

## **IT for Change**

Bangalore, India

*IT for Change is an NGO in special consultative status with UN-ECOSOC*

Email – ITfC@ITforChange.net



Dated: 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2009

Shri R. Chandrashekhara  
Secretary,  
Department of IT, GoI.

Reg: 'National policy on open standards for e-governance' - comments on the draft

Dear Sir,

We thank you for providing us an opportunity to comment on the draft 'national policy on open standards for e-governance'. The following is submitted on the behalf of IT for Change, a Bangalore based NGO.

Setting up appropriate open standards is basic both to collaborative development of technology and its mass use. The nature of ICTs use by government agencies can by default determine society-wide standards, and hence an 'national policy on open standards for e-governance' has a special significance far beyond ensuring interoperability of different governmental systems. It should therefore be strongly informed by long term public interest and not merely short term expedience. In this respect we find the present draft of the proposed policy a very progressive document which can help shape the new ICT paradigm in a manner that ensures the best democratic and development-oriented possibilities in the emerging information society.

Two central features of the draft policy are, single and royalty-free standards. However, we understand that there is a lot of pressure from vested interested to dilute these key aspects of the policy by sneaking in provisions for 'multiple standards' as also possibilities of allowing revenue streams from some 'proprietary standards'. We consider both these concepts – 'multiple standards' and 'proprietary standards' – as oxymorons. A standard is by definition 'single' and fully 'public', and therefore 'non-proprietary', – things like weights and measures, and the shapes of electric plugs.

These new forms of 'standards' - multiple and proprietary - are being constructed with the sole purpose of setting up illegitimate rent-seeking positions in the emerging digital infrastructure of our societies. Including them in our e-governance policy will, perhaps irretrievably, set the basis for a flawed architecture of our emerging social systems, compromising the immense potential we see in ICTs for greater democracy, equity and social justice.

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It is important that the issue of 'open standards' is seen in the light of this wider societal significance and a commitment is made to completely public, free and single standards for e-governance in India. We strongly recommend that the present draft policy is not diluted on these counts. It is also important that the policy is finalized at the earliest since a lot of e-governance activity is taking place right now all across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Parminder Jeet Singh'. The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Parminder Jeet Singh

Director,

IT for Change, Bangalore