

Harnessing Information Technology for Good Governance

Feature

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Globally governments have to communicate regularly with citizens. Efficient and effective communication was, is and will remain as one of the key vehicles to achieve good governance for any government.

Instruments like drums were a medium that governments used to reach out to people, that have been now replaced by internet and data. The power of internet and information technology has helped hasten the speed of communication, resulting in information reaching out to the targeted group seamlessly.

Information Technology has ensured that a policy decision taken by the government can be quickly executed and implemented at multiple locations, across the length and breadth of the country. It also ensures transparency, accountability—while assuring quick and effective responsiveness of government, to citizens' problems and suggestions.

A SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of Information Technology's role in improved governance, throws light on the benefits, citizen enjoy from good governance. It also indicates that India as a country has not yet fully benefitted, from the power of IT in achieving good governance. There are only islands of success.

But the success stories, howsoever modest, have demonstrated that each one of them carry a huge potential, for it to be replicated in a large scale, across state and nation—to achieve good governance.

Take the example of Government of Chhattisgarh that has used ICT based module to reform, to improve its Public Distribution System (PDS) that also ensures a transparent and accountable delivery mechanism.

To address the leakages in PDS, the State of Chhattisgarh implemented an end-to-end information technology solution in 2007. Operations at every level of the scheme - from procurement of produce, to storage and transportation to state warehouses and Fair Priced Shops- have been computerized.

There is continuous monitoring of operations at all levels via reports uploaded onto the web in real time. Web management has led to enhanced accountability of operations. The online platform provides an account of commodity stocks which helps decision makers in utilizing the inventory of commodities with greater efficiency.

A unique feature of PDS in Chhattisgarh is the innovative citizen interface portal through which citizens can track the movement of PDS commodities and also register their grievances.

The ICT solution being used in Chhattisgarh is showing very encouraging results and states like Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have showed interest in rolling out a similar procedure.

Then there is Karnataka State Government that has successfully eradicated corruption in getting land records. Bhoomi is the Land Records computerization effort by the Government of Karnataka. Work on the project launched in 1999. In 2001, the first online services were provided to the citizens and other stakeholders of the project Bhoomi has not only sustained its commendable levels of service achieved in 2006, but has also made very

significant progress. Currently, as many as two and half crores of property records are being issued to citizens every year, under the Bhoomi programme.

The Record of Rights (ROR) is now made available at the doorsteps of farmers also through as many as 800 tele-centres, in addition to the erstwhile centres at the taluka level. The process has now been extended to the village as a unit from the erstwhile sub-taluka level unit.

Similarly the Gujarat Government's e-Dhara, (renames e-Jamin) the computerized system of land records has been a tremendous success. All 225 Talukas of 26 districts are connected by Gujarat state wide area network (GSWAN). The number of property records issued from e-Dhara has gone up from 1.58 crores to more than 3 crore per year as per the last estimates.

In 2007-08, these RORs started getting issued from e-Gram centres at village panchayats and people did not have to go to Talukas. Through centralization of all the 227 land record databases, which was effected in 2010, the RORs can now be delivered from anywhere.

e-Dhara incorporated a feature to capture photographs and finger-prints of owners to enable secured transactions under registration. Finger Print Scanners have been provided at the Taluka level for verification by the Deputy Mamlatdar. These and other measures have increased the security of data manifold.

In 2011, all transactions were centralized by bringing data from all the 227 e-Dhara centres to a central server. This increased central control over data. The project is also financially self sustaining, by generating about Rs. 2 crore per month from the fees charged for the RoR copies being issued from the e-Jamine system.

The above three cases illustrate how good governance can be achieved and also sustainable, with help of Information technology.

A number of government services that were plagued with corruption delay and were out of reach for people, are now operating successfully, after IT was introduced. Securing a passport and driving licence were a major project for an individual. The use of IT in booking of railway tickets has ensured more transparency and comfort for the traveler.

The emphasis laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the ramparts of Red Fort on August 15 this year, ensures that more success stories of good governance using IT are assured, when he said, "E-governance is easy governance, effective governance and also economic governance. E-governance paves the way for good governance."

Good governance is not an exclusive agenda of a political party, a leader or one state in India. It is the way that everyone responsible for governance has to deliver. It is an assurance to the people who have chosen their representative, to make policies and also execute them, efficiently.

Various leaders, political, spiritual, academic and corporate have spoken about the need to have good governance, as an essential tool for development of a nation. Mahatma Gandhi said, "We must become the change we want to see." This is the message for all those who wish to achieve good governance.

Information Technology is a powerful tool that this generation of policy makers and executers are blessed with. The opportunity to use it for good governance exists, so does the danger of losing it. It will be an interesting journey, amidst fast growing number of mobile

devices, broadband, new operating systems and ingenious applications. Each of them is a platform to achieve good governance.

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