

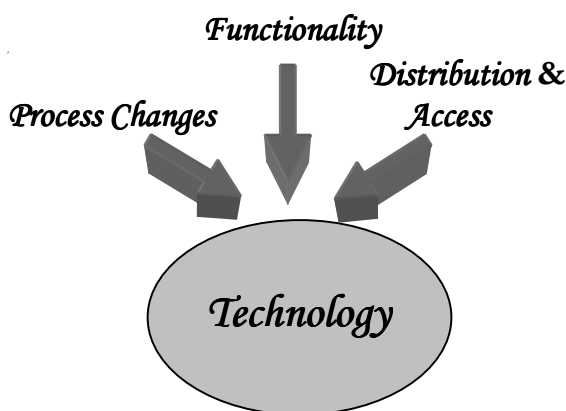


## PARIVARTHANE VOL.14

### E-GOVERNANCE in EMPOWERING CITIZENS

Several urban local bodies (ULBs) have undertaken e-governance initiatives to improve interface with citizens. All meaningful attempts at e-governance have tried to address, with equal attention, all the three major aspects – the functional aspect which visibly improves the interface, Distribution and access of e-governance services, and the organizational aspects to address role requirements as a result of e-governance.

#### Exhibit 1: Critical aspects of e-governance



#### **SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES GO BEYOND SERVICE DELIVERY**

*Technology today gives local bodies the ability to citizen interface through complaint reprisal, transparency and active participation*

Local bodies have started their e-governance initiatives by focusing on improving interface services. These have generally encompassed tax payment, assessment information and interface services such as birth and death certificates and water connections. Technology today provides local bodies the ability to increase other aspects of citizen interface as well - such as complaints redressal, transparency and participation [Exhibit 2]. Successful local bodies have leveraged this aspect to provide a comprehensive interface with citizens.

#### Exhibit 2: Services covered by e-governance

- Easier payment of Taxes
- Simplified service delivery
- Access to information and improved transparency
- Quick complaint redressal system

#### **INNOVATIVE MEANS OF IMPROVING ACCESS ARE NECESSARY**

*Due to the low penetration of the internet in India, ULBs have to design innovative interfaces to make it easier for a majority of citizens to access the services*

While a local body can upgrade the level to which it leverages technology, the same is not true for its citizens. This is on account of the low penetration of computers and internet access. A survey conducted by CRISIL Infrastructure Advisory in two cities that have implemented e-governance, reveals that only 1 % of the citizens access civic services through the internet. A majority of citizens still rely on physical visits to municipal offices and telephones to avail of municipal services. This makes it imperative for ULBs, while they leverage technology, to also look at innovative interfaces that can be accessible to a majority of its citizens. We definitely have some cases wherein ULBs have successfully delivered on this count too.

Vishakhapatnam Municipal Corporation undertook the e-governance initiative by setting up civic centres across vital locations in the city. It also tied up with 21 bank branches in the city for collections, and set up website. Vijaywada Municipal Corporation took the initiative through an innovative cable net and telephone interface, by tying-up with bank branches and through e-Seva centres. The survey reflects a high usage of the services through these civic centers, even though direct usage through internet is still limited.



### PROCESS CHANGES ARE CRITICAL TO ACHIEVE FULL POTENTIAL

*An e-governance initiative requires streamlining of internal processes and complete integration across service modules*

Any e-governance initiative, which delivers on a sustainable and effective basis, will require streamlining of internal processes and a complete integration with the interface system. To cite an example, an online or telephonic interface for complaint redressal is not useful if the complaints are not shared within the local body efficiently. Further, it shall also ensure that the complaints are not only shared but are also acted upon. This requires the backend system to integrate various departments with the complaints redressal cell. It shall also require a strong MIS system that provides feedback on performance of the redressal system.

Similarly, for interface services to be fully effective, the internal process for a particular service of the ULB also needs to change. For instance, the processing time for a birth certificate has been reduced to two days in Vishakapatnam - in contrast, many ULBs take a fortnight. This has been achieved by integrating the system with the hospitals and nursing homes, and allowing for real-time updation of information. The system also ensures that Municipal Information System (MIS) reports for complaint redressal are generated on an ongoing basis and the concerned official takes immediate corrective action.

A ULB can become even more effective by not only streamlining and integrating its processes, focusing delivery but also by making most of its processes transparent and seeking public participation in the same. Vishakapatnam has gone ahead to disseminate even transactional information, including a list of registered contractors, tenders, budget documents, disbursements, and ward-wise works status, through its website. This ensures that the citizens get accurate and speedy access to information, thus making the corporation accountable for the details provided.

### USE OF SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGY IS CRITICAL

*To ensure continuous upgradation to keep pace with changing technology, the required skills should be available in-house*

It has been witnessed that an e-governance initiative has popular support in the initial stages. This helps it to maintain momentum during this stage. However, the sustainability of the initiative depends critically on the skills to maintain and upgrade the system. With the rapid changes in the technology, the cost of continuous upgradation may become a hindrance at a later stage. It is in this context the fact that the skills required have been integrated into the ULB would be of immense importance. Vishakapatnam has developed staff and integrated the software in-house. Further, it has also deputed staff and provided inputs to other corporations in implementing such an initiative.

It is thus clear that e-governance can go a long way in simplifying the municipal functions and taking it to the door-step of the citizens. The key point that needs to be seen is the level of service area coverage which ULBs are willing to include under this, and the degree of information they are willing to share with the citizens. The more ULBs are willing to share, the more they would empower the citizens.

*Source: Compendium of Best Practices, 2003 Edition, Crisil Infrastructure Advisory, Page165-167.*

#### **FEED BACK**

**Dear Commissioner / Chief Officer & All other ULB Staff,**

We hope this issue of 'Parivarthane' was useful and informative to you. We look forward to your suggestion and feedback. You can suggest any topics of Urban Sector, to be published in the future volumes of this topical paper.

Please mail your feedback to:

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Or call us at **+91 80 2559 0333 / 2**

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