15th Annual National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms

Date and Venue: 2nd- 3rd March, 2019 at DDU State Institute of Rural Development, Lucknow

Background Note
Session: Information & Communication Technology for Better Governance

The application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for delivering all government services (e-Governance), with the aim of amplifying government ability to fulfil the needs of the general public, is currently in use by many governments around the world. In short, it is the use of electronic means, to promote accountable and transparent governance. A top-down modular view of a working e-Government would consist of digital interactions between a citizen and their government (C2G), between government and other government agencies (G2G), between government and citizens (G2C), between government and employees (G2E), and between government and businesses/commerce (G2B).

An e-Government brings better service delivery to citizens, helps citizen's access information easily, improves efficiency within governments, and improves interface with business and industry.

Access to information is enabling the empowerment of citizens, helping them control service delivery to their benefits and giving them the power to hold governmental institutions accountable for service delivery[1].

Numerous e-Democracy and e-Participation initiatives, pertinent to the electoral process, have emerged in India. E-democracy entails the use of ICT and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in all kinds of media (e.g., the internet, interactive broadcasting and digital interactive broadcasting and digital telephony) for purposes of enhancing political democracy or the participation of citizens in democratic communication[2]. E-participation involves the use of ICTs to support information provision and 'top-down' engagement, i.e., government-led initiatives, or 'ground-up' efforts to empower citizens, civil society organizations and other democratically constituted groups to gain the support of their elected representatives[3]. There are four such ventures that have been set in motion to deepen democracy in India[4]:

- e-registration initiatives such as the National Voter Services Portal, including from civil society, which make it easier for people to participate as voters in the electoral process
- emergence of new political parties that have harnessed ICTs to enable their rapid growth[5]
- use of ICTs to provide information about candidates to voters, thus enabling more informed choices
- the availability of online services and software packages that enable elected representatives to perform their roles in improved ways

Some key issues adversely affecting the Indian political process are low participation by educated voters, money and muscle power during elections, and lack of awareness amongst voters regarding criminality and asset details of their candidates. Civil society organizations such as ADR and Citizens Initiative have leveraged ICTs including online portals, social media, e-petitions and mobile campaigns for voter mobilization and voter awareness campaigns[6].

With this as the background, we hope this panel could dwell on the numerous challenges which still remain, such as low internet penetration in rural areas, lower income group's lack of access to mobiles and computers, data

[1] https://waset.org/publications/16711/citizens-perceptions-towards-e-governance-field-study
[2] https://research.utwente.nl/en/publications/the-digital-divide-as-a-complex-and-dynamic-phenomenon
[3] http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.1661&rep=rep1&type=pdf
[4] http://www.iimb.ac.in/sites/default/files/u181/Gowda%20Early%20Indian%20Initiatives%20in%20e-Democracy%20IJEG.pdf
[5] http://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/23652/Gowda/8b74a16e-f299-4f6b-bb35-817edb9817a5
[6] http://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/23652/Gowda/8b74a16e-f299-4f6b-bb35-817edb9817a5

security issues, and lack of a comprehensive policy framework. How can CSOs overcome these challenges and harness the Internet to   build a politically-engaged and electorally effective community? Also how can data penetration reach to the grass roots level so that the common man is capable of questioning the elected representatives for their inability to deliver good governance?

-By Divya Arora
Sr. Software Analyst, ADR