

e-Governance

THE DIGITAL GOVERNMENT IMPERATIVE

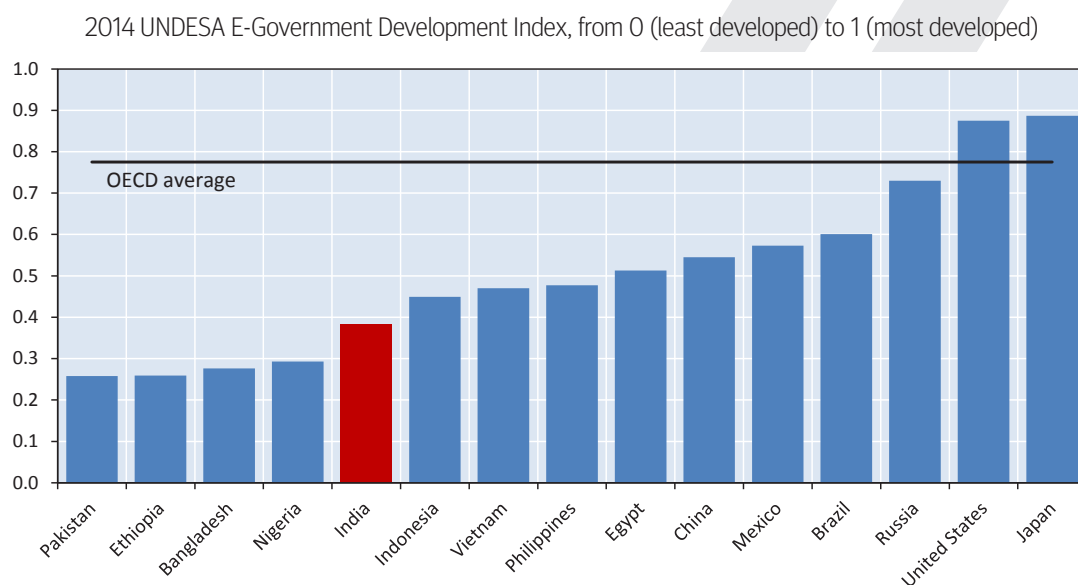
- ▶ The second most populous country in the world lags far behind on the UN E-Government Development Index.
- ▶ Simply digitising existing processes is not the solution. Rather, processes themselves need to be overhauled to realise the full potential of digital government.
- ▶ Governments at all levels should use data analytics to improve operational efficiency and engage with citizens through social media.
- ▶ If digital government is to be successful, India will have to ensure that all segments of its highly diverse population are aware of and have access to e-government services. This will require addressing the issues of infrastructure, capacity, and content systematically.

What's the issue?

India adopted a broad-based strategic approach to e-government in 2006 through the National E-Governance Plan. The plan set out key priority areas such as the creation of shared data and service centres. However, these changes have so far had little effect on overall governance and citizens' quality of life.

Compared with other large countries, India still has a long way to go in terms of e-government development. India scores just above Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Ethiopia – and substantially below OECD countries – on the UNDESA E-Government Development Index, which is based on three broad components: online services, human capital, and telecommunication infrastructure (see Figure).

India lags behind other countries in terms of e-government



Source: UNDESA

Why is this important for India?

Businesses are increasingly adopting analytics to drive growth, efficiency and profitability as part of the new trend of data-driven decision making. To keep pace with the private sector, governments must be a part of such trends and be better prepared to embrace change. The share of the population that has always used ICT and social media to network and interact is growing, but it is not necessarily interacting online with the government. Indian society is particularly dominated by young people, and young urban Indians want to participate and engage through social media. It is this new generation of citizens that government agencies must prepare to address and engage with.

Every service, whether for citizens or businesses, passes through layers of government processes that dilute the transformational benefit of digital government and cause delays. The use of ICT can increase the extent or speed of services, but, on its own, it cannot ensure that accountability and transparency objectives are properly addressed. Process re-engineering is needed to weed out unnecessary activities, improve service quality, ensure compliance, reduce discretionary powers of government service providers, and allow collaboration across administrative boundaries. This, in turn, requires administrative frameworks, leadership and incentives to promote new ways of working.

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations, analytics can be used in decision making for both tactical and strategic purposes. They help to evaluate the performance of government officials, thereby ensuring greater accountability. The possibilities offered by data analytics have only recently become better understood as the Open Government Data movement creates a push for improving the quality and availability of government data. It is important that India's e-government agenda incorporates the use of data in government decision making.

Governments today have to engage much more with citizens and go beyond simply providing services. Citizens engage with government agencies in ways that influence policy, give voice to emerging concerns, and ensure that government is connected with the citizenry. Social media enables the two-way communication process that is necessary for citizen engagement.

E-Government can bring a huge cultural shift, especially for those who are on wrong side of the digital divide. But difficulties linked to ensuring authenticity in the absence of paper-based transactions keeps the uptake of e-government services low. There is a lack of awareness about e-government, in particular as a way for government and citizens to connect, and especially in India's rural areas.

What should policymakers do?

- ▶ Use social media as part of a broader digital government strategy for openness and engagement.
- ▶ Take advantage of the significant growth in mobile telephone subscriptions, with nearly 933 million subscribers as of March 2014, to reach out to citizens by adapting electronic services to mobile technology.
- ▶ Ensure greater awareness and acceptance of e-government transactions within government agencies as well as among the public.



Further reading

OECD (2014), "Social Media Use by Governments", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance* No. 26, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcmghmk0s-en>

OECD (2009), *Rethinking e-Government Services: User-centred Approaches*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/gov/public-innovation/rethinkinge-government-services-user-centred-approaches.htm>

OECD (2011), *M-Government – Mobile Technologies for Responsive Governments and Connected Societies*, OECD Publishing. http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/m-government-mobile-technologies-for-responsive-governments-and-connected-societies_9789264118706-en

Ubaldi, B. (2013), "Open Government Data: Towards Empirical Analysis of Open Government Data Initiatives", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance* No. 22, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k46bj4f03s7-en>

