



Issues in E-Governance in Urban & Local Bodies in India

Abhay Patodia¹

ABSTRACT

Governments of the countries around the world have started utilizing the potential of technology to deliver online information and services to their citizens. To reap the benefits of e-governance, various types of issues related to technologies, change of managements, and funding are to be considered. Also, it is worthwhile to examine the associated challenges in implementing the complete range of e-governance projects. This paper addresses both the issues and challenges in e-governance planning.

Keywords: Mobineers in E-Governance, Information Technology, Urban E-governance

1. Introduction

In order to articulate good practices in e-Governance implementation, there must be strong structure and implementation process within the given context. A common strategy as well as operational framework is necessary to interpolate the e-governance (eGov) in municipal working. Perception differs with regards to understanding and hence implementation of e-Governance in municipal bodies. Under National e-governance Programme (NeGP), the Department of Information Technology (DIT) of the Government of India (GOI) is leading the eGov initiatives. The eGov in municipalities has been launched as a National Mission Mode Project (NMMP) Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). There are more than 5000 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India. Under JNNURM only 35 cities are to be taken up in phase I and other cities will be covered based on initial experience. The need of the hour is to expedite the implementation of this programme as no project has been considered even after 4 months of its launch.

However, there is a need to sensitize the states and ULBs as well as the citizens with the importance of the eGov programme. The benefits in terms of transparency, efficiency of services etc should be brought to the notice of all concerned. There are issues like reluctance in acceptability of the system, funding requirements, prioritization etc. Broader approach can catalyze the pace of implementation and thus results. Unless adequate awareness is there, it would not be possible to force the system.

2. Issues for ULBs

Keeping in view that a large number of municipal bodies are to be covered under the e-governance programme, multiple funding sources will have to be explored. It would not be wise to depend completely on the government funding. Funding through Union Government sources is available primarily under the NMMP programme of Ministry of Urban Development, where for the selected 35 cities, the central funding up to 35% and 50% of the project cost is available for cities having population of 4 million plus and 1

¹ 9/7 Patodia House ,Nagia Park,Shakti Nagar, Delhi -110007, India (E-mail : athar.siddiqui@mobineers.com, Telephone: +91 9350169226)

million plus respectively (as per 2001 census). Government should also provide substantial funding from the Planning Commission, DIT etc. State funding through plan/non-plan budgets should also be provided at increased pace as even under NMMP 15-20% funds are to be provided by the states. Otherwise states are also transferring the subjects to ULBs as enunciated in the 74th constitutional amendment. Initial financial boost should also be provided by the states.

More powers should be given to ULBs to raise resources; states are not providing enough revenue sources to them and are only transferring the responsibilities. As mentioned in Para 5.4 of NMMP guidelines dovetailing of MLALAD/MPLAD schemes' funds with ULBs' share is possible and citizens should also insist on usage of these funds for eGov purpose as a municipal area covers the entire city.

Externally Aided Projects (EAP) – in terms of both finances and advisory services of the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF), City Development India Initiative (CDIA), International Finance Corporation (IFC) should be structured so as to provide funding for eGov in municipal bodies. GOI along with the state government may stand as counter guarantee for the assistance. The lead role here is to be played by GOI. Likewise, institutional funding from banks etc is also required. Some banks like Union Bank of India, Yes Bank, Industrial Development Bank of India etc are keen on taking up eGov projects.

Public Private Partnership (PPP) elements in eGov are required to be increased. Project structuring is required to be done aggressively by banks, consultancy organizations for having a bankable eGov project. We have examples in Mumbai, Surat, Kalyan-Dombivili, Hyderabad, Hisar etc. We have PPP advisory facilities in Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Urban Development etc.

One critical angle of the eGov solution is the objectivity in fund allocation by different agencies for optimum results. Funding of non-admissible items under NNMP or any other programme should also be kept in view. The overall integration in terms of finances, software, agencies etc are very critical.

Advisory services and handholding of ULBs, by the Government is sine-qua-non of the whole scheme. This is comparatively and generally a less understood concept and hence the need for advisory and handholding. Even at the central level the need of the hour is to handhold. PPIAF, CDIA, WB, ADB, IFC will be helpful. Besides, we have in India a number of excellent consultancy firms, banks, and non-profit organizations, which are required to be roped in.

Capacity Building is required at each and every level as this is comparatively and generally a less understood concept and hence the need for advisory and handholding. Even at the central level in MoUD, advisory services are required. Worse is the condition at state level. Strengthening of "ULB cadre" for management and maintenance of e-Governance initiatives is the core issue. Various tasks for capacity building include:

- Capacity assessment
- Capacity gap analysis
- Institutional capacity building plan
- Training need analysis and identification
- Training plan
- Outsourcing of manpower
- Building or staffing PMU's for e-Governance initiatives

Selection of Technology- Different levels of readiness in ULBs lead to difficulties and delay in assimilation and migration of system. Various factors need to be considered for selection of technology including

service oriented architectures, shared infrastructure databases & applications, use of new technologies especially web-based, information security, data centers infrastructure & state wide area network.

The data available with the ULBs is in scanty. A big challenge is to collect, standardize and maintain the data. Key factors like huge data size, uneven data formats, distributed databases, historical data & data exchange interfaces should be taken into consideration at design time.

GIS is very important for effectiveness of eGov initiatives as latest data can only facilitate good governance. This along with and door-to-door survey makes it accurate and useful. The key considerations for effective GIS implementation includes complete asset mapping, integration with other ICT applications of continuous updation and standard interfaces for data access by other applications.

Connectivity between data center and service centers is one of the major financial factors both as capital and operational costs. No single connectivity solution is successful. Therefore systems should be designed to handle multiple connectivity options. Various factors that play roles in connectivity solution architecture are cost, topology, service providers, technologies available and current & future capacity requirement.

The objective of the PPP model for the three major entities in System implementation will play critical role in selection and prioritization of services.

- **For citizens**, objectives shall be on quality of service, minimizing the number of customer visits, increasing service platforms, time reduction to deliver service and ease of Information availability.
- **For municipalities** objectives shall be on process efficiency & effectiveness, enhancing existing revenues, setting up new revenue streams, reducing processing cost and boosting image of municipalities
- **For the implementation agency** objectives shall be investment optimization through PPP model, Return on Investment (ROI) and cost benefits.

3. Potential Areas under PPP Model

Based on the above criteria **few services** that can be covered under PPP model effectively and immediately, include:

- Property tax- is one of the main sources of revenue for the municipalities.

Objectives include minimizing number of customer visit, optimizing revenue cycle and ease of information availability.

Basic functionality shall cover online availability of forms & information, inclusion of new assesses, change of ownership, assessment, tax collection, revision in property details, monitoring of the appeals and petitions and online tax calculator.

- Birth & death registration- has been made mandatory by the Government of India.

Objectives include online registration at source (hospitals), multiple service counters & timely issue of certificates.

Basic functionality shall cover registration of birth/death/ still birth, issue of certificates and corrections of details.

- Trade licenses are issued to traders of medical equipment and items in city.

Objectives include timely issue of licenses & auto generation of renewal list

Basic functionality shall cover Issue of new trade licenses, renewal of licenses and closure of licenses

- Citizen grievance management will provide mechanism for grievance registration, tracking and resolution.

Objectives include immediate issue of acknowledgement, interface with other modules for resolution monitoring, escalation mechanism and easy progress tracking.

Basic functionality shall cover complaint registration, complaint forwarding, escalation, closure and standard interface for integration with other e-Governance modules/ systems.

- Building plan approval process relates to the issue of permission for the construction/ modification of buildings based on state and central government rules and regulations.

Objectives include online availability of forms, faster approval of plans, town planning, building permits and building information.

Basic functionality shall cover submission of plans for new construction & modifications, collection of the fees, site inspection management and approval order processing.

- Water supply relates revenue cycle management of water taxes

Objectives include timely bill generation defaulter tracking and improving revenue cycle.

Basic functionality shall cover online application processing, demand calculation, tax collection, defaulter management, reconnection and disconnection.

- Solid waste management process involves the monitoring and management of the activities of garbage lifting, transporting and disposal by proper scheduling of workers.

Objectives include proper scheduling of activities, better resource utilization, improved asset management and reduced administrative burden

Basic functionality shall cover resource management, monitoring of the garbage collection & dumping and monitoring of environmental issues such as participation, contamination, side waste & exceptions.

4. Concluding Remarks

Urban development is a state subject and therefore, the ownership for e-governance in ULBs is required to be taken by states. The functions enumerated in the 74th constitutional amendment are yet to be transferred to ULBs in most of the places. Also ULBs are not matured enough to stand alone in the scheme of things. Hence, state has to play a major role here. As in other fields, there are ethical and controversial issues, which also require a mention. There is possibility of vendor tender lock- in PPP, exorbitant AMC charges for software due to propriety item etc. For a healthy economic growth of the country there is a need to have a level playing field. There is also a felt need to rope in small service providers for encouraging them by associating them with NeGP and NMMP at every level. They are to be encouraged for software development, for PPP implementation of eGov projects. Ministry of Urban Development as a nodal point should provide the guidance and handholding by way of DPR preparation, appraisal process, implementation, advisory etc. There is a need to educate the government bodies and the citizens about the benefits and necessities of e-governance and at the same time the implementation framework needs to be made more ULB friendly by providing more finance directly to them. There is severe lack of trained manpower for the programme and maximum number of consultants and PPP operators should be roped in. Ministry of Urban Development should play the leading role facilitating advisory services and funds to the ULBs

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