

Ring Back Tones  
to  
Livelihood

Changing face of  
M-Platform Services—  
Indian Experience:

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## Abstract

Bollywood more often than not, is the fulcrum of change in the Indian sub continent. It remains a trend setter, be it for personal likes and dislikes or the ambition of being the Super hero in real life. It has had an amazing impact over the past 6 decades on every Indian, be it in the rural or in the urban part of the country.

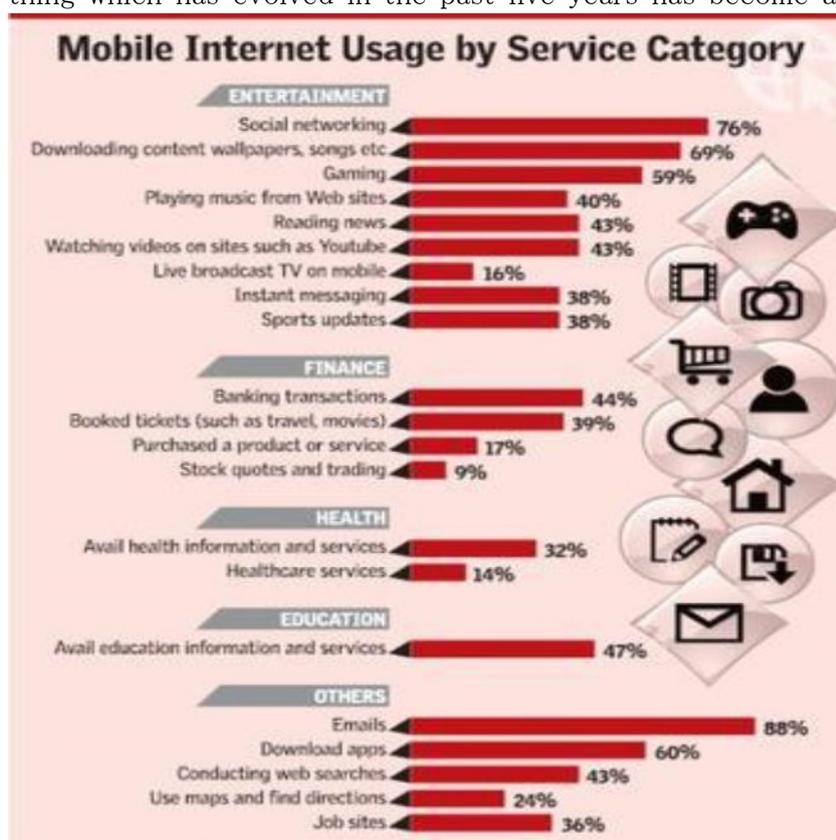
The advent of mobiles over the years has transformed, and given rise to the clichéd statement , “ India has more mobiles than Toilets” , a fact indeed. The 3 inch device has transformed numerous lives and attempts are being made to provide more on the device under the aegis of Value added services.

Plethora of services are being launched and what has truly emerged is the fact that “ Media approach” remains the flavor of the day. Again a benchmark to be drawn from the recent launch of a “ bollywood video” over the mobile phone at less than a Cent. Service acceptability is a challenge- given the lower literacy levels but usage of mobiles is increasing at the behest of the bollywood related services.

This paper evaluates impact of the role of Ring Back tones and other Bollywood related services which has created user stickiness to the mobile services, which in turn is helping to accept other forms of services which have bearing on the lives of each individual in the rural part of the country.

A major challenge faced by those at the EBoP (Economically at the Bottom of the Pyramid) is getting access to the basic services, which can have a large impact on their livelihoods. More often than not the formal channels of brick and mortar have had their own limitation to reach out to those in the far flung villages.

Physical infrastructure continues to be plagued by various challenges; however, an interesting thing which has evolved in the past five years has become a major problem solver for the last mile connectivity - Mobile phones.



Source: Wipro, IAMA Report March 2013 ( Graph from Hindu Business Line)

The rapid growth of mobile telephony as compared to fixed line telephony and the recent introduction of mobile enabled services in areas of health, education, agriculture etc. have provided a means to overcome existing information asymmetry. It also helps, at least partially, to bridge the gap between the availability and delivery of various services of the government.

As shown in the above Table, which is based on the Wipro-IAMAI report clearly shows the dramatic shift in the users & the role of Mobile phone in a normal day. This clearly indicates the potential the instrument has to ensure that for those who are yet to experience the basic services- it surely can reach them via the 4inch device.

## RING BACK TONE- RBT & TO LIVELIHOOD - TRANSFORMATION

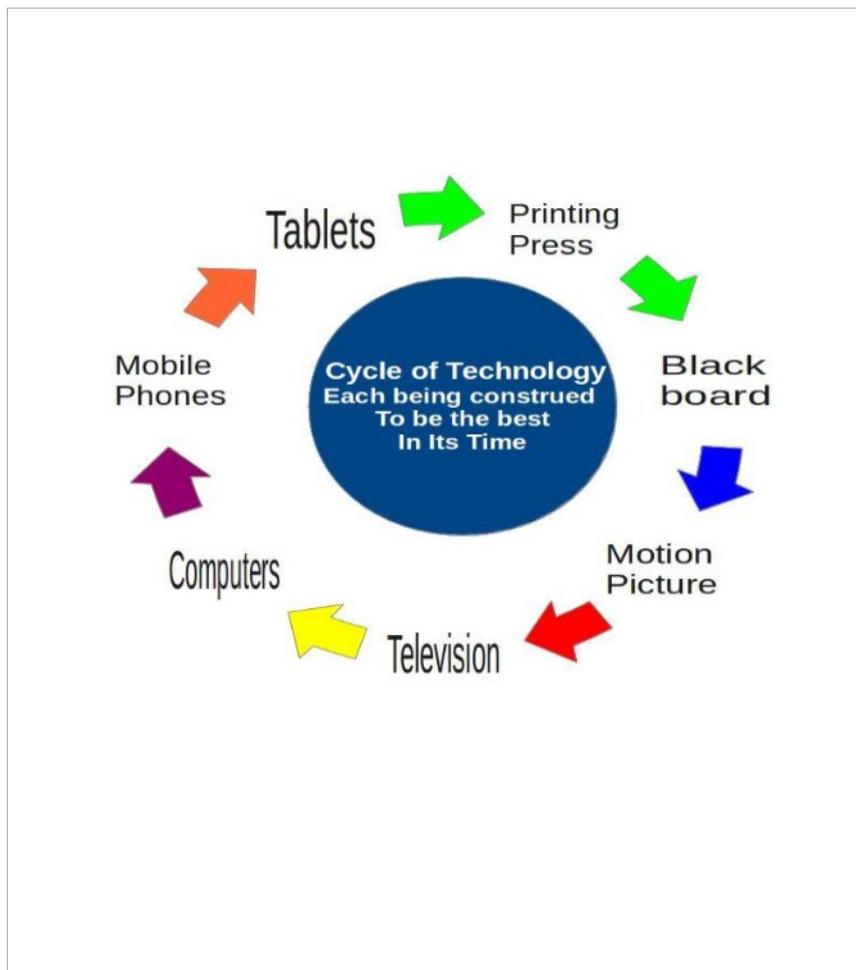
In his opening remarks Sir John Daniel at the M4D India - workshop held in India - Pune, in March 2012, made very key points as :

1. Each new development in communications is hailed as the harbinger of a revolution in education.
  1. In the middle of the nineteenth century one Josiah Bumstead remarked that “the inventor or introducer of the blackboard deserves to be ranked among the best contributors to learning and science, if not among the greatest benefactors of mankind”.
  2. A hundred years later Hoban claimed that the motion picture is the most revolutionary instrument introduced into education since the printing press.
  3. Ten years later it was clear to Stoddard that television offered the greatest opportunity for the advancement of education since the introduction of printing by moveable type.
  4. A decade later we were told that impact of computers on society, and hence on education, has been far greater.

Television

To extend his point, further in the past Decade it was the Mobile, but now Tablet is sitting on top of the Chain

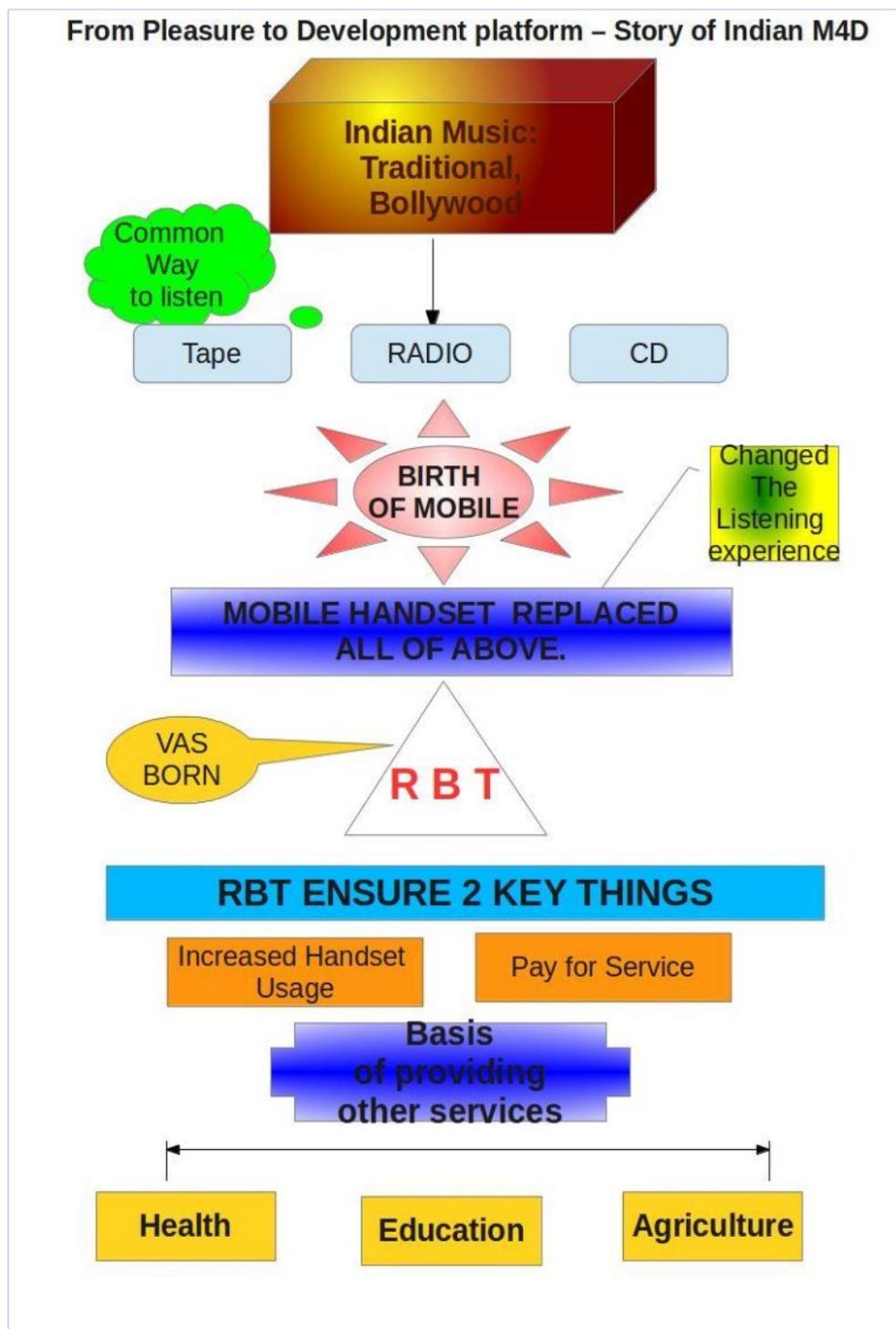
### CYCEL OF TECHNOLOGY



So in Today's times its the turn of Mobile- which is being hailed as the Champion of Technology, but soon even that 's giving way to the 7-10inch devices!

As the Technology continues to evolve so is also the modality to deliver. Often , the rope to cling on to while the transition happens, is what has been experienced before and then graduate to the new world. Something which has been experienced in the Indian context, when it comes to expanding development services using the mobile platform.

In India Music (Bollywood and traditional) is the backbone of the culture- so it was an easy opportunity to convert this passion into a business model over the mobile. Ringback tones become an instant hit, which allowed users to make their favourite song as there incoming ring tone, instead of the mundane electronic sound of the mobile. At Rs 30 a month, it never felt like a pinch for the users and RBT's (ring back tone), started giving more revenue than the airtime charges.



The rapid growth in the RBT business lead to exploring more variants , which could be used to offer other services as well.

## RBT established two important things:

1. Acceptability to pay for a service
2. Mobile transforming beyond a communication device- **THIS IS THE KEY**

With these two facts, it opened up a huge opportunity to explore various other services which can be offered in the similar tone.

## Agriculture Extension Services

Thus led to the birth of agriculture extension services- the first to be launched for the Indian Farmers.

Few key characteristics of the - Agri Extension services:

1. Good agriculture practice ( GAP)
2. Daily weather updates
3. Market prices of key crops
4. IVR- mode- where in the farmer could call back to check
5. OBD- out bound diallers
  1. Where in on daily basis, calls would go to the designated numbers to give them information on crop or other scheme.

## The above found transformed the way farmers were doing their production planning:

1. They were better informed on the latest scientific development
2. Had timely access to the latest pest/disease related information & cure.
3. Market awareness increased: Helping them to negotiate better with the traders in the market.
  1. Overall increased the earnings - estimated vary on the actual numbers but considering all the various studies etc, - its same to say at least 15-20% improvement happened in those farmers who availed the Agriculture related program over the mobile.

Agriculture was the first starting point for all the Telecom operators- as it had the underlying challenge of reach and precision of information. Both were targeted very well, which yielded into building a robust service model- being rolled out by each operator in his respective circle.

Most important thing which truly enabled the farmer was: INFORMATION- real time and updated. As often this was his key challenge, which he would overcome looking at newspaper or listen on the radio. But the Mobile based services, gave all this at his doorstep and as per his needs. Some of the agencies involved in this are were narrowing down the key crops for the farmers instead of giving generic & also providing weather pertaining to his district etc. This led to huge empowerment as now they were better aware and could plan their crop production more efficiently.

The farmers were able to reduce a lot of their time specially when they would want to sell their produce, earlier they would have to carry the entire stock to the market and then get to know the price, where as now he is able to clearly get the same information, which is authentic over

his mobile- so basis this he is taking the decision to take the stock to sell or wait. This was he is saving, Labour, fuel- both of which are a large burden.

Over the years, what started as a combination of SMS & voice- it seemed after the initial euphoria SMS was turning out to be a let down. As farmers were more keen to hear or listen rather than read something over the phone. This change in preference led to change in the entire Agri extension service dynamics- clearly showing the way forward- VOICE.

Further, the initial success also brought in independent players- who were neither Telecoms or anything remotely associated with the Telecom industry These were specialised agencies who were operating in various other domains. Each of these agencies, had their inherent strengths:

1. Domain
2. Technology
3. Information

Each of these entities, created their own service platform- which were agnostic to the Teleco, and the services were being offered independently. This further deepened the entire Agriculture extension Service model, as these entities were also charging premium to the existing services being offered by the Telecoms.

The pay model which shaped up due to the RBT ( ring back tone) use- which incidentally till date remains the largest revenue provider to the Telecoms, after the airtime charge- this created a sense of ' need to pay for" which was the biggest challenge specially in the rural areas for those services which are focused towards: Agriculture/Health/Education- as the default thinking is " it should be free".

The success of extension model in agriculture- was the key which led to the further enhancement of the mobile based intervention mechanism program in other area like:- Education , Health etc.

### **Education: Focus has been to provide language learnings**

Most important aspect in the Indian context was the fact, that surely mobile phones acceptability rose as beyond the normal expected usage- as was demonstrated in the case of agriculture. Various studies have stated that as estimated 500 million students in India will need access to higher education in the next ten years.

Out reach is the key , as the kind of manpower needed to provide , supervise and ensure quality output is produced- it is a very daunting task. Numerous efforts are being to solidify the brick and mortar formats- which are the cornerstone of delivery , however with the amazing penetration of the mobile phones- the dynamics of the entire learning process has changed.

For a simple reason , the M-Learning can provide:

- **Delivery Instantaneously :**
  - Content can be delivered as soon as it is ready.
- **Costs:**
  1. Android mobile operating system, smart-phones and tablets are no more a thing of

luxury

1. Akash (Tablet) is the biggest example , the cheapest handset in the world.

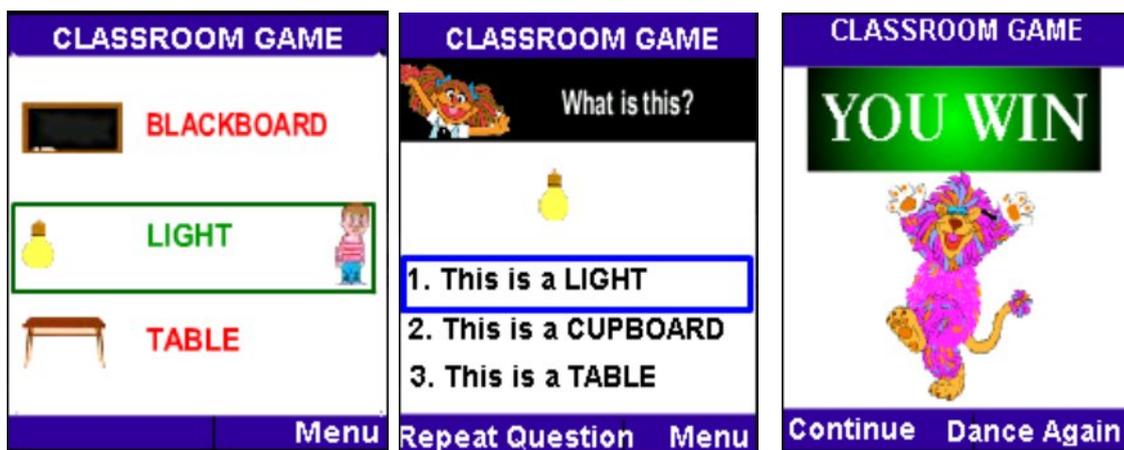
- **Place no barrier:**

1. Mobile device is not bound to a single location.: For both those creating content and those receiving them

M-Learning was a much more complex task- as a mere sms would not have been sufficient to teach a person to read and write. So the Target group and the focus was not so much on the basics of educational needs but to enhance or support the existing basic understanding.

In an project, undertaken on “ Improving Literacy in Rural India: Cellphone Games in an After-School Program ” Matthew Kam, Anuj Kumar, Shirley Jain, Akhil Mathur, and John Canny – have demonstrated how by shifting the focus from providing basic knowledge to advanced knowledge the mobile has played a pivotal role. In their project , and in the report stated above- the focus was to provide after school support to the children for enchaining their English learning capability.

The project entailed building gaming applications to provide English education,some of the screen shots of the games as as below:



Clearly the entire structure of the project was keeping in mind that the Child had basic understanding of the language and what is being presented over the mobile was to supplement and strengthen the overall understanding. Each participant was loaned a cellphone preloaded with English language learning games. Participants were taught how to start the games, and were asked to focus on learning English when playing the games on their own .

Important thing is the friendliness of the mobile as it was not seen to be some high tech instrument but a normal thing which they were living with , having seen their parents use it & now it was their turn.

While designing the educational program an important aspect which needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that - Technology intervention must fit into the traditional Teacher centred pedagogy. As was evident in this project, which was ensuring that the children had basic understanding which they were receiving via the brick and mortar format & further enhancement was happening via the intervention of the Mobile-post the normal school hours.

Similarly in other cases, which are not school centred- but more to provide better language learning ability, its largely the individuals ability both in terms of using the phone and also to grasp the subject basis the service being given via M-platform.

Presently– Telecoms in the country are offering multitude of services ( off course backed by domain experts) in the education arena. Few of them being:

- Aircel, the fifth largest GSM player in the country by subscribers, offers education related services through its mGurujee application.
  - The app allows users access to content in areas of engineering, management, civil services and medicine; school syllabi of CBSE and ICSE boards as well as skill development, vocabulary and general knowledge tutorials.
  - A user can subscribe to mGurujee and get access to learning content in practice, quiz, timed or tutorial mode. When the user completes a question set or the time is over, the results are displayed instantly.
  - The operator charges Rs 5 per question set and Rs 30 per month for subscription to a question set.
- Another GSM operator, Tata Docomo, provides an English Seekho service through its mobile portal, Tata Zone.
  - It allows users to take conversational English language lessons on their mobiles through an interactive voice response (IVR) application that guides the user through audio clips. It offers short lessons followed by interactive lessons
- And off course, Vodafone & Airtel to have their English learning program services.
  - By and large the services offered by the operators are similar, marginal difference in the offering.

Further , along with the Telecoms– there are other players who are into brick and mortar formats but are providing the reach via applications / SMS/ IVR etc to provide continuous learning experience to its pupils. One of the largest one being, Apart from telcos, institutions such as the Indira Gandhi

National Open University ( IGNOU) have initiated basic mobile services for students spread across the country. IGNOU is using an SMS model for exam alerts, which is available in five regional sectors in India and has a network of 30,000 to 50,000 students.

Further, Even corporate training programs or advanced learning options are being evolved over the M-Platform– which surely will find more takers as the instrument changes its size. Since the target audience in case of Corporates is much more advanced user , hence even the affordability of the device will no longer be an issue. M-Learning is graduating out of the 3–4 inch device into the 7–10 inch ones ( tablets), which is the next big wave that's is being seen in the Indian context.

The consistent effort by the government to provide more to its citizens– each state government is providing the hardware ( Tablet), which often is seen as the basic challenge, but with the support of the state this has been overcome. Once the hardware is in place– various programs and key amongst them being education is being driven very aggressively specially in those states in which Tablet is being distributed free of cost.

## Health

**M-Health is a combination of brick and mortar and M platform– given the subject.**

As its practically impossible to diagnose a disease over an application - one would have to go

through tests etc to detect the disease and begin the treatment.

However, what surely can be done is monitoring- etc, identification of the issues symptoms etc, which often goes unnoticed and the problems become epidemic.

Currently, there are more than 20 initiatives for mHealth in the country, which are focused on the following aspects :

1. Record the availability of beds in the various places- which is sent to the central agency at a district level and then accordingly - patients in the village are guided by agency- which is often operated by an NGO.
2. Providing SMS based reminders for managing an major health issue
  1. Constant reminders & also availability of medicines etc.
3. Using Multimedia approach to train the health care individuals

**Some of key initiatives which have found global appreciation are :**

1. **Mother & Child Tracking System: Government of India Initiative:¥**
  1. Under this program the expectant mother has to register with the nearest healthcare facility in the village, and then on wards on periodic basis she receives messages on how to manage herself before and after delivering the child. This has been a great initiative, but has its own challenges, given the scale and level of operation. But surely is seen as a great service by those in the rural parts of the country
2. **Prof. Ashok Jhunjhunwala for [Uniphore's VoiceNet platform](#):** Personalized Voice based Information Retrieval and Transaction System (PVIT) of mobile phones with authentication and local-language voice-recognition to effectively aid healthcare delivery in India.
3. **Derek Treatman for CommCare-Sense:** Localized multimedia to improve quality of care in four districts spanning Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan, India. The multimedia CommCare applications developed using locally recorded audio messages and culturally appropriate imagery that are used by community health workers to spread information on maternal and child health in low-literate areas of rural India.

The variants of the mobile phone operated services under the three heads : Agriculture ,Education,Health- could not have been possible unless the barrier to the new technology was overcome. More often, the transition happens when, an known entity exits in front- in this case happened to be the Ring Back Tones- as this led to the usage of mobiles as not just as instrument of communication but also for pleasure. The Journey of the Indian M4D programs clearly have their roots entrenched into the world of Bollywood- which truly increased the usage of phone & rest is history. Basically for any Technology to be successful its acceptability is the key- which in Indian experience in context of Mobiles have been proven very well.

**EVOLUTION OF M4D PLATFORM : INDIA VIA RBT**

