat overcome.

The positive results of Ni on have added value to the beneficiaries and some of the notable benefits are as follows:

Learner gets improved quality of support services:- From the learners point of view is that Ni On has made the system more friendly and closer to the learner. The availability of learner record has made it easily to provide learner support services.

Learner gets better support from AI:- The role of AIs has been reduced to a great extent thereby removing the basic weakness in the organizational structure of NIOS. The main role of the AI now is to work only as study centers and provide academic support through Personal Contact Classes/

TMAAs, counseling, etc. This will eliminate a host of drawbacks in the present organizational structure of NIOS, especially in the area of admission/ examinations and student support services.

Learner gets a transparent system through use of technology:- Learners can view their data at any given time. This use of technology will greatly supplement the efforts of NIOS in implementing the basic concept of e-governance by integrating ICTs for bringing transparency in discharging the regulatory functions of NIOS, namely accreditation, admission and examination, in line with the directives of Central Vigilance Commission. These services are also passed on to a vigilant learner.

Learner gets greater time for Studying:- Since the learner data was a common pool, and was available online, it has been easier to transfer it to Mailing and Distribution Unit for ensuring distribution of course materials. The gestation period of data processing is also reduced due to use of technology and so the learner gets his/her course materials faster.

Learner gets benefit of cost effectiveness:- With the use of technology, NIOS has been able to place many documents on the website free of cost. Thus earlier while the Prospectus cost Rs 50, now the learner gets it for free on the website. He has to pay only Rs 30 for the application form. Course materials are available on the website and learners can download them free of cost. The facility of e-payment through credit card makes payments convenient and simple.

Learner finds easy mobility between formal and OLS:- NIOS will allow true mobility to the learners i.e. vertical as well as horizontal mobility across the formal and open schooling system and promote greater acceptance of NIOS certification across the Board. Online data will also help in Transfer of Credit from one Board to the other.

Learner Grievances are addressed better through a authentic and reliable database:- The computerization of admissions will help NIOS in developing a comprehensive data base of its learners along with the access to the learners at all point of time during their enrolment with NIOS. It will help NIOS in redressal of grievances and also conducting research and programme evaluation from a learner centric viewpoint. Such feedback from such research would feed into policy and decision-making not just at NIOS but government level too.

Learner of NIOS overcomes Digital Divide:- Many NIOS learners are disadvantaged as they have been pushed out of the formal school system. With the use of technology in all spheres, NIOS learners would be doubly disadvantaged if they were deprived of the new mode of learning. Through Ni-On, NIOS has stepped up its operations and made provisions for using technology for learning and delivery so that it can make the NIOS learner a global learner. NIOS cannot afford to make its learners the victims of the Digital Divide.

Other Distinctive Features/Accomplishments Of The Project

Contribution to Universalisation of Education:- At present the annual enrolment of NIOS ranges in between 2.50 lakh to 3 lakh learners per year. Once the On-line admissions/examinations system is implemented at all India level, the NIOS enrolments are likely to rise to 7 lakh students annually without requiring a proportionate increase in the man-power for dealing with such a large number of students. The coverage of out of school children under the open learning system can be further enhanced by another '3' lakh learner per annum if State Open Schools also follow the upscaled model of NIOS. It means that NIOS and SOS together will be able to cater to admissions 10 lakh learner per annum and 50 lakh out of school children there by achieving 11th Five Year Plan targets.

Learner Support Centre:- Since the learner will be in contact with NIOS through the Internet, it will be easy for NIOS to provide quality academic support services to the learners adequately in proper time. Under Ni On, a '24 x 7' Call Centre type of mechanism is being made functional in NIOS which would address all problems of the NIOS learners online. The staff handling this call Centre would be trained by NIOS in answering FAQs related to admissions/examinations initially. Later on this facility would be fully expanded to include all aspects of functioning of PCP, TMA, helpline etc for the learners of NIOS.

Increased revenue and reduced Costs:- The expansion in the learner base of NIOS alongwith the assured annual enrolment would result in increased revenue and savings for NIOS.

Improve the normative and evaluation standard of NIOS:- The Ni-On model will work as a standard and normative system for providing quality and timely student support services and setting up of ideal teaching learning

and examination standards for NIOS. This will improve the evaluation standard of NIOS, as most of the evaluation will be through On Demand Examination (ODES). The public examination system will be strengthened and streamlined. ISO-9001 certification of ODES is being planned by NIOS. It is also proposed to obtain ISO-9001 certification of its Public examination held twice a year.

Exemplary Horizontal Transfer of ICT-Based best practices

1. Appropriateness of Context & localization of best practice

1.1 Appropriateness of Context

The Ni-On Project is aimed at strengthening of Open & Distance Learning systems (ODLs) at Secondary level like NIOS in order to supplement Government of India's efforts for Universalization of Secondary Education. This project is more relevant in view of huge numbers (almost 6 crore children out of Secondary School System) and lack of resources to expand network of Secondary Schools in Formal System. In order to cater to 15% out of school children, as per 11th Five Year Plan estimates, NIOS needs to expand its own reach, effectiveness, efficiency & reliability as service provider to this client group. Innovative use of existing ICT, for re-engineering its basic processes of admissions, payments & examination system was done, to get rid of rigidities, lack of accuracy, poor quality data and resultant poor services to its learners, to evolve into a higher form of ODLs, with greater freedom, openness, choice, flexibility, transparency, accountability & higher efficiency both in terms of cost, time & quality of the services.

1.2 Localization of Best Practice

The ICT intervention, Project (Ni-On) NIOS-ONLINE, along with its Learner Support Centre, can include Hindi as local language, in addition to English. The possibility of introducing Urdu – at National level and subsequently Regional Languages at Regional level also exists in the Project, which can materialize with passage of time and gaining enough hands on experience from this Project.

2. Scalability

2.1 Extent of Automation

The Project is 90% automated. Basic Web Server is maintained with C-DAC support. All Regional Centres (11 all over the country) have also a Web Server, along with '6' User Departments at NIOS Headquarter. 10% activity is manual i.e, that of verification of Admission Forms and documents due to the fact that NIOS is a Public Examination Board like CBSE/ICSE etc., and some aspects have to be checked thoroughly as per legal requirements.

2.2 Ability to Leverage shared NeGP Infrastructure

Ni-On Project ensures connectivity and seamless transfer of all kinds of data in between Central Admission Cell, Regional Centres, all User Departments of NIOS & Learner Support Centre (Call Centre of NIOS).

2.3 Number of Connecting Nodes

Infrastructure in terms of Hardware, Software installed once, need not be changed for atleast 4-5 years. The only recurring cost is in terms of '30' + '10' contract employees for running On-line Cell at NIOS Headquarter + '11' Regional Centres + '1' Learner Support Centre at NIOS Headquarter. The hiring of leased internet lines and computer purchased, is needed for all other day to day functions of NIOS. Hence it cannot be treated as specific to this Project. Ni-On simply uses, existing resources more intensively, thereby improving their economics to NIOS.

3. Sustainability with respect to different aspects

3.1 Technology

- 3.1.1 Innovative use of existing technology has been done i.e. use of dedicated high speed Internet Lease Lines for Online Cell at NIOS Headquarter, Central Web Server with C-DAC, Web Servers at all Regional Centres, special software for On-line Admission Forms, for On-line Accreditation Forms, setting up of Electronic

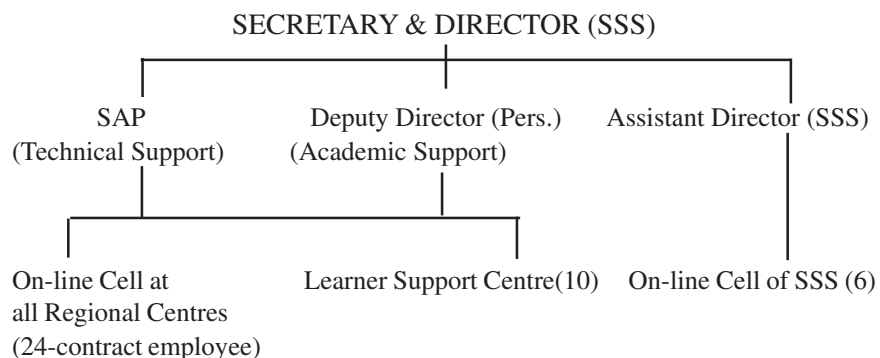
Payment Gateway, specialized agreement with ICICI Bank, has been done under this Project.

3.1.2 Each learner has a separate E-mail ID & User Password and can only see information related to him or her. User cannot change anything. Within NIOS, user Departments, Regional Centres and Learner Support Centre can only access relevant data through the authorized officers, having separate ID and Password. Information in Central Server can not be altered by anyone except Chief Cyber Security Officer cum SAP. Digital signatures of all authorized Nodal Officers in each Regional Centre in each Regional Centre, User Departments etc., have been developed & encryption of signatures of Project owner has been done to control the system. Chief Cyber Security Officer can make changes in database, only after attaining written permission of Secretary, NIOS on file, to be kept on record.

3.2 Organisation under Ni-On Project

3.2.1 In first phase the project was manned almost by in-house resources. It was manned by the core team members and the regular NIOS staff working under them. In second phase, after its expansion, almost '40' persons were hired on contract basis at various levels, having annual wage bill of (direct cost) of Rs 30 lakhs. In addition of hired contract staff, 6-8 regular officers/staff members are associated on part time basis with this Project.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF NI-ON PROJECT



3.2.2 Training, Orientation & Capacity Building

- In-house discussions & deliberations were done between all constituents of NIOS – Project owner, Sh. D.S. Bist introduced the concept and then sensitized all key functionaries of NIOS, at field level, about the Project - its objectives, its possibility & desirability. Above all they were sensitized about the fact that without their active role and support, it cannot be implemented successfully. Several meetings with Head of Departments of NIOS, with all Regional Directors of NIOS were held by owner of the Project, to convince them about the feasibility and desirability of the Project. Subsequently funds were released to them for buying hardware etc and sanction to hire contract staff, One week orientation course was run at NIOS Headquarter by SAP for all contractual staff members hired for On-line Project ('2' at each Regional Centre) in all '11' Regional Centres of NIOS.

IVRS Tree for Learner Support Centre (LSC - Call Centre) of NIOS was developed in-house with the help of a private firm, one week orientation/training of '10' Call Centre employees was also done before putting Call Centre on operational trial.

3.3. Financial (scope for revenue generation)

3.3.1 NIOS is an autonomous organization in educational sector & its charter is not to generate revenue and subsequently profits. It's charter is to provide quality, school education to those who are out of formal school system, at the least possible cost with a comparable quality education to that of formal system.

3.3.2 Ni-On Project is a viable and a very cheap option. Its total cost in initial phase was only Rs. 6.60 lakh (direct + indirect) resources (like computers, web servers, lease lines etc) which are already in use of NIOS and hence it is basically optimizing the use of existing resources of NIOS, 10% cost of these resources has been added to Ni-On Project cost as indirect cost. Its direct cost are only hiring of contractual staff and software development for it (most of it done in house under guidance of owner of the Project). As the numbers of

On-Line learners increase, the per unit cost will decline from Rs. 22/- in initial phase to Rs. 20.62/- per learner in Phase – II and to Rs. 13.20 in Phase – III (expected).

3.3.3 The cost of admission to a learner, in off-line (traditional mode) through study centres (AIs) of NIOS was Rs. 50/- which is the cost of prospectus plus admission form. It has now been reduced to Rs. 30/- (giving Rs. 20/- to learner) for on-line learners. **Therefore the potential profit of NIOS through Project Ni-On has been passed on to the learners of NIOS who are by and large from the marginalized background.**

4. Cost Effectiveness (Give details about impact on cost incurred w.r.t overhead cost, direct and indirect cost, man days/man hours required to do a job etc.

4.1 Cost of the Project

- NIOS pays Rs. 250/- per learner to the study center (AI of NIOS) for doing work related to admissions examinations & academic work, on its behalf. Even though Admission work is the main and basic work, we have divided Rs. 250/- equally into '3' broad areas of work done by AIs (study centers) for learners on behalf of NIOS. According to this estimate, each (off-line) admission through AI (study center) of NIOS costs Rs. $250/3 = \text{Rs. } 82.50$ paisa to NIOS. In comparison to this, on-line admission in initial phase had costed Rs. 6.60 lakh and phase II Rs. 33 lakh. 30,000 admissions on-line were done in phase I and 1.60 lakh on-line admissions were done in phase II, the expected admissions in Phase –III 2009-10 is Rs. 2.50 lakh & direct cost will continue to be Rs. 33 lakh. The same quantum of admissions off-line (through AIs of NIOS) would be as follows :

**Table: Cost comparison in between On-line & Off-Line
(through AIs) admissions**

| Phase | Numbers of Admissions | | Costs | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--|---|
| | ON-LINE | OFF-LINE | ON-LINE | OFF-LINE |
| Phase-I 2007-08 | 30,000 learners | 30,000 learners | Total Rs 6.60 lakh Per learner cost = Rs. 22/- | 30,000 xRs.82.50 =Rs. 25 lakh Per learner cost Rs. 82.50 |
| Phase-II 2008-09 | 1,60,000 | 1,60,000 | Total Rs.33 lakh Per learner cost = Rs.20.62 paisa | 1,60,000 x 82.50 = Rs.1.32 crore |
| Phase -III (Expected 2009-10) | 2,50,000 | 2,50,000 | Total Rs. 33 lakh Per learner cost = Rs. 13.20 paisa | 2,50,000 x Rs.82.50 = Rs.2.62 crore |

The cost advantage of handling same number of admissions On-line and Off-line show the difference of more than '4' times per learner. This cost difference will increase further, if we discount the cost of hiring of lease lines for internet and computers, which are needed by NIOS, urgently even without Project Ni-On. In phase -`3' therefore the cost would only be in terms of direct cost i.e. `40' contract staff employees which will remain fixed, even as the number of learners enrolled through Ni-On project crosses 2.5 lakh mark. The per learner cost will be Rs. 13.20 paisa, which will keep declining with the increase in number of On-line Admissions, whereas the traditional model of admission (Off-line admissions) has a fixed unit cost per learner i.e. Rs. 82.50 paisa.

- The numbers of man hours, mandays, gets reduced substantially under Project N-On. In On-line system only '40' full time contract workers are working whereas in Off-line traditional system, entire staff of Regional Centre (all '11' of them) and Student Support Services Dept., Material Distribution Unit of NIOS is working for greater part of the year for same work. The job gets done in 30-45 days in On-Line system,

with 99% accuracy whereas it takes more than 180 to 210 days in Off-line system with large scale complaints, of wrong and erroneous data, faulty delivery etc.

- On-line system supports a 24x7 Call Centre for solving Student Support related problems of the learners without their going anywhere (except to Internet access or phone access point), whereas in Off-line learner has to run in between AIs, Regional Centre & NIOS Headquarter at NOIDA spending large amount of money, time and effort which is lacking with most of them as they come from marginalized background.
5. Innovations to original Project (Give Details about number of steps involved in process, identification and removal of bottlenecks/Irrelevant steps etc.)

Ni-On Project is an innovative use of existing ICT to re-engineer the entire processes of Admissions, Examinations and Payments in NIOS, to make it more learner centric. This is a unique project, which has been undertaken by an Educational Institution at All India Level for the first time. There are few single unit based Educational Institutions like Universities etc., who have introduced the facility of On-line Admissions but Learners of NIOS seek admission from all the parts of the Country and also from some countries in Middle-East, thus making it truly a novel project. Introduction & implementation of Ni-On Project has transformed NIOS into a higher form of Open Distance Learning system, by removing its rigidities and inefficiencies.

Summary of Efficiency Enhancement due to Ni-On Project

| | Off-Line | | On-Line | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| | No. of Transactions | Time Frame involved | No. of Transactions involved | Time Frame involved |
| Admissions | 15 | 180-210 days | 5 | 30-45 days |
| Payment | 6 | 90-100 days | 1 | 7-10 days |
| Examination Stream 3 & 4 | 10 | 60-70 days | 5 | 20-25 days |

Therefore from the above table, it is visible that large number of transaction steps involved in the process of Admissions, Payments and Examinations in the traditional off-line mode of Admissions in NIOS (i.e. through

AIs/Study Centres) has been reduced to a great extent leading to considerable saving in terms of man hours and man days due to the simple fact that time frame involved in completing all these transactions has drastically been reduced from 6-7 months to 1 months only. This is in addition to the fact that the processes re-engineering done under Ni-On Project provides accurate and quality data to NIOS, which is further used by its Learner Support Centre to provide 24x7 assistance in support to its Learners directly without requiring them to spend time, effort and money in running from AIs to Regional Centres and NIOS Headquarters in Delhi, under Off-line system.

Removal of Bottlenecks and Irrelevant Steps

By creation of On-line Admission Cell and Learner Support Centre, NIOS has been able to do away with the AI-based admissions in On-line Stream of Admissions. In the traditional mode of Admissions (through AIs), the entire processes/transactions were done manually though use of Computers for data punching and scanning was also done. It involved continuous work by all the members and staff of all Regional Centres for almost '6' months alongwith the '2' Departments of NIOS Headquarters also working along with the Regional Centres for finalization of Admission Data and dispatch of the study material to its learners. This entire exercise allowed emergence of large number of errors both inadvertent (systematic) and deliberate causing lot of inconvenience to its learners. All this projected NIOS as a poor service provider to its marginalized client group. By introduction of Ni-On Project, this whole exercise has become automated to the extent of 90% and hence is fast error free and transparent. 10% manual work, which is still involved under this Project in terms of physical checking of hardcopies of the Admission Forms is, on the account of the fact that NIOS is also a Public Examination Board like CBSE, ICSE, hence the hard copy of original application form of the Learner has to be cross-checked for Original Documents which are needed on statutory basis for granting admissions to its learners and certifying them through its Evaluation System. It has changed, the NIOS not only in structural and functional terms but has also improved its image as service provider. NIOS has now streamlined its various core activities like enrolment of learners i.e. Admissions, Payment & Evaluation system of all streams of examinations) and its Material Distribution System. It is now applying for ISO-9001 Certification

thereby becoming the first Educational service provider to do so. NIOS is an apex ODL Institution at National level and the biggest Open Learning School in the World, hence its best practices in terms of Project Ni-On can be replicated by State Open Schools in the Country and by National Open Learning Systems at School level in other developing countries of the World.