

Chapter 16

E–Governance Projects for E–Inclusion in India: An Architectural Assessment Framework

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ABSTRACT

Globally, e-governance systems have evolved towards wider acceptance. Almost all the countries have embraced e-governance as part of their long term policy. Contemporary e-governance systems argue in favour of convergence with scale up strategies. These strategies include convergence among the business sector, government and the civil society in the country and aim to connect with international agencies for better networking. E-inclusion has also been an integral part of the national e-governance strategies to spur citizen participation. In case of European Union (EU), e-governance, e-inclusion and such convergence have become very important because of the member-driven common interests and benefits. In the case of developing countries, similar efforts are being made to incubate and rollout converged services to citizens in rural and semi-urban areas with e-inclusion imperatives. Notwithstanding these varied approaches, there are pitfalls in translating the strategies into actions at the national level. Implementation of strategies at the national level calls for appropriate architectural analyses. This is because e-governance efforts need huge capital investments, require longer life development cycles and involve multi-agent service orientation to address the barriers of e-inclusion. In this chapter, e-governance architectural issues are discussed with three cases drawn from Indian scenarios through a conceptual framework. This framework aims to examine the possibilities of architectural convergence for national level e-governance services with e-inclusion as an important attribute.

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INTRODUCTION

E-governance initiatives, despite acceptance to an extent in the form of e-government systems, have so far remained a hype in many parts of the world. Failure stories abundantly reflect that such initiatives with development perspectives have not yielded encouraging results. Surveys indicate that 35 per cent of these projects have been total failures, 50 per cent are partial failures, and 15 per cent of these have been successful in developing and transitional countries (Heeks, 2003). It is argued that e-governance initiatives are often on project mode and each project forms island for deliveries creating an overwhelming gap between project design and on-the-ground reality (known as design-reality gaps). This gap contributes to failures. Despite such discouraging outcomes, e-government initiatives in developing countries have evolved to a level of acceptance among government agencies and backend service provisioning organizations (Mishra, 2010). Most countries are now in the phase of assessing the “impact” on issues related to “efficiency,” “effectiveness,” and “equity.” This is because most of e-governance efforts are now beyond the initial phases of addressing primary challenges of “digital divide,” “setting up infrastructure,” and “spreading awareness” to deliver citizen-centric e-governance services. Most of the countries are now able to showcase their e-governance services and declare the “availability” of these services uninterrupted crossing the spatial challenges (Bhatia, 2005; Bovaird, 2005). E-governance systems in many countries have evolved to the level of maturity. However, uses of such services have been a challenge for these countries. E-governance systems have so far remained supply-driven in most countries and their actual use largely depends on the type of services rendered. E-government services are now “mandatory” in nature and citizens are expected to use them. However, usage of many services which have development perspectives like income generation, health and education depends

largely on the success of these services related to citizen needs. Though it is argued that readiness, availability, and uptake phases of e-governance systems are not contemporary anymore for evaluation of success in managing such projects, most of the developing countries still grapple with this phenomenon (Heeks & Molla, 2009). There are many challenges like use divide, low latent demand, and sub-optimal usage of e-governance services.

E-inclusion has emerged as a critical contributor to address digital divides. Thus e-governance and e-inclusion are expected to provide complementing support structures and processes for citizen centered services. It is contemplated that such synergy would overcome the barriers in adoption of e-governance services and in fostering social development. It is often argued that e-inclusion aims to transform the very approach to contemporary e-governance frameworks with focus on inclusive governance. It means citizen collaboration in addition to the existing strategies to include business, market and other stakeholders in the overall societal development (UN, 2005). In its e-governance readiness report for the year 2005 (UN, 2005), UN assessed various barriers of e-inclusion which are primarily the variants of digital divides.

It is a call to developing countries for shedding the emphasis on connectivity and access and substituting it with a focus on inclusion for all groups in the population. It is a call to focus on programmes and policies aimed at the diversification of the ICT base, such that those with low income, women, disadvantaged groups and those living in rural areas are systematically included in the impending benefits from newer technologies. The Framework propounds the notion that to build an inclusive society, e-government should expand to e-inclusion. (UN, 2005)

It is apparent that e-inclusion needs to influence e-governance strategies adopted at all the

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