



## Government Services and ICT for Inclusion

Dr. Subhajyoti Ray

**ONE** of the professed aims of the Manthan Awards is encouraging inclusion and empowerment through the innovative and large-scale use of ICT. Here both innovation and large scale are important operating principles. Innovation is important because low cost, ease of use and effectiveness of use are important factors with Indian users of technology. Large scale is perhaps more important given the size of the country and its population. While impacting 50,000 people may be revolutionary in some countries, in India it is just scratching the surface! More importantly, along with large scale you also would need "customisation". How so? Take the case of language alone. If you want to make an app or provide a service on a large scale you would have to deploy it at least in 4-5 languages, each posing its unique problems. Innovation and scale, therefore, have quite a different connotation in the Indian context.

Given the scale and complexity, therefore, ICT for inclusion projects in India require deep knowledge of technology on one hand, and more importantly, deep knowledge of local requirement, taste, customs, on the other even while implementing na-

tional level projects. We often think there is a surfeit of technological knowledge in India. This is a false assumption. There is indeed a surfeit of technology implementers, but there is an absolute lack of people who create innovative technologies that are relevant to a particular context. We also think we have deep knowledge of consumer behaviour and user needs. Frankly, we do not. I would say not anymore because the scales are too large and growing: 900 million plus mobile users 150 million Internet users. We have not handled such scales before.

The key to success for increasing use of ICT for inclusion, therefore, lies in the following beliefs: a) technology does not come by courier in shiny packets. It has to be locally relevant and useful; b) user requirement and response cannot be assumed; c) there are no results without scale, and finally; d) there is no quick fix.

Based on these beliefs, I submit that in order for ICT for inclusion projects to be successful the first port of call must be large scale government projects in partnership with private companies and

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grassroots organisations. Scale, localisation and a lucid understanding and articulation of the problem statement on the use of ICT for inclusion can only come initially from the government. While innovative technology and implementation is best left to private companies and grassroots organisations. This assumption was clearly brought out by several entries at the Manthan Awards this year under the category of e-Governance. In most of the successful entries, success being defined by the parameters of innovation, usefulness, scale etc.; the government officials were directly and

deeply involved in conceptualising and articulating the need and oversight of implementation with clearly identified goals and ownership. The private sector and grassroots organisations brought in low cost and effective technology through the medium of Internet or mobile and implemented the projects.

**Dr. Subhajyoti Ray is President, Internet and Mobile Association of India. He can be reached at [subho@iamai.in](mailto:subho@iamai.in)**

37

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