

**Digital Governance Models:  
Moving towards good governance in  
developing countries**

**Vikas Nath**

**Math is a Fellow (LSE), Policy Analyst, with the UNDP**

**Ph.D. - London School of Economics**

## **Digital Governance Models: Moving towards good governance in developing countries**

**Vikas Nath<sup>1</sup>,**

---

Digital governance in developing countries may seem to be a distant thought for many but it is certainly making its presence felt, and in a form which is different from that evident in the developed countries. The growing use of information and communication technology (ICT) is catalysing the formation of knowledge societies, and thus providing greater avenues to people to participate in their own development process. The transformations occurring are unique and unprecedented in many ways and have the potential to reach those who hitherto have been marginalised from the decision-making processes. The inhabitants of knowledge societies will be more informed about the socio-economic and political processes which affect them and will be empowered to voice their concerns, and make informed decision on how they would like to be governed and by whom. We are entering into a brave new world where it will not be the leaders who govern people but it is the people who will let the leaders govern them. The paper provides an insight into how digital governance models are facilitating the transformation of governance in developing countries to more responsive and people-led governance structures.

---

The most powerful weapon on earth is public opinion - never forget that.

Paul Crouser

The growing use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in different facets of human life is leading to multidimensional and often unpredictable changes. It is changing the way individuals interact with each other and with the society as a whole, and the way the society provides space for its inhabitants to interact with each other. New modes of communications have become available which are faster, efficient and have the ability to reach every individual in the society. In theory, any individual with access to an ICT node can get connected to the information superhighway, and frequently such communication channels are two-way. The opening of such channels have a significant role to play in developing countries. They allow its users to have an almost unrestricted access to information residing in remote databases and knowledge pools. The two-way nature of these communication channels ensure that they serve as an outlet and broadcasting media for putting local information into the wider public domain.

The distinct attributes of ICT- being reachable to all individuals and being more user controlled and two-way, serves as a catalyst in transforming existing societies into knowledge societies. Knowledge networkers inhabiting these knowledge societies are better updated of the events happening in both local and global domain. Their opinions and actions are more likely to be based on the foundation of knowledge which is universal, timely and triangulated from different sources.

---

<sup>1</sup> The views presented in the paper are those of the author and do not reflect the views of the organisation in which he is working. More information about digital governance could be downloaded from the Digital Governance website at <http://www.digitalgovernance.org> or by contacting the author at V.Nath@lse.ac.uk

### ***Emergence of ICT enabled Knowledge Networks***

ICT are a set of tools constituting of electronic and convergent media. Along with the Internet, they include community radios, electronic mails, local area networks, and wireless applications. These tools may or may not be owned privately. For developing countries, the pertinent question is that of access to such tools rather than ownership, and access could be through public means such as tele-centres, public phone booths, and community owned ICT. Further, these ICT need not be used in isolation but may converge with the existing communication channels such as newspapers, traditional media, NGO extension system and postal system--- as is often the case in developing countries.

The embedding of ICT, in different forms, transforms the traditional mechanism of information exchange within a society in several ways. These are:

- First, it accelerates the flow of information between different nodes and cuts down the time lag from several days to a few hours or even minutes. Same information can now flow through several communication channels—reducing the probability of information loss and distortion.
- Second, it widens the domain of information recipients and providers, leading to greater diffusion of information, and also an increase in the amount of information being diffused. In theory, anyone with access to a two-way ICT node can be an information provider and a recipient.
- Third, they create information exchange interfaces which never existed before. These interface cuts across the traditional and organizational barriers to information flow such as hierarchy and bureaucracy. This becomes possible due to the non-exclusionary, by design, nature of the ICT networks. No one is prevented from sharing information over these networks, and in theory any person with access to an ICT node can write an electronic message to anyone.

Thus, the changes occurring in the communication network are both intrinsic (in terms of increase in density of information flow between the nodes) and structural (in terms of addition of new nodes in the network). Consequently, both the existing nodes and the new nodes benefit from enlargement of the communications network.

The embedding of ICT networks in the society leads to several far-reaching changes in information and knowledge dynamics.

- Knowledge does not remain confined within a geographical boundary or a selected group of people but becomes a more freely exchangeable public good.
- Knowledge gets transmitted instantaneously from the source of its origin to multiple users and it becomes impossible to obliterate the information hosted on the communication network.
- Knowledge networks catalyse the flow of information and knowledge in the direction where it gets best recognised, valued, enriched and put to use.

A direct implication of knowledge networks is that whoever manages the knowledge better and uses it innovatively will reap the highest benefits in terms of intellectual, economic and political superiority. Further, same knowledge would have differentiated values for different users and it is the ability and vision of the end user to recognise and embrace the differentiated values of knowledge and put them to gainful use. As we will see in subsequent sections, this aspect of knowledge networks has a significant influence on the design of digital governance models in developing countries.

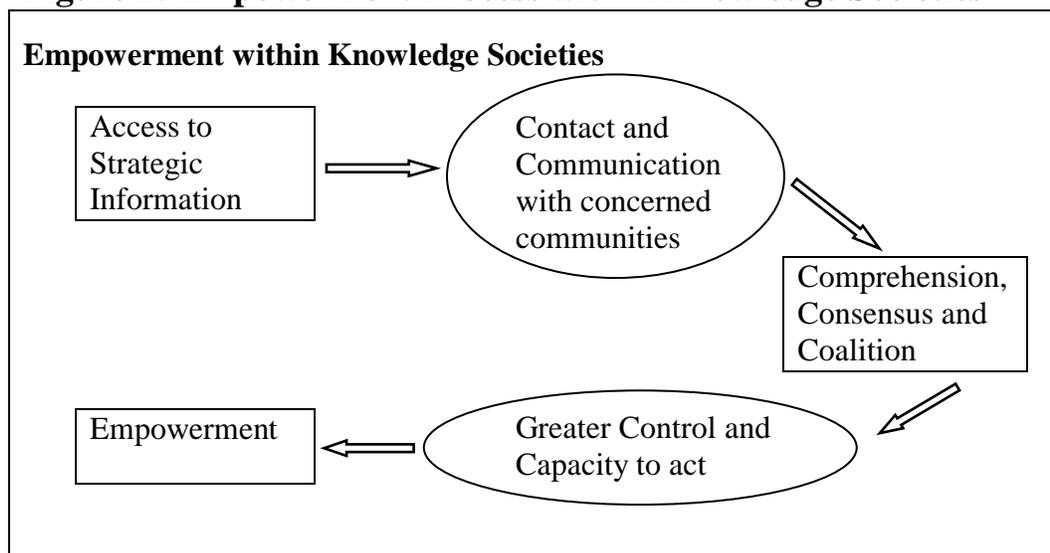
### **ICT - Empowerment Loop**

Knowledge is empowering, while the lack of knowledge is debilitating. The World Bank organized forum called “Voices of Poor”, which got feedback from 60,000 people in 60 countries concluded that people wanted access to knowledge and opportunities instead of charity to fight conditions leading to poverty. And knowledge is not a scarce resource- it is infinitely expandable and proliferates with use.

With the expansion of information exchange sphere through ICT, individuals and communities earlier confined within isolated information islands are now able to assimilate knowledge from different sources and draw a comparison with their own situation. They are able to broaden their perspective, share mutual concerns and form allies with other communities. Emergence of open communication channels to interact and become a part of the larger information sphere is therefore a stepping stone to empowerment of individuals and communities in developing countries. The empowerment process is non-exclusionary in a sense that each individual is a recipient and incubator of knowledge in a truly networked world.

The diagram below illustrates the various stages of the empowerment process of individual and communities within the knowledge societies. The empowerment process is unprecedented because it often happens on its own, can occur anywhere, and could be a silent empowerment revolution that can radically transform the existing governance processes. The transformation however, happens in partially unpredictable ways due to rapid increase in information levels among the society and differences in how people absorb and act upon the information.

**Figure 1: Empowerment Process within Knowledge Societies**



### **Knowledge Networks and Governance**

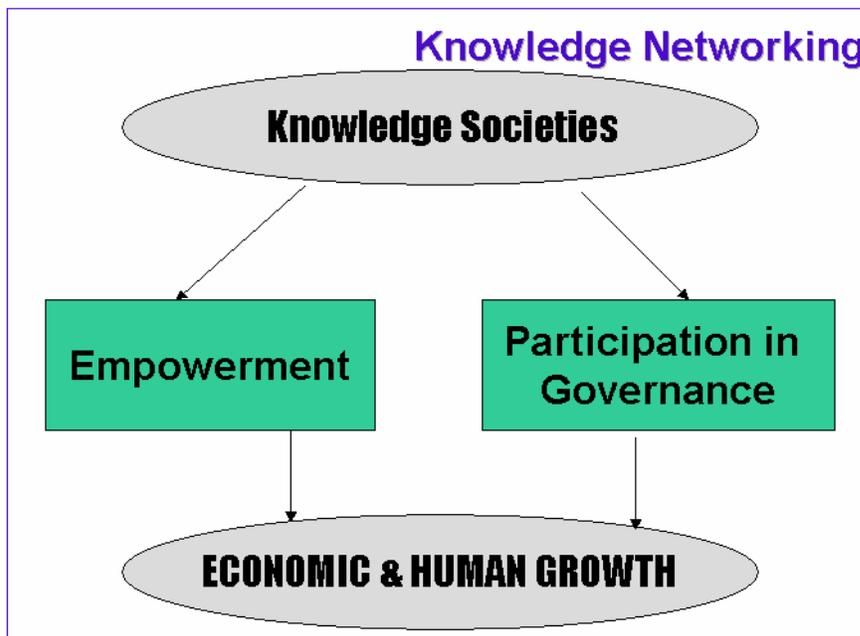
Governance in broader terms may be defined as the way the society works and is organised. The definition encompasses the manner in which power is exercised in respect of the management of economic and social resource. This definition of governance is applicable at all levels from local governance to national and international governance. Information architecture therefore becomes one of the key building blocks to creation of governance regimes.

Attributes such as access to information and dispersion of information in the society are critical to shaping of governance structures. They define the basic nature of governance mechanisms, the people who control them, and the openness and objectivity of the governance processes. There are three facts that better explain the inherent link between information and governance.

- First, access to information and knowledge is essential to form an opinion and make an informed decision. Judicious and well-informed decision-making is dependent on the quality and timeliness of information.
- Circumscription of information and knowledge with a confined group opens up avenues for its manipulation for exploitative purposes.
- Distribution of information is akin to distribution of power. Mechanisms propagating information equality therefore often meet resistance from groups that stand to lose power through these processes.

The conventional governance and information relationship is founded on the extraction and accumulation of information and using it to the effect that creates hierarchical structures within the society. Power then gets unequally distributed along these hierarchical structures, and the skew in the distribution of the power is proportional to the strategic information residing at each hierarchical level.

**Figure 2: Knowledge Networking**



The marginalization of large segments of people from political processes has been both the cause and subject of poor and unresponsive governance structures. These governance structures are often captured by a few who exercise their economic and political superiority to chart its agenda and operations. Information does not flow freely and fairly under such regimes and therefore tends to be exploitatively used. The core principles of effective governance are violated when people are excluded from decision-making process affecting their development and have little control to alter such forms of governance. Citizens and consumers of government services therefore, often demand that the Government be more open in its dealing and take into account the voices of the people. The emergence of knowledge networks can play a key role in making governance more meaningful for people by transforming the information architecture of the governance mechanisms. In this way, these networks emerge as innovative models for developmental promotion and can empower people to address issues that were earlier beyond their capacity.

Knowledge networks function on the underlying principle that access to information is empowering and strategic use of information by the citizens could become the key to popular and meaningful governance. A unique feature of the networks is its ability to matching information with its users. They perform the role of locating strategic information for active recipients to and targeting information of significance to its potential users.

### ***Digital Governance***

Digital Governance is a popular term to focus on the new, evolving forms of governance - electronic governance. Good governance rests on the pillars of information and knowledge and its recognition by the decision-makers. Digitisation of this entire set of knowledge within a network which links every individual including the decision-makers and gives democratic freedom to everyone to access and make use of this knowledge paves the way for Digital Governance.

Introduction of Digital Governance is a way to ensure that common citizens have equal right to be a part of decision-making processes which affect them directly or indirectly, and influence them in a manner which best improves their conditions and the quality of lives. The new form of governance will ensure that citizens are no longer passive consumers of services offered to them and would transform them to play a decisive role in deciding the kind of services they want and the structure which could best provide the same.

ICT can influence the process of Governance in various ways and in varying degrees, from improving the current mechanisms of delivery of services to transforming the entire mechanism and the nature of services themselves. The role could be:

- *Technical role*, in terms of automation of tedious tasks earlier done by humans.
- *Facilitating role*, leading to participatory and all encompassing decision-making and implementation processes.
- *Innovative role*, involving new services and mechanisms to deliver these services.

These roles bring significant and far-reaching changes in the very nature of government–public interface by bringing in greater accountability and transparency in the governance processes and as we will see in the subsequent sections. Alternative mechanisms to carry out these tasks would take a lot more time, resources and efforts.

### ***Digital Governance Models***

Models of digital governance are still evolving in developing countries and continuously improvising to fully harness the potential of knowledge networks. A few generic models however have shaped up which are finding greater recognition and are being replicated. These models are based on the inherent characteristics of ICT, which are: enabling equal access to information to anyone who is a part of the digital network and de-concentration of information across the entire digital network. In simpler terms, information does not reside at any one particular node in the Digital Governance Models but flows equally across all the nodes- a fundamental change from the more common hierarchical information flow model that leads to unequal distribution of information and hence skewed power-relations.

It needs to be noted here that these models of governance are fundamentally different from those popular in the developed countries due to the differences in the basic conditions, and perspectives and expectations from good governance. The five generic models of digital governance in developing countries that have been identified and will be discussed in this paper are:

- Broadcasting / Wider-Dissemination Model
- Critical Flow Model
- Comparative Analysis Model
- Mobilisation and Lobbying Model
- Interactive- Service Model

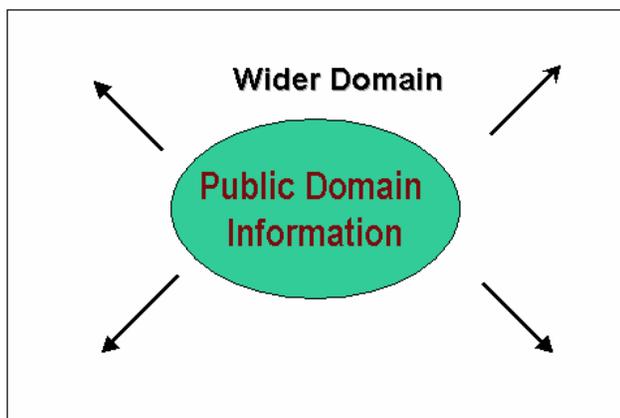
These models exhibit several variations dependent on the local situation and the governance functions carried out through these models. The models, their functioning and applications are discussed in the subsequent sections.

## Broadcasting / Wider-Dissemination Model

### *Underlying Principle*

The model is based on dissemination of information relevant to better governance that is already in the public domain into wider public domain through the use of ICT and convergent media.

**Figure 3: Broadcasting / Wider-Dissemination Model**



The rationale behind the model is that a more informed citizenry is able to better understand the governance mechanisms and is more empowered to make informed choices and exercise its rights and responsibilities. Further, there is a greater likelihood that society in which the individuals are equally informed will ensure that the agenda and forms of governance are not biased to favour a few.

The wider-dissemination model opens up an alternate channel for people to access information as well as validate information available in the local domain from external sources. The widespread application of this model gradually corrects the situation of information failure and provides people with the basic government-related information to come to a common understanding and decide upon the future course of action.

### *Applications*

Some of the situations in which the wider-dissemination model could be used are:

- Putting government laws and legislation online.

- Making available the names, contact addresses, emails, fax numbers of local governmental officials online.
- Make available key information pertaining to governmental plans, budgets, expenditures, and performances online.
- Putting key court judgements / judicial statements which are of value to common citizens and create a precedence for future actions online, viz. key environment related judgements, State vs. Citizen court rulings etc.

This model is the first step to more evolved forms of digital governance models. The model is also the most crucial one as it catalyses free access and flow of information to all segments of the society and serves as the building block to better governance. National Governments therefore need to aggressively adopt this model if they want to create an environment for enhanced participation of its citizens in the governmental processes.

The model however loses its effectiveness where free-flow of information is not encouraged or is not objective. Tight governmental controls and bids to censor the content being transmitted through this model would be the bane of this model. The onus is therefore both on governmental organisations as well as civil society organisations to ensure such models continue to proliferate.

## **Organisations / Projects based on the model**

### ***India***

***Directory of official websites of Government of India:*** <http://goidirectory.nic.in/ministry.htm>

National Informatics Centre (India) is the official website of the Government of India. It makes available information on government ministries- its projects and schemes, Indian laws and legislation, contact details of local government offices and key position holders online for public access.

### ***Brazil***

***Brazil's official national E-Government website:*** <http://www.brazil.gov.br>

The website provides comprehensive information on Brazilian government as well as links to integrated citizen services.

### ***South Africa***

***Chapter 2 Network:*** <http://www.advocacy.org.za>

The Chapter 2 Network is a clearinghouse of information and communication for social justice issues in South Africa. It provides information about advocacy campaigns, research on political intelligence, policy analysis and legislation monitoring to civil society organisations engaged in social justice advocacy.

### ***Global***

***Earth Negotiations Bulletin:*** <http://www.iisd.ca/voltoc.html>

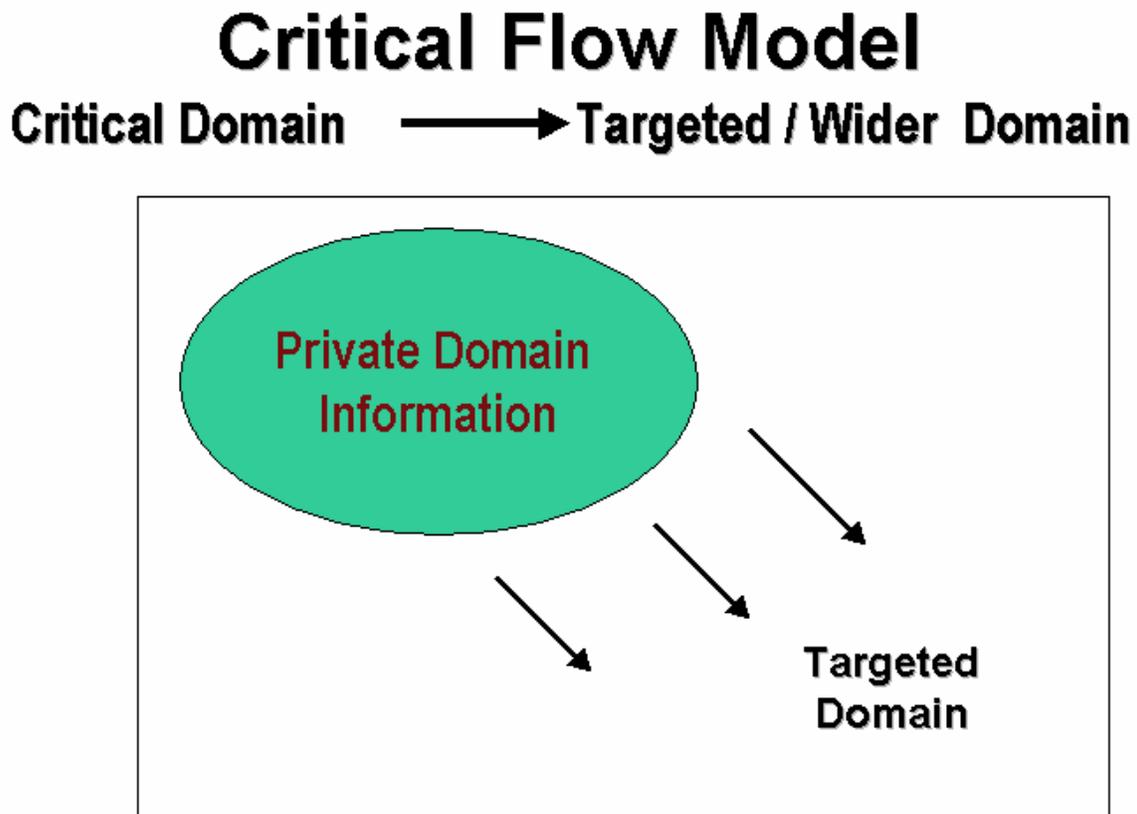
A reporting service that keeps citizens around the world informed about global environmental negotiations, processes and decisions. It has immense value for people and government officials alike in developing countries to keep track of global negotiations taking place in the West and be more informed about them.

## Critical-Flow Model

### *Underlying Principle*

The model is based on channelling information of critical value to a targeted audience or dissemination it in the wider public domain through the use of ICT and convergent media. The model requires foresight to understand the significance of a particular information set and using it strategically. It may also involve locating users to whom the availability of a particular information set would make a critical difference in initiating good governance.

**Figure 4: Critical-Flow Model**



The strength of critical-flow model is the inherent characteristic of ICT that makes the notion of distance and time redundant. This reduces the cases of exploitative governance possible earlier due to time lag between availability of information to different users.

### *Applications*

Some of the situations in which the model could be use are:

- Making available information on corruption of a particular government ministry or government officials, to its electoral constituency or to the concerned governing body.

- Making available research studies, enquiry reports and appraisals commissioned by the government to the affected parties.
- Making available Human Rights violation and criminal impeachment records against government officials to NGOs and concerned citizens.
- Making available environment related information available to local communities. For example, information on radioactivity spills, effluent discharge in rivers, green ratings of a company etc.

Critical-Flow model is more directed in terms of its information content and its intended users. By focusing on the critical aspect of information, it exposes the weakest aspects of governance and decision-making mechanisms. It informs people about specific cases of state-failure and bad-governance to build up a case for concerted action. At the same time, by fuelling public unrest, the model exerts pressure on the concerned government institutions and individuals to take into cognisance the interest and opinion of the masses in decision-making processes. The onus of creating such models may lie more with the civil society organisations to emerge as an effective watchdog to government policies and actions. The government by itself may not have sufficient incentive and an attitude towards sharing such information.

The model will not work in cases where government mechanisms do not foster public debates and censure all information of critical nature. It will also fail where the government maintains a tight control over all information and it remains restricted to top few levels of the government.

### **Organisations / Projects based on the model**

#### ***India***

***Central Vigilance Committee (India):*** <http://cvc.nic.in>

An initiative on e-vigilance. The website provides free-access information to citizens about government officials who have been indicted on judicial charges relating to corruption and have been advised penalty. People can also file complaints against any public servant who fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission.

#### ***Bangladesh***

***Human Rights Portal:*** <http://www.banglarights.net>

The Bangladesh Human Rights Network actively promotes human rights reforms both within Bangladesh and across geographical and political boundaries, and supports women, children, and marginalized communities in resisting social oppression.

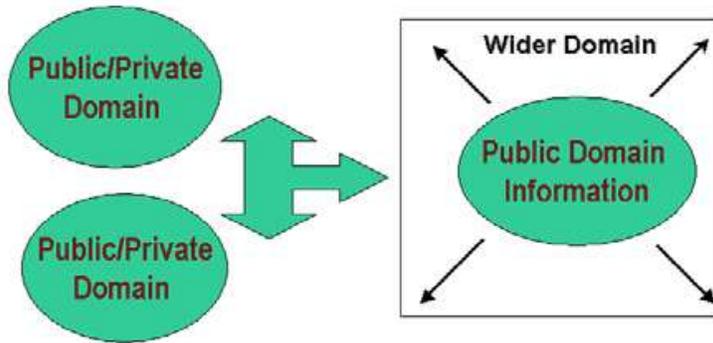
#### ***Global***

***Transparency International's Corruption News:*** [http://www.transparency.org/press\\_moni.html](http://www.transparency.org/press_moni.html)

A trial service run by Transparency International called the "The Daily Corruption News" which reports on corruption from around the world.

**Figure 4: Comparative Analysis Model**

**Comparative Analysis Model**  
Private / Public Domain + Public / Private Domain  
→ Wider Public Domain



***Underlying Principle***

This is one of the least-used but a highly effective model that is gradually gaining popularity. Comparative Analysis model is based on exploring information available in the public or private domain and comparing it with the known information sets to derive strategic learnings and arguments. The model continuously assimilates new knowledge products and uses them as a benchmark to evaluate, influence or advocate changes in current governance policies and actions. The comparison could be made over a time scale to get a snapshot of the past and present situation (before-after analysis) or between two different situations to understand the effectiveness of an intervention. (with-without analysis). The strength of this model lies in the boundless capacity of ICT to store information in a retrievable manner and transmit it almost instantaneously across all geographical and hierarchical barriers.

***Applications***

Some of the situations in which the model could be used are:

- For gauging the effectiveness of current policies by gleaning learnings from government policies and actions in the past.
- Establishing conditions of prior-precedence, especially in the case of judicial or legal decision-making and using it to influence future decision-making. This could be useful in resolving patent-related disputes, public goods ownership rights etc.
- Enabling informed decision-making at all levels by enhancing the background knowledge and providing a rationale for future course of action.
- Evaluating the performance record of a particular government official or ministry.

Developing countries can effectively use this model to their advantage as ICT opens access to global and local knowledge products at a relatively low -cost. Watchguard organisations and monitor-groups could use the model to track the performance records of electoral candidates and share them in their constituency. The model is however reliant on the availability of comparative information sets and the ability of users to analyse and bring out strong arguments or self-explanatory graphics from the analysis. The model becomes ineffective in absence of a strong civil society interest and short public memory.

### **Organisations / Projects based on the model**

#### ***India***

##### ***Comparative Learning from Disasters***

After the devastating earthquake in Kutch in 2001, learnings on disaster management was drawn by comparing it with the high intensity earthquake that shook Latur in India in 1993. The extensive information available on Internet on both these earthquakes open up vast scope of comparison by all segments of the society. An example of disaster comparison made by an Officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) is available at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/digitalgov/Latur-Gujarat.htm>.

Comparing disaster information can empower people by making them realise that damages to life and property incurred are not just a factor of magnitude of the disaster but are also dependent on the preparedness of the government machinery and effective Government policies to handle the disaster.

#### ***India***

##### ***Green Ratings Project:*** <http://www.oneworld.org/cse/html/eyou/eyou31.htm>

The Centre for Science and Environment in India conducts a survey of how Green the Indian industries are. The Green Rating Project is an attempt to provide an independent and fair evaluation of the comparative environmental performance of companies, from a perspective which supports responsible industry and encourages poor performers to improve. Performance reports of companies are shared over Internet and other media and people's opinion is solicited in deciding the greenest environmental managers, Chief Minister etc.

#### ***Philippines***

##### ***Vote.ph:*** <http://www.vote.ph>

Vote.ph is the non-partisan, non-sectoral online directory and quick reference center on Philippine elected government officials and election candidates for both the national and the local levels. It serves the purpose of informing voters know who are the electoral candidates running in their respective area and who their incumbent elected officials are.

#### ***Global***

##### ***Human Development Indicators*** <http://www.undp.org/hdro/indicators.html>

The Human Development Report of UNDP makes use of archived statistical information pertaining to literacy, health, national income etc. as a benchmark to assess the progress made by different countries with regards to their Human Development Index and suggests policy recommendations based on that.

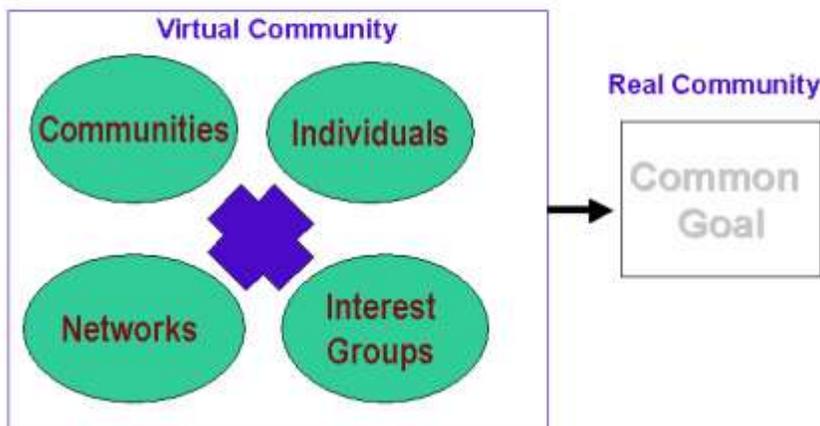
## Mobilisation and Lobbying Model

### *Underlying Principle*

Mobilisation and Lobbying Model is one of the most frequently used digital governance model and has often come to the aid of the civil society organisations in developing countries to impact international decision-making processes. The model is based on planned, directed, strategic flow of information to build strong virtual allies to strengthen action in the real world. It takes up the pro-active approach of forming virtual communities which share similar values and concerns, promoting active sharing of information between these communities, and linking them with real world activities.

**Figure 5: Mobilisation and Lobbying Model**

### Mobilisation and Lobbying Model Networking Networks for Concerted Action



The strength of this model is in the diversity of its virtual community, and the ideas, expertise and resources accumulated through virtual forms of networking. The model is able to effectively overcome geographical, institutional and bureaucratic barriers to shape concerted action. The model also provides a strong virtual arm to several activities such as directing campaigns against a particular individual or decision-making body.

### *Applications*

Some of the examples in which the model could be used are:

- Fostering public debates on global issues, themes of upcoming conferences, treaties etc.
- Formation of pressure groups to pressurise decision-makers to take their common concerns into cognisance.

- Amplifying the voices of marginalised groups who are traditionally marginalised from decision-making process.
- Building up wider participation in decision-making processes.
- Building up global expertise on a particular theme in absence of localised information to aid decision-making.

The model has grown tremendously since the onset of debates for the Seattle round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1999 when it saw the formation of several virtual communities to advocate the concerns of developing countries in the WTO agreement. The display of a unified civil society force at Seattle was in many ways a result of intensive discussions that took place over virtual networks months prior to the summit. The discussions taking place over the virtual network fed into regional level action plans that built into the global movement.

The mobilisation and lobbying model enhances the scope of participation of individuals and communities in policy issues and debates. The model also creates an effective deterrent for government bodies and individuals to be watchful in their actions lest they turn the opinion of local and global community against them. This model could be effectively used by the Government to encourage public debates and to gauge public opinion on a particular issue as a part of good governance strategies.

### **Organisations / Projects based on such models**

#### ***Global***

***Independent Media Centre:*** <http://www.indymedia.org/>

The Center was established by various independent and alternative media organisations to provide grassroots coverage of WTO-Seattle in 1999. The Center acted as a clearinghouse of information for journalists, and provided up-to-the-minute reports, photos, audio and video footage through its website.

#### ***Global***

***Greenpeace Cyber-activist Community:*** <http://cybercentre.greenpeace.org/t/s>

The Greenpeace Cyberactivist Community has members from more than 170 countries and territories. and is growing quickly. It is an effort towards creation of virtual communities to mobilise global support against some of the disputable environmental policies/ actions of the Government. Members receive email campaign updates, and can send letters to key corporate and political decision makers, download action kits, send e-cards to friends and colleagues, participate in on-line discussions, and play a significant role in helping to win environmental campaigns.

#### ***India***

***Panchayats:*** <http://www.panchayats.org>

A discussion list run by Indian professionals to discuss policy issues and case-studies relating to local livelihood strategies and decentralised natural resources management. The participation is open and the list generates useful discussion between practitioners, activists and policy makers.

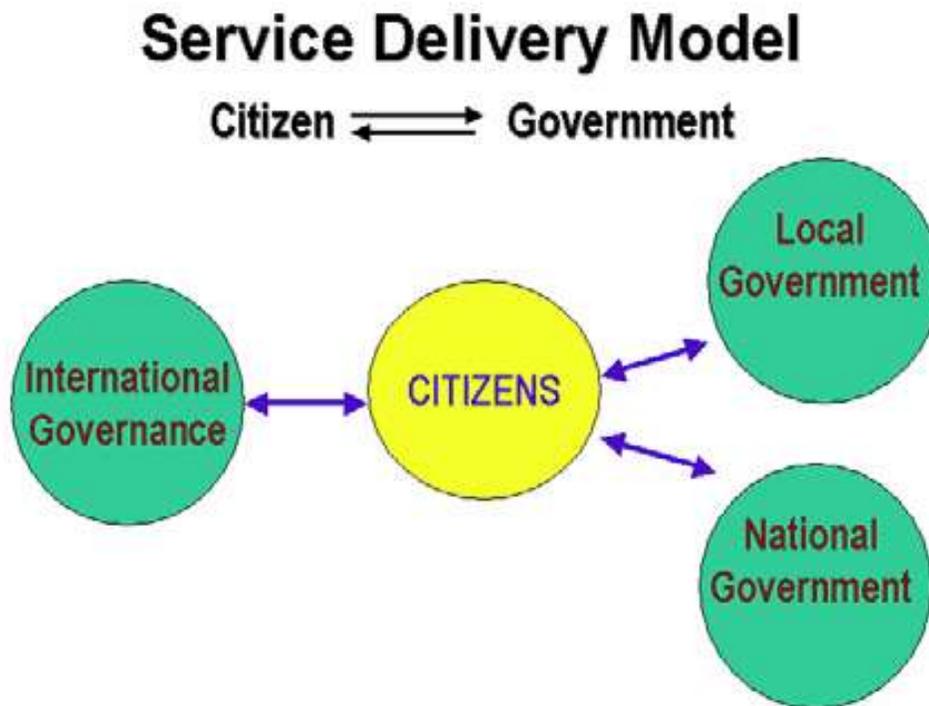
## Interactive-Service Model /

### Government to Citizen to Government Model (G2C2G)

#### *Underlying Principle*

Interactive-Service model in many ways is a consolidation of the earlier digital governance models and opens up avenues for direct participation of individuals in the governance processes. ICT as mentioned earlier have the potential to include every individual within a knowledge network and enable interactive communication channels among them. This model fully captures the potential of ICT and leveraged it for greater participation, efficiency and transparency in functioning of the government as well as savings in time and costs relating to decision-making.

**Figure 6: The Interactive-Service Model**



The Interactive-Service Model makes possible the various services offered by the Government to be directly accessible to the citizens. It creates an interactive Government to Consumer to Government (G2C2G) channel in various functions such as election of government officials (e-ballots); filing of tax returns, procurement of government services, sharing of concerns and providing expertise; conducting opinion polls on public issues, and grievance redressal.

This model is more embedded in developed countries and has often been proposed for replication in developing countries. Such forms of solution-transfers may not be very effective. The model is on the higher end of technology-reliance as compared to the other models. This makes it difficult to replicate in developing countries in absence of individual and secure ICT access.

### ***Applications***

Some of the situations in which the model could be used are:

- Establishing an interactive communication channel with policy-makers such as video-conferencing and online dialoguing.
- Conducting electronic ballots for the election of government officials and other office bearers.
- Conducting public debates / opinion polls on issues of wider concern before formulation of policies and legislative frameworks.
- Filing of grievances, feedback and reports by citizens with the concerned governmental body.
- Performing governance functions online such as revenue collection, filing of taxes, governmental procurement, payment transfers etc.
- Carrying out video-conferencing, on-line discussion with policy makers.

### **Organisations / Projects based on the model**

#### ***Philippine***

##### ***Philippine Custom Reform:***

<http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/egov/philippinecustomscs.htm>

The Philippines Customs Bureau has developed an on-line system to process clearance of imports, payment of duty, and delivery of release orders for shipments to leave the docks. The new on-line system has lessened the cost of trade for businesses, reduced opportunities for fraud, and helped the Bureau to maximise revenue collection.

#### ***India***

***Gyandoot:*** <http://www.gyandoot.net/gyandoot/intranet.html>

Gyandoot is an intranet in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh connecting rural cybercafes catering to everyday needs of the masses. The site offers several interactive governance related services to the local people such as providing copies of land-maps, online registration of applications, and public grievance redressal. It is a step towards tele-centre based e-governance models.

### **Towards Good Governance**

The digital governance models bring about a transformation in the existing forms of governance as they change the nature of citizen-governance relationship and bring in new agents and mechanisms to influence the governance processes. The models foster democratic control over the governments' economic, social and welfare policies by citizens and civil society organisations - a key process requirement for good and responsive governance. It ensures that the voices of people are more likely to be reflected in decision-making processes.

To sum up, the changes brought about in the citizen-governance relationship through digital governance are fourfold:

- They open up avenues for flow of information both vertically and laterally, and thus encompass a wider foundation of the civil society. A greater density of information flow is achieved – between government and civil society, amidst the government or within the civil society itself. The right to voice and expression therefore gets more frequently exercised by citizens who wish to engage in the political processes.
- Information becomes difficult to be capitalised by a few for political gains and at the expense of ignorance of citizens. Digital governance ensures that the power-equations shift from being concentrated and restricted at selected nodes to its more even and timely distribution among citizens, opposition parties and watchdog groups.
- There is a greater scope to influence policy-makers and members of the civil society through collective opinion casting, direct participation, participation in public debates, and use of advocacy tools.
- Policy-makers become more aware of the voices of people and can effectively involve them in policy-making mechanisms. They realise that their actions are under the scrutiny of many more watchdog organisations and there are greater avenues available with people to obtain or triangulate information from different sources. Information also becomes difficult to obliterate and is forever archived to increase the institutional memory of the society.

**Figure 6: The People’s Participation Model**

## People’s Participation in ICT-enabled Governance

	<b>Conventional Media</b>	<b>ICT and Convergence Media</b>
<b>Mode of Participation</b>	<b>Representative Ex-Situ</b>	<b>Individual/ Collective In-Situ</b>
<b>Forms of Participation</b>	<b>Passive/ Reactive</b>	<b>Pro-Active / Interactive</b>
<b>Impact of Participation</b>	<b>Indirect</b>	<b>Direct/ Immediate</b>

The widespread application of digital governance models synergizes representative forms of democracy with direct participatory forms. This becomes possible because information earlier residing with citizen's representatives in the governance domain is now available with the citizens themselves. People are therefore more aware of the political issues that interests them

and also about the implication of the actions made by their representatives. This form of informational egalitarianism creates an effective watchguard system where people watch the people who are supposed to watchguard their interests in the governance mechanisms.

As seen from the comparison chart, the involvement of people in ICT-enabled governance mechanisms is significantly different in comparison with traditional forms of governance. The mode of governance transforms from "representative" to "individual based" and from "passive" to "pro-active". People are no longer totally dependent on information provided to them by their leaders or policy-makers through conventional media to form an opinion about the issue. They are able to capitalise on different sources on information and can pro-actively enter a dialogue with the decision-makers on issues of interest to them.

Since ICT-enabled governance models, can directly connect individuals with officials in the government and decision-makers, the impact is immediate, and puts greater access and control over governance mechanism in the hands of individuals. Spaces therefore get created within the existing governance mechanisms that would be democratically informed by citizen voice. This process makes the government more responsible and accountable to its citizens.

#### **End Note:**

Digital governance models bring with them the potential to result in far-reaching changes in governance structures in developing countries. The approach to it however has to be cautious and well- thought, and should take into consideration the existing situation in developing countries, such as high rates of illiteracy, lack of private means to own an ICT node, and poor infrastructure availability. Simple replication of popular e-governance models of the North will not be effective and may end up marginalising people who are on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The creativity lies in the use of information and blending it with the potential offered by ICT to create customised low-cost digital governance models. Understanding of the political environment is therefore a must. Solutions may often emerge by analysis of reasons behind governance failures by the people themselves and then imaginatively using digital governance models to focus on the weakest spot in the bad governance cycle to bring gradual improvements. Small successes therefore become significant landmarks in the path to transformation to good governance. Last but not the least, the existence of a civil society that is intolerant to bad governance is of no less importance. A civil society which is content or tolerant to the ways of current governance processes and refuses to engage in the political change process will find digital governance models to be of little use.

#### **About the Author:**

**Vikas Nath** a Fellow (LSE), Policy Analyst, is currently with the UNDP. Having completed a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics, his current research interest is the application of information technology to development and to e-governance. He has published several research papers on these topics in both journals and proceedings.

**References:**

Digital Governance website, <http://www.digitalgovernance.org>

ECOSOC 2000. Report of the Secretary General on the theme of *Role of Information Technology in the context of a knowledge based global economy*.

InfoDev. 2000. *The Networking Revolution: Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Countries*. The World Bank Group, Washington DC.

McConnell International, 2000. Risk E-business: seizing the opportunity of Global E-Readiness. McConnell International, LLC  
<http://www.mcconnellinternational.com/ereadiness/EreadinessReport.htm>

Narayan, Deepa. 2000. *Voices of the Poor*. Oxford University Press for the World Bank.

Nath, V. "*ICT enabled Knowledge Societies for Human Development*", Information Technology in Developing Countries. Volume 10, No. 2, August 2000.

UNDP 1999. Human Development Report 1999. New York.

World Bank's E-governance Site <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/egov/>