Alternative Approaches to Governance in the Information Society

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The Information Society (IS) Paradigm

- IS phenomenon is more than an economic domain despite its capitalist structuring

- Defining social, institutional and political paradigm

- Reconstituting systems and redefining principles of globalisation

- In the political economy of the dominant IS paradigm:

  – Global consolidation and global governance deficit
  – Local abdication

- Plays out in all three spheres of social life – market, state and society

- We focus on IS analysis in relation to the state

- Nature and course of public policy in the IS

ICTs and Policy

- ICTs seen as a technical domain guided by neoliberal principles

- Market-centric ideology on policy making

    - Raising efficiency
    - Increasing export revenues
    - Expanding IT and IT-enabled service industries
    - Enabling functionality of institutions

- Consequently traditional development actors tend not to engage with ICT policy making and advocacy

- Resulted in technical experts guiding ICT, ICTD and e-governance policies

- Integration in development sectors seen through efficiency and human resource development lens

- True empowering potential of ICTs is not realised

Governance Reform

- Vacillations in governance theory

- Good governance: World Bank approach

  - Citizens should respect laws, but not actively institute them
  - Ignores active citizenship and engagement

- Disturbingly this translates into WB financing for projects

- Reclaim governance toward facilitating citizenship and claiming rights

- Current tension has particular political significance in the information society discourse in relation to 'e-governance'

- Specifically, the e-governance opportunity for realising active citizenship is curtailed

  - Good governance approach
  - Dominant ICT approach

Current E-Governance Models

- Efficiency enhancing and infrastructure change

  - Citizen as 'user' of neutral technologies
  - Ignores role of ICTs in transforming systems

- Increased role of markets and outreach of state

  - Private sector role in public service delivery
  - Citizen as 'consumer'
  - Efficiency and accountability of interaction between service provider and citizen

- NISG vision: lead the nation to a pre-eminent position in providing integrated online services to the citizens and businesses

  - Not about online services
  - Not organisation centric, but citizen-centric

- Drishtee kiosks

  - Lack of back-end support
  - Ignored systems redesign

Citizenship and E-Governance

- Emphasis on participation, decentralisation, accountability, governmental responsiveness and social equality and justice
  (absent currently)

- Governance not simply equated with civil service reform or efficiency enhancement of public organisations

- In governance ICTs should be used for:
  – Bottom-up principles: Enhance citizen participation
  – Institution design principles: Improve transparency, accountability

- E-gram in Gujarat
  – Online application
  – Offline ecology with separation of informational and executive roles

- Abhiyan in Kutch District, Gujarat
  – Online applications
  – Engagement with local governance structures

- RTI should be a system design principle
  – Digitisation as a first step
  – Restructuring of current pathways of information flow

Transformational Governance in the IS

- Rights and citizenship-driven systems reengineering through ICTs

- System building blocks

    - Coordination
    - Storage and retrieval
    - Citizen-centric reorganisation

- Focus on techno-social solutions and opportunities

    - Offline ecology building *(E-gram)*
    - ICTs are realms for construction of social meaning *(Heroic sakhi)*

- Direct developmental engagement

- UK transformational government strategy

    - Delineates a 'service transformation board' and a 'common infrastructure board'
    - Prevents collusion of these two disparate roles
    - Focus on outcomes (developmental and governance) maintained
    - Unlike CSC, where lens is restricted to infrastructure design