

Effective Public Service Delivery and e-Governance: Who Drives Whom

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Background

Despite a plethora of delivery mechanisms, most governments are increasingly perceived as unresponsive, with no covert accountability systems and mere lip service to transparency. It is by now an accepted fact that traditional government structures and systems are no longer adequate to meet the demands of rising citizen aspirations and challenges of complex global economies. The role of the government established and accepted earlier as the 'Sole Provider' is being questioned in every forum. The availability of constantly improving technological solutions coupled with innovative managerial tools have given rise to scope and options for improved administrative structures, efficient and effective public service delivery systems and the highest quality of governance. Governments and governance the world over are undergoing a 'paradigm shift' in their traditional roles and structures of inflexible control and procedure orientation, towards result orientation, flexibility, facilitation and a citizen-centric approach.

Administrative reforms are not new to this country. Historically, from the days of Chandragupta Maurya and Chanakya, to Akbar, Jahangir and the British Raj, strong to feeble attempts have been made to reform the government. But most often these reforms were aimed at improving the government's ability to control the inflow and outflow of revenue. The welfare orientation and the focus on development of backward areas and people are post-independence phenomena. Since the 1950s, the Government of India has been slowly but steadily climbing the ladder towards a citizen-centric focus on administrative reforms. Since the 1990s, it has been accepted at the national as well as state levels that there are three 'non-negotiable ingredients' for a government to be considered capable of delivering good governance. These ingredients are – responsiveness, transparency and accountability.

However, when we look back at the reform initiatives in the Indian administration, it can be clearly seen that these non-negotiable principles have only evolved of late through a process of experience gathering at all levels. It appears preposterous today that the R.A. Gopalswami Report of

1952 entitled 'Machinery of Government – Improvement of Efficiency' was treated as a confidential document!

The year 1964 is important in the history of administrative reforms in India as the Department of Administrative Reforms under the Ministry of Home Affairs was setup in March that year. The 1970s were more or less uneventful in terms of earth-shaking reforms. The 1980s saw capacity-building as the focus for administrative reforms. The first time that a shift in the emphasis from regulation to development was placed on paper, was in the report of the L.K.Jha Economic Administrative Reforms. The announcement of the new economic policy in January 1990 led to stress on privatisation, down-sizing and concentrating on cost-benefit outcomes of governmental functioning.

The 1997 conference of chief ministers is a landmark development for commencing the shift towards attaining good governance across the centre and the states. The overall theme of the conference revolved around 'rebuilding the credibility of the government' by coming out with strategies for a responsive and effective administration. The sub-themes of the conference included – an accountable and citizen-friendly government, a transparent administration, and a performance-oriented public service with high levels of integrity. 'Responsiveness' to the needs of the poor and 'transparency' in the form of low cost access and two-way flow of information became the major concerns.

Citizen's Perception of the Government

There are no institutionalised standards for the delivery of public services. Therefore, there always appears to be an unending struggle between the governmental systems, its capability to deliver and the actual needs of the citizens. Going by the typical definition of democracy, i.e. 'a government of the people, for the people and by the people', democratic India certainly seems to have fulfilled the tenets of 'a government by the people'. Though having recognised the need to govern 'for the people', and place the common requirements and aspirations 'of the people' on the highest priority for service delivery, progressive governments have found that the governing process itself comes in the way of their attempts to establish a positive relationship with its citizens. For the citizens, any encounter with the government is a harrowing experience. Be it a visit to the police station for registering an FIR, or to the respective authorities for obtaining a permission/license/certificate, or a visit to the government hospitals or government educational institutions – the procedures are so lengthy and the number of officials and their attitudes so complicated that the citizen remains a dissatisfied and frustrated customer. The earlier governments performed well in the past but now with the dawning of the information age and the emerging knowledge regime, the citizen is no longer satisfied with services which

can be delivered only by frequent visits to government offices, or standing for hours in long queues, or after time-consuming lengthy processes or with the evil but necessary associations with touts and middle men. The citizens want fast and efficient systems available at a single window which do not require them to know the faces and names of the bureaucratic structures, and which give them a 'nice feeling' about interacting with the government.

From Government to e-Government to e-Governance

Government is the sum total of the systems by which a state or community is governed (New Oxford English Dictionary). Therefore, e-government would necessarily mean the electronic systems adopted by any government for enabling transactions which aid in governing a state or a community. Not only are these two definitions dispassionate to the needs of the citizens on first appearance, but would indeed be practically incomplete if they were not associated with the major outcome of every such system i.e. governance. Osborne and Gaebler in their book *Reinventing Government* have defined governance as 'the process by which we collectively solve our problems and meet our society's needs. Government is the instrument we use'. On the basis of these concepts, it is simple now to realise that e-governance is not just the mere application of information and communication technology to government functioning. In fact, it goes much beyond stand-alone back office automation of government departments for generating management information systems. As per a typical definition, e-governance is 'the electronic delivery of services by the government to the citizens'. This really is a definition which is quite restrictive in scope, as it does not take into account aspects such as creation of data banks, tracking and monitoring systems, inter-linking of ministries and departments and related organisations etc. The government of India's definition of e-governance as 'using IT to bring about SMART (simple moral accountable responsive transparent) governance' appears more rounded and wider in scope but tends to dilute the boundaries between good governance and e-governance. In my view, all definitions of e-governance should be approached cautiously so as to ensure that it remains one of the most important items on the broader agenda of good governance practices and not an alternative term of usage for good governance. *Further, it must be remembered that unlike in the nineties, more than administrative reforms leading to adoption of e-governance initiatives, today e-governance is driving the process of administrative reforms.*

The Indian governments, at the national and state level, are keenly encouraging the development of IT as a strategy for responsive and transparent administration in all major domains. While initially, most e-governance efforts concentrated on data collection, data exhibition on web sites and facility for data downloading, there was almost negligible, if any, element of organisational transformation and change.

Fortunately, it was quickly realised, that these efforts would come to zero, unless accompanied by transformation of mind sets, culture and processes in government organisations. Therefore, of late, most e-governance efforts inherently include business process re-engineering, aimed at generating citizen-centric and citizen interactive systems.

Further, and once again very fortunately, the central and state governments also realised that unlike many development-oriented schemes which are replicated *mutatis mutandis*, across the board, the treatment for e-governance has to be different. The micro culture, the micro geography, the micro needs and the micro systems have to be taken into account. Each model of e-governance provides a learning ground for bringing about better and improved electronic solutions for delivery of services, provided it is replicated or adapted with care. Care has to be taken to understand at what stage we should introduce e-governance for ensuring effective service delivery.

Public Service Delivery and e-Governance

It is important to understand the ‘whys’, ‘which’ and the ‘hows’ of public service delivery. It is very difficult to define this term. I have not come across any comprehensive definition or understanding of what really is public service delivery. Briefly put, it is the inter-relationship between the government functionaries and the citizens to whom the services of the government are addressed to, and the manner in which the services reach those for whom they were intended. Any effective public service delivery mechanism must ultimately lead to good governance. The governments generally utilise one or the other of a variety of mechanisms for delivering services to the citizens such as Central Government Schemes, implementation of state-specific schemes, local self-government interventions, small-scale interventions of NGOs, special purpose vehicles such as DRDAs (District Rural Development Agency) and JNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission), contracting out or outsourcing to the private sector, fostering other partnerships etc. Despite this assortment of mechanisms, there is no substantive change in the perception of the government in the eyes of the beneficiaries towards whom these services are aimed at. Quality, selection, responsiveness and speed seem to have been overtaken by the concept that competition can be decided on the basis of ‘best price’ alone.

We need to begin somewhere. To go about this process, we need to ask ourselves certain basic questions about public service delivery such as it exists today:

- what do we want to deliver
- how do we want to deliver it
- why do we want to deliver it in the manner in which we are doing right now
- is there an alternative mode of delivery

A very genuine and critical introspection emanating from these questions will inevitably lead us to the conclusion that the existing processes and systems need to be improved, if not overhauled. Two options are available in the wide world of management. They are business process re-engineering (BPR) and the continuous process improvement (CPI) model. Adapting Michael Hammer's definition of BPR to GPR (government process re-engineering) the following definition has been accepted globally.

'Government process re-engineering is a radical improvement approach that critically examines, re-thinks and re-designs mission product and service processes within a political environment. It achieves dramatic mission performance gains from multiple customer and stakeholder's perspectives.'

Continuous process improvement on the other hand, is simply an improvement of processes in the existing system. Quoting from Michael Hammer, 'the contrast between CPI and GPR lies in where you start and with the magnitude and rate of the resulting changes'. In summary, if we change the process by keeping today's process as a starting point then we are following the CPI model. Whereas, if we re-engineer the whole system and process by starting with a clean slate, and the magnitude of resultant change is very large then we have done a GPR. In practical government functioning, it is almost impossible to achieve a GPR all on its own. Invariably most changes in processes which lead to efficient and effective delivery of public services are a combination of GPR and CPI, or sometimes only a CPI.

In my view, the following chronological approach can be adopted for improving public service delivery through GPR and CPI. E-governance becomes an important technological input and tool while undergoing this process.

1. Identify all the services.
2. Identify the modes of service delivery
3. Identify the category of beneficiaries such as individual citizens, miscellaneous as well as uniform groups, gender groups, age-related categorisation, organisations, institutions etc.
4. Prioritise the services which are most in demand and also prioritise the categories of beneficiaries. This has to be done with the complete involvement of all the stakeholders including the intended beneficiary. This process should also include identifying the areas of harassment to the beneficiaries.
5. Look at, and analyse the 'as is' status and process. Check each level, analyse the kind, mode and speed of delivery, identify points of delay, of corruption etc.
6. Identify all resources that are available and also all the resources which are being utilised to maintain 'as is' status i.e. man (power), money (funds), machine (equipment and logistics), motivation (of employees) etc.
7. Identify the wasteful aspects and/or the gaps in operationalising delivery of services, transporting or communicating within the organisation

and outside to complete the processes, levels and kinds of inspection and monitoring, and areas/points of delay.

8. Innovate and adapt This is where we need to think out of the box, take care of the gaps and focus on citizens needs. By adopting the GPR or CPI process, we need to actively improve and/or re-engineer processes to reduce delays, keep time commitments, provide accessibility at several locations, fix and standardise responsibility of the service providers and service users, focus on accuracy, provide for grievance redressal, take care of augmenting the skill and training level of government functionaries, etc.

This is the stage where e-governance should make its entry. If there is any attempt to introduce IT for delivery of services before this stage, then it can be ab initio termed a failure.

The concepts of 'inter-operability' (within and outside government) and the 'life events approach' to citizen interface also need to be seriously considered at this stage. Simply put, when a given e-system is able to work interchangeably and comfortably with another such system, then such a system is considered 'inter-operable'. Inter-operable systems have a distinctly standardised manner of sharing information with each other. There are several stand-alone e-initiatives in our country waiting to be integrated for facilitation of providing a single window for citizens. In the ultimate analysis we need to think in terms of inter-operability from the 'village to the capital'.

The 'life events' approach focuses on the life's numerous requirements of an individual citizen. From birth to death, the citizen has multiple interfaces with the government's various departments – education, health, employment, agriculture, industry, sports etc. Every department has its own system (which are perpetrated by an inherent resistance to change) of dealing with the citizens. But de facto, a citizen does not live his life within the different water-tight compartments of different departments. He is neither aware nor interested in the functional segregations of departments, which in any case are meant for the government's convenience. He expects the government to look at his own convenience in a manner that enables all his life's events to be taken care off at a single window. *If a citizen was asked to design his very own government there would be no queues, no multiple visits, no under the table deals, no loss of time and income for him!* The future of e-governance lies in integrating and designing the delivery of all services required during the life time of a citizen, in such a manner that the G2C interface becomes seamless, cutting across all boundaries. The government functionaries would become faceless and nameless in such a system, and the movement would not be of 'files', but a flow of information in a smooth and user-friendly manner. This of course demands commitment, standardisation, change in mind sets and capacity-building of the human resources, organisational transformation, quick uptake of new and better technological and managerial tools, and participation of the community.

8. At the last stage we need to run pilots and focus on monitoring (MIS), training and removal of wasteful processes noticed at this stage. This should be followed by evaluation and standardisation. Following this, replication should be considered with local adaptations, if required.

Some State-level Initiatives for Public Service Delivery: The case of Gujarat

It is not a very well-publicised fact that the state of Gujarat perhaps has one the largest OFC networks in the Asia Pacific region. The Gujarat State-Wide Area Network (GSWAN) is a state-of-the-art system which caters to the internal and external communication services of the administration, and is fully equipped with voice, video and data technology services. All these services are IT-based with its leased line gateway at the state capital which also hosts the server farm. Some important e-governance initiatives of Gujarat which have impacted in a positive manner on the efficacy of the public service delivery are mentioned below.

1. SWAGAT (State-Wide Attention on Public Grievances by Application of Technology)

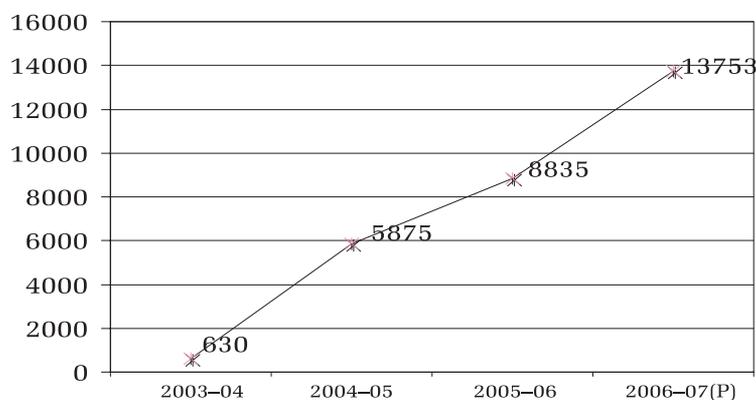
On a single day each month, applicants from across the state submit their long-standing grievances online from the district headquarters to the Chief Minister's Office. The Chief Minister on the same day directly interacts with the applicants and the district administration through video conference and attempts to resolve the grievances on the spot. Since the inception of the initiative in October–November 2003 up to December 2004, out of a total of 8621 long-pending complaints, 7660 were resolved. From January 2005 to December 2006, the initiative received 10,911 complaints/applications of which 10,109 were disposed on the spot. This is an initiative which is entirely based on GPR.

2. E-GRAM

This project envisages taking IT to all the 18,000 villages of Gujarat, for the delivery of public services. The eight services to be delivered under this initiative are standardised and include a single-window delivery of birth certificates, death certificates, income certificate, caste certificate, tax collection, agriculturist certificate, payment of electricity dues, entry in record of rights and issue of land ownership records. This programme is running successfully in over 13,000 *gram panchayats* today and it is intended to complete the implementation in all the 18,500 villages by the end of this year. Governance at the doorstep is a major development through BPR and CPI. Following is the progress chart.

Year	No. of VPs computerised
2003-04	630
2004-05	5245
2005-06	2960
2006-07 (P)	4918

Number of village *panchayats* computerised



The Jan Sewa Kendras

These are citizen facilitation centres spread over all the 25 district headquarters of the state as well as all the 225 *taluka* headquarters. They are run by the revenue administration headed by the collector and district magistrate in each district. The 75 services provided by the *Jan Sewa Kendras* are also standardised and the focus here is on the citizen's charters. The services in the citizen's charters are categorised into two categories depending on the time for disposal. These are: the 'one-day governance services' (which are services delivered within one hour on the same day as the application) and 'time limit disposal' of services in which the services are delivered as per the commitment of time made under the citizen's charters. Processes have been re-engineered to ensure that time limits are maintained. There is complete transparency in the provision of services as the citizens are kept informed of the whole system of processing of applications. The one-day governance services are functional in all the *Jan Sewa Kendras*. The entire 75 services or the citizen's charter online is also successfully running in all the 25 districts, based on the successful pilot model of Ahmedabad Dis-

tract. This model has been replicated in all the districts with standardised processes, logo, signage, etc for all the *Jan Sewa Kendras*. The Ahmedabad district alone processed over 90,000 applications in the year of initiation (2004) of its *Jan Sewa Kendra*!. In 2005–2006, 5.1 lakh applications were processed in the various JSKs of the state.

e-City

Under this initiative, City Civic Centres have been established in all the seven municipal corporations and 112 of the 145 municipalities of the state where the urban citizen can easily access municipal services and make tax and utility payments. Some of the services offered include payment of property tax and other dues, obtaining water connections, birth and death certificates, business registration and licensing, tenders etc. There is also provision for online registration of grievances as well as for citizen forums. The year 2005 had been declared as the ‘Year of Urban Development’ in the state of Gujarat. This gave the necessary push and motivation to ensure that such standardised services are made available in every city of Gujarat. As per a study by the government, the percentage increase in revenues in the urban local bodies with City Civic Centers show a definite upward trend in 2004.

Class of municipality /city	%age increase in 2004 over 2003	
	Revenue receipts	Non-revenue receipts
Class A	19.27	46.74
Class B	46.00	37.00
Class C	15.00	69.00
Class D	29.00	45.00

Gyan Ganga

This is a rural connectivity project which gives internet access to the rural populace of Gujarat, introducing them to the world of information and networking them with health (including tele-medicine), agriculture, educational and government services. This public–private partnership project will also provide self-employment to the local youth, video conferencing facilities and information about government functioning. Content and services, including local service providers have been identified and the government is now in the process of finalising the implementation of the project in 16 locations in different parts of Gujarat. Eight locations covering 200 villages have already seen the successful commissioning and implementation of the project.

Mahiti Shakti

This project was taken up as a pilot in 80 villages in Godhra District and its success has motivated the government to replicate it. This initiative provides easy availability of information relating to the government and also makes available standardised application forms of various departments of the governments at information kiosks spread over the rural areas. The innovative aspect of the scheme includes the fact that these kiosks have been setup at varied locations including dairy co-operatives, district co-operative banks and STD/PCO booths in partnership. The forms can also be sent online to the concerned departments therefore saving time, cost and energy of the rural citizens.

IWDMS (Integrated Work Flow and Document Management Systems)

This is an initiative taken by the state secretariat for enabling decision-making, policy formulation, correspondence and data management, tracking of documents and inter-operability, and standardisation of procedures across various departments of the state government. A private agency has already been selected for customising the software and this initiative has been made functional in all the 25 departments of the Sachivalaya.

The above is just an illustrative list of e-initiatives taken by the Government of Gujarat. There are several others such as the sales tax department online, *talim rojgar*, *tele fariyad* or the Chief Minister's call center, e-Dhara (land records online), form book online and GR (government resolutions) online, treasury network, etc.

The e-dhara initiative has made available approximately 98 lakh land holdings online, across the length and breadth of the state, covering a population of 1 crore and 16 lakhs. The videoconferencing facilities provided in jails for online trials have helped the state government save almost Rs.80 lakhs per jail, per year! Now about 2000 of the citizen's facilitation centres have GSWAN connectivity (of which 1000 are in the rural areas, 225 in the *taluka*/block headquarters and 350 in police stations). The State Disaster Resource Network is constantly updated and is an important tool in the hands of the district administration for managing disasters. The system of internet-based disease surveillance by the Health Department is necessarily updated on a daily basis to enable quick response. The list of initiatives is very long but the focus of all e-governance efforts in Gujarat is to provide for active user interface and committed standards for delivery of services and also to enable citizens to have easy access to information about public services.

The Final Analysis

There is already enough that has been said or written about e-initiatives and lot of work is being done to sensitise the governments to the need for transparency, accountability and responsiveness through e-governance. Though it has become an accepted mechanism for delivery of public services, each time governments undertake the daunting task of rising to the expectations of the citizens, the questions of 'how', 'where', 'when', 'for whom', etc will arise. There is no doubt in our minds that there is a need to speedup the reforms process, and that this can only be done by focusing on the main pillar of globalisation i.e. information.

Over the last 10 to 15 years we, as customers, are demanding better and better products and services. We expect products to be customised to our unique needs and there is no doubt now that customers have choice. The only thing that comes in the way of exercising this choice is the lack of accessibility and availability of information. The first bastion, i.e. the monopoly of the government over information and knowledge has already fallen with the enactment of the Right to Information Act in 2005. Information about laws, policies, decisions, modes of public service delivery, etc will soon be commonplace. If the Act is rightfully implemented in accordance with its spirit, the days of harrowing tracking of grievances by the citizens should soon be of historical importance only. It would be the government's turn to keep track of information needs and to take action to make it more and more citizen-centric.

To develop information as a resource capable of bringing the citizen closer to the government in a typical G2C interface, it becomes important to evolve all e-governance initiatives around the citizen's needs. The key building blocks for such a focused e-governance programme for public service delivery, in my view, must have some of the following components.

- Leadership should be provided from higher levels of government for initiating and implementing pilots. But once a pilot has been found successful, the replication should become the responsibility of the state government.
- There must be empowered e-government coordinators at various levels. They should be available, at district level, state level and at the centre, persons with experience and vision who have the power to take decisions on the kind, quality, standards, strategy, replicability, etc of e-governance projects within a given overall framework.
- A strong framework for e-governance and for its overall management at the central level, which goes down till the last mile with inbuilt scope for flexible adaptation at the local level.
- A criteria for defining 'success' of a project, so that it can be taken up for replication, and a system for sharing best practices at the state level, nationally and globally.
- A legal framework at the central and the state level

- Inter-operability framework
- Information security policy and practice
- Outsourcing policy
- Commitment to innovation

In an article in *Economic Times* entitled 'Development lessons of the 90s', the author, Shri D. Subbarao states that 'a variety of approaches to growth are possible, and what approach a country needs to take has to be routed in the specific country context. What has worked for one country may not work for another, and following the best practice is not always the right choice. There is no unique set of rules for growth. The focus has to be on accumulation of human and physical capital, efficient allocation of resources, adoption of technology and sharing of the benefits of the growths'. Taking off from here, the challenges before governance in terms of policy, organisational structures, laws and rules and the work culture itself can only be resolved by recognising information also as a resource (in addition to human, financial, and physical resources) which is essential for growth and for attaining the goal of good governance.

Capturing data at one common source is perhaps a long way off in our country, but that is where we need to head lock, stock and barrel! As an example of multiple efforts, we have the case of the postal directory which is prepared with painstaking details by the Postal Department. At the same time, while trying to enlist voters, the same efforts are duplicated to locate addresses and voters attached to those addresses by the election machinery. The census survey is not far behind. Then we have BPL surveys, Polio surveys, cable TV surveys...imagine it and voila...we have yet another survey! There are innumerable such examples. What stops us from linking the census survey every 10 years with the survey for the multi-purpose National Identity Card and get it updated every decade? Why cannot birth and death registers be automatically linked to the voters list? Why cannot, say, a rural woman simply walk into an information kiosk and decide for herself which scheme of which department for which she is eligible, she would like to apply for? Why cannot this choice be known to all the departments at the same time, so that duplication of benefits from similar schemes of different departments to the same beneficiary is prevented and at the same time the citizens get empowered to make their own choices? Why cannot we issue caste certificates along with the birth certificates?

I can see only one way forward for this. There has to be one single nodal agency for implementing e-governance in the country which is empowered to formulate the overall framework for all the state governments and the central government departments – somewhat on the lines of the various poverty alleviation schemes of the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD). The implementation process of these rural development (RD) schemes in the States such as the SJSY, NREGS, etc follow central government guidelines but are permitted the flexibility of local innovations leading to smooth

adaptation in a given common framework. We have tried it out and it is acknowledged the world-over that it has worked. Therefore, I cannot help drawing further similes from the RD schemes here. These schemes invariably have an IEC (information, education, and communication) component inbuilt as a percentage of the budgetary allocations. The harbingers of these schemes must have been true ICT and e-governance visionaries, though unacknowledged as such, so far. The problem is that this component is mostly interpreted as a provision for distributing pamphlets or calling for immensely large and sometimes unmanageable gatherings of rural folk and addressing them (unilaterally of course, with no scope for two-way discussions) on the benefits of various government schemes. In my view, the guidelines on the utilisation of this component must strictly indicate a certain degree of progress in e-governance (such as digitising data, process re-engineering, increasing accessibility of information to the citizens, etc) completely based on local innovation/adaptation and local technology availability, before the next amount is released. I would go further and suggest that in fact, all project funding, whether from central or state governments must be tied up to a compulsory component of IT and e-governance on similar lines.

While concluding, I would once again like to reiterate that, the profound realisation of the rapidly changing role of the state from an interventionist, regulator and control freak to a facilitator, promoter, partner and arbiter has led to increasing concerns about profitability, performance and ethics. The main players i.e. the service providers and policy makers will have to focus on the citizens, particularly the poorest of the poor. They will also have to involve the stakeholders, build capacities of the employees, encourage attitudinal shifts, be data driven in decision-making and cautiously adapt best practices. *In the final analysis, if the end result of all the administrative reforms for efficient service delivery, whether through e-governance or any other good governance practice, is the empowerment of citizens, then the battle is won. We are not waiting to achieve a 'government on demand', but a government 'designed' by you and me.*