

“Bandwidth is GDP”



Please give us an overview of Gujarat's IT efforts.

We started thinking about e-governance back in 1999. In fact, we had an IT cell in the government in 1998, and then an IT department was constituted followed by GIL which led to the creation of a technology platform and provided support to each department to pursue its IT programs. Our IT road-maps were developed a decade back and even then we knew that we had to have a network across the state. Setting up GSWAN back in 2001 has kept us in the lead even today.

We have taken a holistic view of IT rather than go about it ad-hoc meeting the needs of a particular district collector. You come across islands of excellence in every corner of the country in terms of IT applications but they lack a holistic vision.

What are some of the unique e-governance initiatives that have been rolled out in Gujarat?

We issued biometric driving licenses at a time when there was no similar initiative anywhere in the world. Even today, the US doesn't have the concept of issuing biometric smart cards for driving licenses. E-zameen is an example of a project where BPR has taken place in a huge way because we are authenticating mutations in land holdings. Since agricultural lands are not technically speaking ownerships, they are life-long leases to the government and there is a lot of litigation and there are disputes across the country because of mutation. Here, having a centrally located database enabled BPR allowing us to eliminate several steps that would otherwise have been required for authenticating mutations.

RAVI S. SAXENA, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Science & Technology, Government of Gujarat talked to Mehak Chawla about his vision for e-governance and how it can transform the state

We have other experiments being rolled out such as bar-coded ration cards. Here, the bar code will give a citizen his entitlement for the month through which he can draw it online and cash it at any shop. The goal is to make a ration card location agnostic.

SWAGAT is yet another unique initiative where the CM can see a person in a village and address his grievance directly.

We also have e-gram where all the 14,000 village panchayats are on the intranet and, when we connect it with GSWAN, it would be the largest intranet in the world.

What according to you has been the backbone behind the strong e-governance in the state?

Firstly, we have a successful wide area network. Secondly, the SWAN has matured in Gujarat having gone through two phases of upgradation. In the first phase, we found that the efficiency of the network, even with the same bandwidth and hardware, could be improved by going in for a superior architecture. Therefore, we changed from a star architecture to a mesh architecture and created four mini data centers.

In the end, it is all about taking governance to the last mile. How is Gujarat faring on that front?

We are embarking on something called *Apno Taluka Vibrant Taluka* (ATVT). When we say vibrant, we mean efficient. We are bringing a number of subjects under the ambiance of one day governance. ATVT will be launched on May 1st and, with this, the seat of governance will percolate to the taluka headquarters level. To facilitate the empowerment of talukas, we are making sufficient bandwidth available at the taluka level for which the budget for bandwidth itself is going to grow seven-fold. We believe that bandwidth is GDP. We are attempting to create a river of bandwidth.

Gujarat is one of the most bandwidth intensive states in India. How was this achieved?

You can't roll out e-governance unless you plan for connectivity of a substantial kind. That brings you to

Internet-based applications and intranet-based applications. All G2G apps have to be largely intranet-based, although there are quite a few that are on the Internet because of the GoI wanting states to be connected.

We also have Internet access riding on the intranet. Today we are supplying bandwidth of the order that, at central locations such as Gandhinagar, the bandwidth is better than South Korea or the US. It slows down as you travel to the districts but we are in a position to provide adequate bandwidth to the relevant people.

How is e-governance transforming the life of a common man in Gujarat?

Technology is changing rapidly on all fronts be it the devices, the networks or even the applications, what I call the DNA. This DNA of transformation has to start with applications that must be thin and support transactions over thin bandwidth pipes such as WAP and work on simple devices costing Rs. 2,000-3,000.

What are your e-governance initiatives in agriculture and healthcare?

In agriculture, e-governance would mean the dissemination of information regarding crop-specific geo-climatic zones. Gujarat has universities, which are located according to geo-spatial factors and are connected to agriculturalists. In the case of agriculture, we are fairly well connected because that section of our population is able to afford mobile devices as well as computers. We also have AgrisNet specifically for the agricultural sector. It is being customized for Gujarat's requirements and will be rolled out in a big way.

In the healthcare sector, we have a Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) that connects over 30 hospitals. We have complete inventory control of medicines across the state. We also have e-Mamta that ensures child tracking right from conception till the child is six years old. The idea is to catch the process at a nascent stage in order to keep tabs on the health of both the mother and the child. The goal is to raise nutrition levels and reduce the IMR and MMR rates in the state.