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Strengthening Democracy - ICT enabling Public Sector Accountability to Citizens

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As a young and vibrant democracy in 21st century, India has made strident developments in instilling accountability in the government machinery. While public policy and systematic changes have driven reforms, technology too has become a steady driver.



The sector that has reaped great benefits from advent of ICT is government-tocitizen communications. From social media networks to private messaging services to blogging and interactive websites, our Governments have come a long way from Vividh Bharti announcements to Twitter AMAs. Social media especially has had a cascading effect on public discourse by democratizing opinions and improving the citizen's access to its government and elected representative.

To listen more, listen closely. This age old adage has led to development of 'social media listening' platforms for 'citizen grievance redressal'.

CM Grievance Cell: Odisha Government on Social Media

Empowered with a booming social media ecosystem of Departments, collectors, police personnel and elected representatives, the Government of Odisha engaged the E&IT Department to put together an unrivalled platform to listen to social media conversations through social media properties of Chief Minister & his Office and analyse them as grievances, suggestions and feedback. The data pipeline would then be segregated by desk operators monitored by a supervisor to tag them into the three categories. The grievances as a priority would then get tagged to Department Secretaries as a top-down approach and are then followed-up with queries from the CMO on timeline of resolution. Resolution would then have to be communicated to the original complainant to close a grievance.

A self-sustained, transparent system that not only keeps Governments on its toes but also ensures quick resolution of issues that would otherwise take days or even months.

Mo Sarkar : 5Ts for Governance

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Odisha Shri Naveen Patnaik, at the onset of his fifth term, gave out a clarion call to his officials to operate on 5Ts of teamwork, technology, transparency and timely delivery of services for transformation. The idea then manifested itself in a platform and framework called 'Mo Sarkar', meaning 'My Government'. It allowed citizens to be registered on a roll of state service beneficiaries who would then be contacted to collect feedback on the service delivered to them.

The governing philosophy was to realign errant officials, reward the efficient and stay in touch with ground realities of implementation. Feedbacks received on the system were then used as a guide to enhance infrastructure, plug leakages and maintain transparency.

All of it driven entirely by a tech platform. Who would have thought?

Online Voter Participation

With a median age of 27.9 years in 2018, India is one of the youngest nations in the world, almost accounting for 34% of the national population. Around 45 million young people have just turned eligible for voting and have been added to electoral rolls, a five percentile growth from 2014. This is also the mass with greater access to ICT devices and platforms and also most willing to engage with Governments as a voter.

Driving conversation with these first-time or even second-time voter in 18-30 age category is crucial for policymaking as they stand to be the biggest benefactors or loser of the legislation

in the long run. Similarly, they can also be tapped upon to conduct advocacy for ‘online voting’.

Estonia is a nation that has led the race for online electoral voting by providing each of their voters with a national ID card that is used for verifying each vote cast. While the digital divide argument persists, its gradual narrowing also paves the road to the future of electoral systems – online voting though e-Voter card or AADHAR. Switzerland is another nation that has furthered this agenda along with Brazil. As democracies mature, systems must get rejuvenated and online voting is a step in that direction.

ICT for Governance Guidance

In a world hit by a pandemic of historic proportion, ICT will become increasingly important as people seek refuge in their safe spaces, expecting their governments to deliver services without interruptions. Here’s what policymakers can choose to focus on:

- Reserve a weightage for ‘public feedback’ while creating policies. It is ‘public policy’, after all.
- Unless grievance redressal processes are ‘transparent’, they neither help the public nor the Government.
- Open Digital Ecosystems to enable publicprivate partnerships where innovators can work on Government-facilitated digital platforms for ‘public good’
- Create ‘service clusters’ where citizens can access multiple municipal services in one single dashboard and ‘use with ease’.

Revolutions have shaped destinies of nations. One in GovTech is anticipated soon and for all the right reasons. Because the future will be built with the technology of today. **How prepared are we?**

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