

Brief Synopsis

In India, many agencies including State and Central Government Departments, non-governmental organizations and Corporate sector under Corporate Social Responsibility are developing & offering various ICT products and Services for public at nominal price or free of cost. Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), The National Informatics Centre, The Media Lab Asia, Academic Institutions (like IIT, IITs and IIMs), Wikimedia foundation, NISG, CGG, ISRO, INCOIS, NASSCOM Foundation, Digital green-Microsoft, Azim Premji Foundation, M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation and many other agencies are involving in design, development and deployment of ICT product/ Services related to public needs (Agriculture, e-Governance, Health, Education, Livelihood, Disabled empowerment etc). Most of all these agencies are practicing Public Sector Software principles (PSSP) like Universal access, participation, transparency and social justice in developing or implementation of ICT products and services.

C-DAC is one of the agencies involved in design, development & deployment of ICT Services for public. The C-DAC has developed Fonts software's, BOSS Linux software and many more other products and distributed to the Nation at free of cost and nominal prices. As part of deployment of various FOSS/ Public Software and other ICT products and services, C-DAC has launched a multilingual India Development Gateway portal for Rural community, Information Security Awareness programme, NRC for FOSS, DGF ICT tools and many e-governance projects such as Kaveri, PMSY. Other examples are Azim Premji Foundation is developing many multimedia interactive CD-ROMs in Indian Languages. Similarly, many agencies are involved in deployment of various ICT products and services to the Rural People. For example, The M.S.Swaminathan Research foundation is establishing Village Resource Centers and providing information and services to rural people at free of cost or they are providing some services on nominal fee through Village Knowledge Centers (VKC).

However, many agencies are facing challenges during design -development-deployment of ICT product/ Services. To overcome these challenges, there is need to identify the possible solutions by all key stakeholders.

Challenges :

- * Most of ICT projects are time bound projects, once the project is over, the respective agencies are unable to follow up with them due to lack of financial assistance.
- * Many agencies are developing / implementing ICT services, but sometimes these are overlapping or duplicating
- * Maintenance and support plans for such softwares is not given importance. With the changing versions of Operating Systems, Database and security issues, it is becoming difficult for the end users to cope up with the possible solutions.

- * There is no common database on Public Softwares
- * Some of the agencies don't have proper clarity on ICT Products & services for Public
- * Most of the agencies are promoting licensed and priced softwares because they are thinking these software's have very good quality instead of FOSS
- * There is no mechanism/ platforms to provide suggestions for improvement /update of the existing free software's.
- * The best practices on implementation are not followed.
- * Developing agencies not adhering to standards

Possible Solutions :

- * Set proper objectives to promote the public software (for education / business / access information to improve public livelihoods, etc)
- * Establish Coordinate agency to track all public software's /services and share with public and avoid the duplication and overlapping
- * Conduct a study on Needs assessment (What type of free ICT products& services are expected by public)
- * Providing trainings to grassroots level agencies / Govt departments to understand the Public software
- * Promotion of all ICT P&S in Indian Languages
- * Introduce the low cost computers with free software to the public
- * Instead of Free services, the agencies may offer nominal prices to public, it will help the agencies to continue the activity in long term
- * Promote partnerships to modify or improvise the existing products/ services for public
- * In every such public software implementation, there should be clear plan for maintenance and support
- * The best practices including the Information Security management systems have to be taken care
- * Adherence to standards by the developing agencies such as W3C guidelines on usability, accessibility and SCORM kind of standards for content development.

Conclusion:

It is recommended that the portal should be created by a suitable agency to use software information on the publicly available software allowing the end users to provide their experience on the same portal about different public software through a CMS. For wider dissemination in the country, such solutions should be multilingual and also should take care of information security aspects.