

Preface

At a time when 100 new smart cities seem to have captured the attention of the nation, it becomes all the more important to have a close look at where our existing cities stand with regard to e-governance and how they are moving in the direction of becoming smart cities. Smart city as seen here is an integrated urban system of Smart Urban Economy, Smart People, Smart Governance, Smart Mobility, Smart Environment and Smart Living.

One of the 23 reforms which form part of the reform agenda of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was the introduction of a system of e-governance using IT applications like GIS and MIS for various services provided by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)/para statals. All the 65 mission cities and all the small towns that obtained projects approved under the UIG or UIDSSMT component of the Mission had to undertake implementation of this reform as well during the 7-year mission period of 2005–2012, subsequently extended by two more years. This goes along with the government of India's National E-Governance Plan (NeGP). NeGP intends to institute and enable mechanisms to improve the system of governance and thus provide better services to citizens by effective use of ICT. E-governance in municipalities is one of the Mission Mode projects under NeGP, which is expected to result in improved service delivery by local governments for the citizen. The broad aims of implementing e-governance in municipalities as per the Handbook on Primers include,

- Focus on identified citizen services that would be coveted with clearly laid down service levels and outcomes to be achieved,
- improve efficiency and effectiveness in interaction between local government and its citizens and other stakeholders,
- improve quality of internal local government operations and management information systems to support and stimulate good governance,
- bring out transparency and accountability in urban local body operations,
- help improve the delivery of services to citizens.

In line with this, the services to be covered under the reform agenda of the Mission are:

Birth and death registration and health programmes (under basic citizen services), property tax and licences (revenue earning services), water supply and other utilities and building plan approval (development services), procurement and monitoring of projects (efficiency improvement services), accounting and professional management system (back office improvements), citizen grievance redressal (monitoring).

The rationale for this particular reform is that it will benefit citizens by providing single window access to various services, simplification of procedures, and opportunity for greater participation in decision-making and so on. For urban bodies, a common information base becomes available across departments, creation of an effective MIS becomes possible, there will be improvement in revenue collection and efficient citizen grievance redressal becomes possible. For the management like the Mayor, Commissioner, Standing committee, availability of standardized and meaningful MIS on timely basis and ability to monitor and track progress, services and revenue effectively will be the impact.

This effort goes along with the Service Level Benchmark (SLB) concept for e-governance in municipalities which eventually involves having a set of Service level Key Performance Indicators (KPI) defined for e-governance services at the national level. The SLBs for birth/death registration includes number of birth/death registered as against applied for registration and number of birth/death registered as against actual number of birth/death as per KPIs. Similar KPIs have to be laid down for calculation and payment of property tax, payment and management of utility bills, grievance handling, building plan approval, e-procurement and project/ward works, solid waste management system, licences, accounting system and personnel management system.

Where do the Mission cities stand in regard to implementation of the e-governance reform at the end of the 9-year period of the Mission? In the e-governance set-up, the following 27 cities could achieve full implementation:

Ahmedabad, Ajmer, Bangalore, Bhopal, Chennai, Coimbatore, Delhi, Greater Mumbai, Hyderabad, Indore, Jabalpur, Jaipur, Kanpur, Kochi, Lucknow, Ludhiana, Madurai, Mysore, Nagpur, Nanded, Nashik, Pune, Rajkot, Surat, Thiruvananthapuram, Vizag.

It is difficult to believe that four mission cities figure in the category of 'no implementation'.

This review shows how uneven the implementation of such a key reform is, that too one which has direct relevance for the ordinary city dweller. What could be the reason for such poor performance? Is it lack of sufficient support and guidance from the concerned state government? Is any one single authority or level held responsible for drawing up the reform road map and ensure completion? Is it absence of capacity at the city level and poor infrastructure support to take up implementation?

As regards the National Mission Mode Project on E-governance, which further facilitates the smart city agenda, a total of 29 projects were approved as a supplement to the e-governance agenda during the period February 2009 and May 2013 for as many mission cities. The total cost of the projects amounts to Rs. 315.89 crore. Although a full assessment of this additional injection of funds has not yet taken place because total projects completion is still pending, what is clearly visible is that wherever the e-governance reform has been properly implemented, the change is visible. In Hyderabad, the Offsite Real-Time Monitoring System is a unique easy-to-use mobile phone mechanism that generates real-time offsite images of municipal activities by citizens. It makes real-time data available to more than 7.4 million citizens living in over 600 sq km. Building plan approval, which used to take 2–3 months now takes only 7–10 days. In Surat, first copy and subsequent duplicate copies of birth and death certificates are issued within 15 min after filling up the form and providing necessary proof.

While some cities are steadily moving towards what could be called Smart governance, the fact remains that this is only a small fraction of the 4,041 urban local bodies we have. This highlights the need for making this reform an essential part of the next phase of the Urban Renewal Mission and insisting on time bound compliance, a must for achieving the Smart city objective, thereby providing citizens the full advantage of technology.

While the full elements of what a Smart City is still needs to be detailed by the government, varying degrees of action are visible in some select cities at least. The new Greenfield townships coming up along the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor are planned to be Smart cities. GIFT city coming up next to Ahmedabad is also planned to be a Smart city. Where are the proposed 100 new Smart cities to come up? These are expected to be along the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor, the proposed Bangalore–Chennai, Chennai–Vizag, Kolkata–Delhi Corridors plus the Yamuna Expressway. The new capital of the new state of Seemandhra can also be planned as a Smart city. It is possible that new private township initiatives like the case of Lavasa would plan to be Smart cities. However, what is important at this stage of evolving of the Smart city concept in India is that a policy pronouncement should lay down the elements of a Smart city and how the process of setting up such cities would be encouraged, promoted and supported. There would also be the important question of integration with other departments and entities which would need to be properly outlined. This is a big challenge and unless we as a nation gear ourselves to rise to the occasion, with the huge IT strength that we have, we would be denying our city residents the innumerable advantages of smart living.

This book, I believe, will play its role in conveying this message loud and clear so that the system readies itself to undertake the big challenge of being Smart.

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