INTEGRATING THE POOR THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN IN INDIA

by

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An Abstract of a Thesis Submitted to the Graduate

Faculty of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major Subject: Science and Technology Studies

The original of the complete thesis is on file
in the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Library

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Troy, New York

November, 2010
(For Graduation December, 2010)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the adoption and implementation mechanism of the national e-Governance plan in the regional state of West Bengal in India. The questions that this dissertation seek to illuminate are (i) the various potentials and challenges in integrating the ordinary citizens in the implementation of the national e-Governance plan in West Bengal; (ii) the interactions between the nation-wide e-Governance project with the social and political systems prevalent in West Bengal. Contrary to techno-managerial belief that the national e-Governance plan will bring efficiency, transparency, and accountability in public service delivery mechanisms, this dissertation has observed that social and political systems also influence the adoption mechanism of this e-Governance plan in West Bengal.

The dissertation has developed a new theoretical framework, the cyber capability framework, to broaden its discussions on e-Governance projects in developing countries from simple growth and access through information infrastructure to an understanding of the complexities involved in the social developments of the ordinary citizens in West Bengal. The six dimensions of the cyber capability framework are: technology, Information, Process, Management, Skills, and vision dimension. The dissertation has also situated the national e-Governance plan within the discourses of national and international information capitalism to contextualize the project deeper. Based on the six dimensional analysis of the cyber capability framework the dissertation has demonstrated that the national e-Governance plan in West Bengal has failed to deliver many of its promises due to limitations in scope for (i) improvisation of technologies in integrating local needs and concerns; (ii) reengineering of backend operations for public service delivery; (iii) making public information as a citizens' right; (iv) relevant e-

literacy initiatives suitable for illiterate and semi-literate citizens; and (v) participation of the ordinary citizens in the national e-Governance plan in West Bengal.

The dissertation has also argued that mobile governance offer better opportunities to integrate the ordinary citizens in the national e-Governance plan in West Bengal as the former is more affordable, breaks the barrier of language and literacy divides, and is more suitable for offering local services to local people. Finally, this dissertation has offered three recommendations, namely, electronic rights to public information, citizens' engagements in e-Governance services, and mobile integration of public services to make the national e-Governance plan a more effective vehicle for public service delivery in West Bengal.