



For the average Bangladeshi citizen, accessing public information and services meant having to spend considerable money, time and effort to figure out which government office to visit, going there multiple times and encountering numerous face-to-face interactions with government officials – a process that is intimidating for the less literate and opportune for rent-seeking.

PROLOGUE

THE CONTEXT

Governments go online in order to make public institutions more transparent and responsive to citizens' demand for information and services. Prior to 2008, Bangladesh only had a handful of government offices with any form of presence online. The web presence of public agencies exhibited the following :

- Variation in terms of structure and content which resulted from different technology standards, design lay-outs and navigational architecture
- Use of non-vernacular language thereby excluding a large majority of the population from understanding the available information
- Absence of demand-driven information pertaining to citizens' welfare
- High dependence on technical companies or teams to make simple content updates resulting in unacceptably stale, and sometimes misleading, information

THE SOLUTION

NATIONAL PORTAL FRAMEWORK

The Access to Information (a2i) Programme of the Prime Minister's Office – with technical support from UNDP and USAID – in collaboration with government stakeholders, designed, developed and implemented the National Portal Framework, an e-architecture aimed at the creation of harmonized public websites that reduced the hassle, time and costs incurred by citizens in accessing and availing government information and services.

Today, the government's National Portal (<http://www.bangladesh.gov.bd>) :

- Unites 43,000+ government offices virtually
- Features detailed information on nearly 400 services from 36 ministries and directorates presented in a standardized format and in the vernacular
- Hosts nearly 1,500+ government forms

What sort of improvement has it brought about in citizens' lives? For example, while a typical villager had to travel to the district government office about 40km away multiple times to get a certified copy of land records, she can now apply online and receive doorstep delivery of the document. Thus reducing time from 30 days to 16 days, cost from USD 3.3 to about USD 1 and the number of visits required to the government office from 5 to zero.

In recognition of these remarkable achievements, Bangladesh received the prestigious World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Award from ITU in 2014 and 2015 for best use of ICT for information and service delivery to the underserved.



25,000 + Government Websites



2.1 million + Contents



43,000 + Government Offices



90 Million+
Hits/Month

PROACTIVE INFORMATION DISCLOSURE AND ACCESS TO E-SERVICES

a2i designed the National Portal involving all Union Parishads (Union Councils), Upazilas (sub-districts), Zilas (districts), Divisions, Departments and Ministries. Possibly one of the largest government web portals in the world, this is the most visible implementation of proactive information disclosure under the Right to Information Act in Bangladesh.

In order to further facilitate access to public information and services, mobile apps are being created under public - private partnerships (PPP) covering a wide range of topics. Altogether, 175+ e-services can be accessed under the National Portal. These services are from 73 organizations and categorised into 22 groups. In addition, steps have been taken to make the National Portal more user friendly for people with disabilities.

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT FORMS

In most cases, access to government services starts with collecting a form, completing it with information, and submitting it along with related documents, photographs of the applicant and necessary fees. Collecting the form itself was time consuming and costly. The Forms section of the National Portal has been created to alleviate unnecessary distress of the citizens, arising from a lack of access to necessary government forms, through a single web address. There are nearly 1,500+ downloadable forms which are subject to automatic update if, and when, any modifications take place through official notifications. There are 10 categories covering the following sectors: (a) finance; (b) law; (c) employment; (d) agriculture; (e) education; (f) land; (g) local government; (h) postal & telecommunication; (i) health; and, (j) other miscellaneous areas.

NATIONAL PORTAL : AT A GLANCE

- 25,000+ GOVT WEBSITES
- 43,000+ GOVERNMENT OFFICES' INFORMATION
- OVER 90 MILLION HITS PER MONTH
- 2.1 MILLION+ CONTENTS
- 30,000+ INFORMATION OFFICERS
- 71,000+ PHOTOS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL & TOURISM SITES
- 7.65 MILLION+ OFFICIAL'S CONTACT DETAILS IN THE E-DIRECTORY
- 71,000+ OFFICIALS TRAINED TO UPDATE CONTENT
- 550 MASTER TRAINERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY
- USE OF FACEBOOK (SOCIAL SITE) AND GROUP E-MAIL FOR PROBLEM SOLVING PURPOSES
- 1,000 INNOVATION TEAMS AND ICT COORDINATION COMMITTEES AT THE DIVISION, DISTRICT AND LOCAL LEVEL
- CABINET DIVISION MONITORING

FORMS AT A GLANCE

NEARLY 1500+ FORMS
OF 158 GOVT. OFFICES

EASY SEARCH OPTIONS USING
THE TITLE OR A WORD ONLY

SAMPLE COLLECTED FORMS

INFORMATION ABOUT POPULAR FORMS

SIMPLIFYING ACCESS TO SERVICES



SERVICE PROFILES

The Service Profiles section is an online encyclopaedia of public services in Bangladesh. It is a web platform where complete, accurate and updated information on nearly 400 services being provided by 36 ministries and directorates can be accessed by citizens. The number of ministries that have redesigned their services to make them 'e-deliverable' continues to grow.

Two key features of the Services Portal are the Service Profiles and Service Process Maps. The profiles offer information starting from the name of the service provider and time required for service delivery all the way to contact details of officials for grievance redressal in case of service delivery failure. The Process Maps offer citizens a visual aid to walk them through the steps of accessing a service. Each step of the service delivery procedure is portrayed in a visual format. It has proven to be immensely helpful for getting a sense of the workflows of various public services thus reducing the hassle, time and cost required for citizens to access them.

SERVICE PROFILES AT A GLANCE

**400 SERVICE
PROFILES**

**400 SERVICE
PROCESS MAPS**

**PROCESS MAPS, RELEVANT FEES AND DOCUMENTS
NEEDED TO GET SERVICES AS WELL AS GRIEVANCE
REDRESSAL PROCESSES AND ASSOCIATED RULES,
POLICIES AND LAWS FOR 36 MINISTRIES AND
DIRECTORATES**

**DEVELOPED BY 120 EXPERTS TRAINED FROM
36 DEPARTMENTS/AGENCIES**

WAY FORWARD TOWARDS CONNECTED GOVERNANCE

By linking the National Portal to local government websites, offering step-by-step information on service delivery and downloadable forms for availing services, Bangladesh is encouraging citizens to use technology for accessing information and availing public services. Citizens no longer have to spend valuable time, money and effort for travelling to government offices, nor depend on middle-men.

The Process Maps of the services provide invaluable information to the government agencies regarding what steps to eliminate/combine to simplify service delivery and make them more citizen-centric. This is nothing other than the age-old Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), locally referred to as Service Process Simplification (SPS). The Annual Performance Agreement that was signed in 2015 between the Cabinet Secretary and every Secretary of the government mandates simplification of at least one service and digitization of at least another every year. Properly and timely implemented, SPS will fast-track service delivery improvement in a sustainable way.

Moreover, government agencies are also increasingly using social media to engage with citizens, share information and deliver services more quickly and effectively than ever before. To enhance e-participation, over 267 Facebook pages have been opened by ministries, directorates, district administrators and various government offices. The Secretaries of different Ministry/Divisions and District Administrators regularly hold 'Social Media *Sanglaps*' (consultations) through YouTube channels to connect with field level officials and citizens' representatives and work on urgent issues of public interest such as food adulteration and child marriage.

Together, these efforts continue to leverage advances in ICTs in all spheres of government with a sharp focus on ensuring the improvement and delivery of much needed services to the underserved in an easy to access and affordable manner.

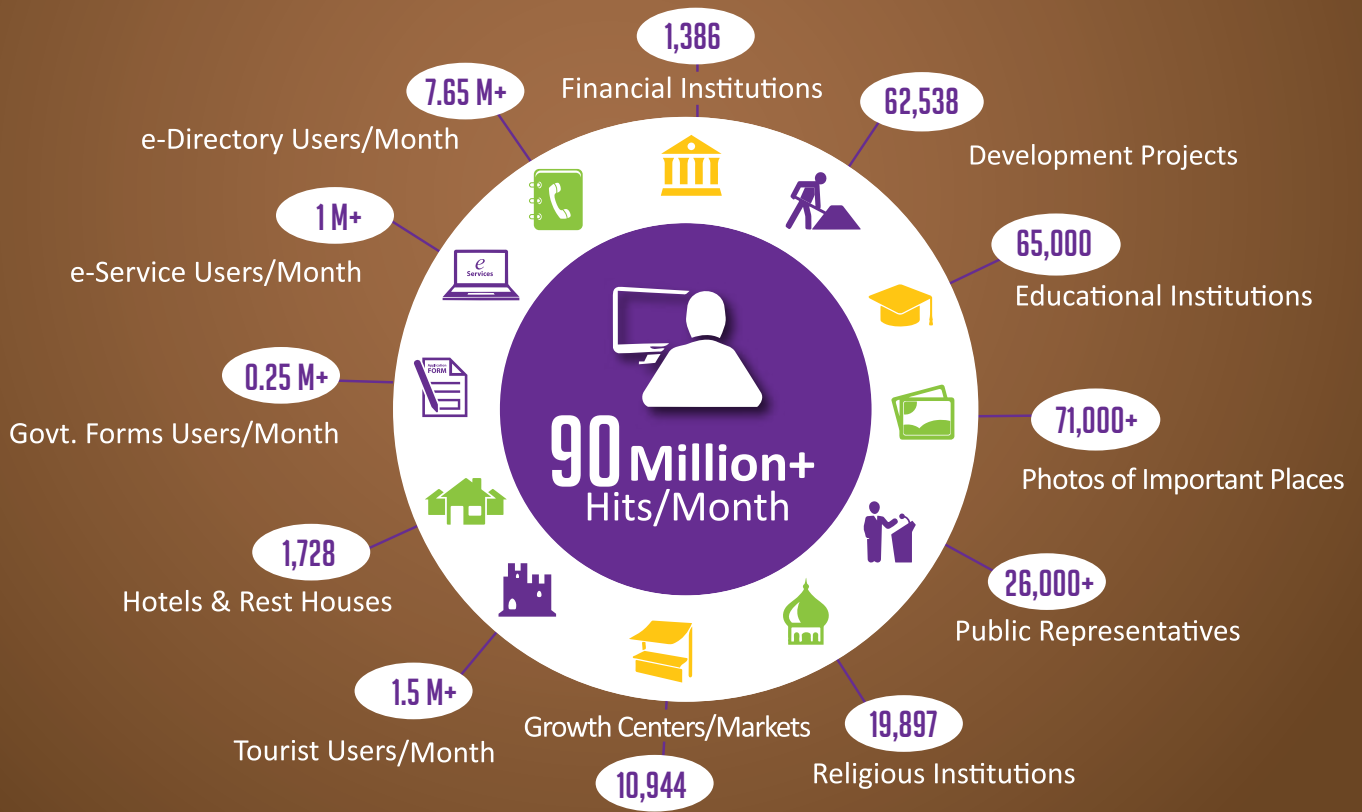
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NATIONAL PORTAL

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a2i | **WSIS**
Wins | Award
2015



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Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.