Chapter 2
Citizen–Centric Service Dimensions of Indian Rural E–Governance Systems:
An Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E-governance systems in India have witnessed prolific advancement over the years. India has strategically adopted e-governance as a part of its policy. In recent times each state has its own e-governance plan to deliver services as planned. National policy also aims to provide formalized services across the nation while recognizing the importance of state specific services. This approach includes various mission mode projects under national e-governance plan (NeGP). Manifestation of such approach has resulted in 100,000 common service centers (CSC) in rural areas. It is expected that rural citizens would find them useful and it may contribute for effective governance. In this chapter it is argued that such an initiative would be successful if rural citizens find these CSCs useful for their livelihood security. Various dimensions of this phenomenon are also examined through some cases in this chapter to understand their contributions to successful CSCs in India.

BACKGROUND

E-governance initiatives, despite acceptance to an extent in the form of e-government systems, have so far remained hype in many parts of the world. Failure stories abundantly reflect that such initiatives with development perspectives have not yielded encouraging results. Estimates indicate that 35 per cent are total failures, 50 per cent are partial failures, and 15 per cent are successes in developing and transitional countries. 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 (Heeks 2003). Despite such discouraging outcomes, e-government initiatives in developing countries have evolved to a level of acceptance among government agencies and backend service

provisioning organisations. Most countries are now in the phase of assessing the "impact" on issues related to "efficiency", "effectiveness", and "equity" since they have gone beyond the initial phases of addressing primary challenges of "digital divide", "setting up infrastructure", and "spreading awareness" for ICT use and delivering 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 (Figure 1). E-governance systems in many countries have evolved to the level of maturity. However, usage of such services has been a challenge. 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 "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. There is still use divide, low latent demand, and sub-optimal usage of e-governance services (Misra & Hiremath 2009; Misra 2009).

Discussion on global e-governance systems suggests a clear direction to policy makers and implementers which calls for provisioning of converged and value added services to citizens with least cost, time, and effort. It is also evident that e-governance systems need to evolve to connected governance through establishment of robust infrastructure, backend integration with all stakeholders, and transforming the government itself through innovation and value addition (UN, 2008). Information indicates that connected governance is possible through phases (Heeks, 2006; Heeks & Molla, 2009; Archmann, 2008). It needs a

Figure 1. Changing e-government issues over time
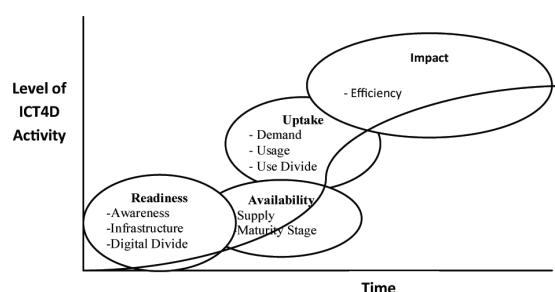
Box 1. Three critical considerations for establishment of connected governance (UN, 2008)

In order to establish ICT enabled connected governance, UN recognizes following three areas:
- **Infrastructure:** Creating an information infrastructure both within the public sector and across society at large, one based upon reliable and affordable Internet connectivity for citizens, businesses and all stakeholders in a given jurisdiction;
- **Integration:** Leveraging this new infrastructure within the public sector in order to better share information (internally and externally) and bundle, integrate, and deliver services through more efficient and citizen-centric governance models encompassing multiple delivery channels; and
- **Transformation:** Pursuing service innovation and e-government across a broader prism of community and democratic development through more networked governance patterns within government, across various government levels and amongst all sectors in a particular jurisdiction.

concerted effort to graduate any e-government effort to connected governance. (Box 1)

As shown in Figure 1 and Box 1, it is mandatory for any country to ensure its readiness in each stage before going to the next higher stage. In the context of Indian e-governance efforts, the situation is not different when compared to global e-governance scenarios, experiences, and trends. In India, foundation of e-governance was laid during 1954 when the Planning Commission introduced computers followed by setting up of the Department of Electronics (DOE) in 1970 and establishment of the National Informatics Centre in 1970 as a national agency to make available necessary infrastructure across all states to provide

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