



Prof Prem Kumar Dhumal
Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh

With the recent launch of the HP State Wide Area Network, Himachal Pradesh has become the first state in the country to launch a SWAN down to the gram panchayat level, under the National e-Governance Program (NeGP). The project is expected to usher in efficiency, transparency and responsiveness in the functioning of government units up till the gram panchayats. Prof Prem Kumar Dhumal, chief minister of Himachal Pradesh, in an exclusive conversation with Dataquest, talks about his government's vision for using IT to deliver better governance. Excerpts

Your thoughts on the government's latest IT initiative, HIMSWAN...

I firmly believe that only the most appropriate and affordable IT tools should be used to improve the living conditions of the masses in the state. Keeping this in mind, we have developed SWAN which will connect all government, semi-government, autonomous, and even private organizations in rendering "anytime-anywhere" government to citizens, government to government, government to business and other similar services closer to the doorstep of the common man. This network would become the lifeline of the entire government functioning.

Quite a few applications are still client-server-based and it requires automated data-aggregation as a

'I want to convert Himachal Pradesh into a knowledge society'

make-shift arrangement for Web-based applications. All software development agencies, including NIC, should convert existing client-server packages in to Web-based ones without any further delay. Then only will the strength of HIMSWAN be fully harnessed and utilized. All departments must take this initiative in this regard.

What are the other e-governance initiatives that your government has undertaken?

One has to appreciate the strengths of networking. We have databases across diverse geography, and even now, we have large numbers of applications running on the traditional client-server architecture. There is an urgent need to make a transition to the Intranet, which is faster and more secure.

One of our initiatives is the Integrated Community Services Centers, or i-CoSC, wherein services like issuance and renewal of various types of driving licenses, vehicle registration, and acceptance of passport application, property registration, ROR issuance and touch-screen kiosk are rendered. i-CoSC will ensure greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability for overcoming corruption by providing improved services in a time-bound manner. In the first phase, we are covering all tehsils and sub-tehsils of Shimla, Kangra, and Mandi districts. NISG-UNDP has provided financial assistance for i-CoSC pilot project in Shimla. The concept of i-CoSC shall be a much enlarged and improved version of the "Lokmitra" project, which was started on a pilot basis in the Hamirpur district. Lokmitra is basically a district-wide Intranet, with servers at the district headquarters connecting twenty-five citizen information booths located in the rural areas

throughout the district.

Some applications like HIMRIS, Himbhoomi, and e-Praman, among others, have been implemented in most tehsils in the state. All these services will be provided using a single window mechanism through i-CoSC. It aims at setting up a one-stop information resource and service center for the people in the state, using simple but state-of-the-art methods of organizing, sharing and communicating information.

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In the healthcare domain, we have implemented a tele-medicine pilot project, so that the common man has access to experts. The HMIS (Hospital Management Information System) project is also being implemented as a pilot project.

What is your vision for using IT as a medium for growth?

Most government officials receive large numbers of petitions every week. Computerized monitoring, cutting across hierarchical levels and physical locations in an organization will result in definite and time-bound actions being taken. The IT department must, therefore, suggest suitable changes in our governance processes to bring about greater automation for redressal of problems, so that people

do not have to make endless rounds to the Secretariat to get their problems resolved. And for this purpose, the existing Web-interface should be suitably modified.

While huge sums of money are being spent on development by the Public Works, Irrigation and Public Health, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj departments, the IT department must come out with a software package for expeditious completion of project reports, estimate formulation, online approvals, monitoring of expenditures, and adherence to quality norms.

The process of amalgamation of citizen-related databases in ICDS, BPL and census needs to be given a fillip, so that identification of beneficiaries can *inter alia* be made more objective. The secretariat has to largely depend on the directorates for data, which in turn have to rely on their field offices for these inputs. Presently, quite often, the requisite data is received after great delay, when it has already become outdated. Now that HIMSWAN is in place, management of data and information will become much easier.

By harnessing the strength of ICT, I want to convert Himachal Pradesh into a knowledge society, and I feel proud that we have already started pioneering e-governance initiatives that serve as a benchmark for others to follow. Once connectivity reaches the grassroot level, it would invariably lead to increased transparency, efficiency, and efficacy for delivery of citizen services. This will also streamline and improve inter-agency coordination and communication, and digitally integrate the geographically dispersed areas. I am looking forward to the realization of my vision for an 'e'-nabled society.

—Stuti Das

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