



Concept Note

International Conference: 'Software in Public Sector, with focus on Public Education' 27 May – 29 May 2010 Le Meridian Hotel, Kochi, Kerala, India

Background:

In most countries, the Public Sector has well-established traditions and clear guiding vision and principles. It has continued to be the bastion of support to the causes of equity, social empowerment and justice, working for the interests of the poor and marginalised. Public sector's guiding principles include:

1. Working for social justice and equity, to address age old issues of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, health, unemployment etc, by ensuring free and easy access to public education, public health provisions, employment nets etc.
2. Privileging public interest and public welfare over private gain or profit.
3. Promoting a culture of transparency and accountability, as well as public participation in its work towards good governance.
4. Ensuring that basic facilities and resources are available and accessible to all, without any demographic or economic barriers.

In the context of a developing country, these '**public sector**' principles are even more important to ensure that millions of poor and marginalised have access to the real benefits of freedom to information and are empowered to participate fully in making decisions about their individual and societal development.

On the other hand, '**Public Education**' shall not just serve public but be instrumental in creating a community through knowledge as opposed to passive consumption of content.

These '**Public Sector**' principles are clearly evidenced in government policies and programs, with the vision of providing and ensuring universal access, which is the cornerstone of government vision and policy. For example, governments provide access to education and health resources to all. Governments set up schools and primary health centres especially in remote areas to provide access for marginalised groups. Although the working of the private sector is a critical part of the economy, its organising, guiding principles and goals are quite different from the public sectors. This distinction is important to maintain for the effective working, integration and balance of both the state and the market in society and when government undertake to have PPPs to deliver services to citizens.

Similarly, when it comes to software, the **guiding principles of the public sector** need to inform the decisions of software architecture, design, integration and deployment.

ICTs play an important role in the information and communication processes within governance systems, and **e-governance is an area that has potential to transform governance through greater transparency, accountability and participation**. However, this role can only be played by acknowledging **the broader aspects of ICTs deployment in the public sector and their importance in development strategies of the country**.

The need for addressing the many severe flaws in current software policies, among which vendor lock-in and lack of portability across governments, has been highlighted by several experts in the recent workshop held in Bangalore (February 2010).

There is a need to further realise the role and possibilities for the adoption and promotion of Open Source Software that by nature has the potential to conform and satisfy to such 'public sector requirements and philosophies in governance'. This need has become even more critical in the last decade with diminishing understanding of the critical role played by the public sector and the primacy given to technological and market based perspectives in ICT projects - in the absence of firm grounding guidelines derived from a deeper understanding of public sector ethos.

Thus, Public sector computerisation projects require careful thinking on issues such as **accountability** to the public, **security** and **costs of access**. It's a direct impact on the fulfilling of basic rights, equity and **providing universal services** which requires independence of the provider.

International Conference on 'Software in Public Sector in Kochi, Kerala

Building on the draft '**Guiding principles for policy on software for the Public Sector**' discussed in Bangalore, the proposed workshop will encourage participants, who are practitioners and policy makers to take this discussion forward to frame 'Public Sector Software Architecture (PSSA)' that can help integrate the software / computerisation and the public sector domains in meaningful and coordinated manner. This would be an essential component of efforts to rejuvenate, strengthen and reform the public sector to fulfill its mandate to all society members. Just as ICTs have transformed the working of the business sector, it has the potential to transform public sector working and effectiveness.

Education is a key sector that could be used for adopting and promoting open source and open standards. However, in a more general framework it will be essential to identify and assign roles at national level ensuring public ownership, transparency, sharing and independent use of public software. Government policies need to address opens source software as a technology and as a final product, dedicating public funds to support the establishment and long-term maintenance of public software projects. The public sector has a philosophical alignment with open source standards with both premised on openness and collaboration/sharing.

There have been several experiments in e-governance and in the public education system in adopting open source software and standards. Continuing the sharing of experiences and learning can help in getting a better understanding of the possibilities and challenges in the adoption of Opens Source standards and Software in the public sector.

Why Kerala & IT@School was selected to partner this event

Kerala has been the role-model for other states in successfully implementing ICT enabled education in the schools. IT@School Project under General Education Department is the technology arm of the Government of Kerala in implementing ICT enabled education in over 8000 schools in the state. The Project aims at empowering the existing teachers in schools to use the various facets of ICT as an educational tool to bring in that paradigm shift from passive learning and rote memorization to methods that would foster children's capacity for critical thinking and their ability to learn on their own. Through its strong network of 200 Master Trainers and 5600 SchoolIT Co-ordinators, who are teachers themselves, the Project has rolled out numerous ICT programmes in the schools of the state, which included rigorous Teacher empowerment programmes, Infrastructure upgradation in schools, ICT enabled content development, E-

governance initiatives, Broadband connectivity to all schools, VICTERS educational channel using EDUSAT network etc. Over 6 million students have been benefited through the Project till date as well as over 0.11 million teachers have been trained in ICT tools. In Free Software front, IT@School has been a revelation in implementing its own Operating System IT@School GNU Linux in all schools. Apart from this, several educational free softwares like Dr. Geo, Rasmol, K-Tech lab, Geogebra, Chemtool, Kalcium etc are being extensively customised by the Project in developing teacher friendly applications for facilitating complete ICT enabled education in the state.

The International Conference jointly organised by UNESCO, UN Solution Exchange ICTD unit and IT@School Project of Government of Kerala, will aim to provide a platform to lay the foundation for countries in the region to consider and promote **Public Sector Software Principles** as part of their governance mandate.

Workshop objectives

1. Provide a sharing of the experiences and lesson learned which could provide various stakeholders involved in promoting good governance with a better understanding of public sector software.
2. Discuss the **potential and challenges** in implementing Open standards and software in public sector by various stakeholders involved in promoting ICTs.
3. Discuss inputs for developing a framework for 'Public Sector Software Architecture (PSSA) document, finalise and adopt **'Guiding principles for policy on software for the Public Sector'** which was initiated at the regional workshop on public sector software in Bangalore on and provide

The conference will be an opportunity to present case studies on adoption of PSS of with there will be special focus on education. Delegates will discuss and provide inputs to enable the spread of these initiatives across the region.