Chapter 19
E-Governance for Socio Economic Welfare: A Case Study of Gyandoot Intranet Project in Madhya Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT
In this chapter, the author has discussed India’s first rainbow e-governance project encompassing the “ICTs, e-governance, rural development and access to the basic administrative services” aspects in India’s hinterland and one of the most backward regions. The paper argues for the “socio economic welfare” stance of the ICTs and the resultant benefits thereof. The present study investigates the socio-economic aspect of community e-governance project named Gyandoot in remote villages of Madhya Pradesh. Out of 18 services offered by Gyandoot, people fully utilized only 3 services (land records, exam results and addressing public grievances) which lead to the considerable fulfillment of target audience’s needs (felt needs and expected needs) and improvement in their work efficiency by high scores on convenience, satisfaction, time, cost, reliability and overall benefits factors and a reduction in the time and money for government service delivery. However, Gyandoot could not fare impressively well on spurt in employment and economic activity fronts thus leading to only moderate gains. Only 17% of the Gyandoot’s potential could be utilized and 39% was used moderately. Rest 44% could not be utilized at all due to less demand of services. ‘Optimism in IT hardware’ and ‘development of entrepreneurial attitude’ were the most noticeable aspects of economic activity generated. The study also posits a few very important questions on the sustainability, interoperability and hierarchical issues relating to the project.

INTRODUCTION
E-governance is defined as the application of electronic means in (1) the interaction between government and citizens and government and businesses, as well as (2) in internal government operations to simplify and improve democratic, government and business aspects of governance (International Institute of Communication and Development, 2001). This word has gained tre-
mendous popularity in today’s information age. Dharampur Sub-District Infrastructure planning for development (1977) is an early example of attempts to use computer applications for cost optimization and decision-making. The Karwar Rural Development Information System (1984) was yet another initiative formulated with a focus on reducing delay and curbing corruption through a monitoring programme based on computer applications (Kaul, M. et al.). However, the modern age e-governance started near millennium (2000) in India when idea of technology driven governance joined the chorus of numerous other issues for the betterment of citizenry. Role of technology powers competitiveness and leads to the creation of brand institutions and the use of right technology could bring in the right non-linear elements in all sectors, including water, power, education and healthcare (Kalam, 2004). The government realized the importance of ICT as a tool of national development and appointed a task force on IT and software development. The task force submitted its report in 1998, envisioned India as IT superpower by 2008, and suggested 108 recommendations. The government implemented most of them and it virtually sowed the seeds of e-governance in India. Much weightage was given to IT considering its tremendous impact on the society. Internet policy 1998 was a result of these recommendations which led to privatization of internet services in India. According to Heeks (1999), ICTs mean ‘Electronic means of capturing, processing, storing and communicating information’, usually in digital form. The possibilities with technology are unimaginable (Thomas, 2005). It is believed that ICTs lead to Informatization. This is the process through which the new communication technologies are used as a means for furthering development as a nation becomes more and more an information society (Rogers, 2000; Singhal & Rogers, 2001).

Why E-Governance?

It is a vexed question whether technology can provide the solution to the daily ordeal faced by citizens in executing transactions with the government. It is a million dollar question whether e-governance is really the answer to end the citizens’ sufferings. Citizen is the epicenter of e-governance (Presiss & Steven, 1996). Abraham Lincoln once said that public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail and without it, nothing can succeed (ibid). As marketing starts with customer’s needs and ends with customer’s satisfaction, similarly, governance starts with citizens’ needs and ends with citizens’ welfare leading to their satisfaction. Citizen is the epicenter of e-governance (Presiss & Steven, 1996) Mahatma Gandhi once said, “A customer is the most important visitor in our premises. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work, he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider to our business, he is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him but he is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.” According to a TNS mode market research survey, in order to pay a bill, a consumer travels an average distance of 10.5km, spends over 64 minutes and incurs an average expenditure of Rs 12 over and above the actual bill amount (Ramalingam, 2006). Another study conducted by Internet and Mobile Association of India, IMAI (2006) found that an average household in top 10 Indian cities pay 42 bills online in a year in finance, telecom and utilities companies. They save 24 hours a year citing convenience (54%), time saving (35%) and fancy (5%) as reasons. The government departments till date are as faceless and working mysteriously as they were invented and handed over to us by the Britishers. (Singla quoted by Mahapatra, Raghunath, 2004). The originators have abandoned this system in their own country while moving towards more accountability (ibid).