

E-Governance Blueprint (Draft)

(Brief analysis and suggestions)



Presented By _____

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The E-Governance Board under the Nepal Government released the blueprint on January 15, 2025, to seek public suggestions. The blueprint aims to enhance the effectiveness of public service delivery through the use of information and communication technology, and build a transparent and accountable governance system through digital transformation.

We would like to thank the government for this important initiative, as the blueprint has the potential to set a strong foundation for the promotion and expansion of e-governance in Nepal. We would also like to acknowledge the government's effort to involve stakeholders in the drafting process of the blueprint and provide an opportunity to present suggestions. We welcome positive provisions included in the draft blueprint, such as digital transformation, simplification of private and public sector services, coordination between different tiers of the government, compatibility between the horizontal levels, enhancement of digital literacy, and provisions related to skill development.

To make this blueprint further robust, practical, and inclusive, **Digital Rights Nepal** and **Accountability Lab Nepal** would like to provide the following concepts and suggestions in the draft of the blueprint.

Key Comments and Suggestions:

Regarding the naming of the document and the areas it covers

This document is referred to as a 'Blueprint. ' However, there is no clarity if the document is to serve as a policy, strategy, work framework, plan, master plan or a roadmap. It has been said it will mainly cover the e-Governance Board and other e-governance-related bodies.

But, there is also lack of clarity on what the legal status of this document will be (will it be approved by the board or by the ministry or by the council of ministers?). In literal sense, "blueprint" refers to a document meant for immediate implementation, but this document has not been drafted in that manner. Thus, there is a need for more clarity on the issues mentioned above.

Regarding the strategic pillars (2.4)

Blueprint identifies seven strategic pillars for digital transformation. Of those, column 2 (legal and regulatory framework) and column 5 (digital standards, guideline formulation, and implementation) cover topics similar in nature. Thus, the two columns can be adjusted under one pillar. Similarly, Pillar 3 (digital enablers) and Pillar 4 (digital literacy and skill development) can also be adjusted under one pillar. Further, it would be more appropriate to name Pillar 6 as 'Regional and International Collaboration and Cooperation' instead of 'Strong Regional and International Cooperation'.

Regarding the current context analysis (1.2)

A detailed analysis of the existing context is crucial before any planning takes place. Although the blueprint mentions 'Current Context Analysis' under Clause 1.2, it lacks a thorough analysis of the prevailing context. This section does not cover the current context of e-governance in Nepal, services that are available, the situation of digital infrastructure, electronic or digital services that are currently available, existing challenges in implementation, responses of the service seekers regarding those services, and the scenario of digital literacy and awareness.

Similarly, the availability and status of data on e-governance, especially disaggregated data, haven't been mentioned. Thus, this blueprint has not been able to give a definite picture of the existing situation and what changes it aims to achieve.

Lack of SWOT analysis of current e-governance landscape

Clause 1.2 of the blueprint does not include an in-depth assessment of the current scenario of the use of digital technology in governance affairs in Nepal - including the strengths and weaknesses of e-governance or its opportunities and challenges in Nepal. Without conducting a SWOT analysis, it is not possible to develop a clear perspective on how to leverage the strengths of the current system, address its weaknesses, expand available opportunities and resolve key challenges. In the absence of SWOT analysis, the policy-making process is incomplete and practical implementation will be difficult. Thus, the blueprint should conduct a SWOT analysis for effective improvement of e-governance.

Ambiguity in the role of the e-Governance Board

Clause 3.1.2 of the blueprint states that "the roles of policy making and implementing bodies must be clearly distinguished, the e-Governance Board shall be designated as the lead and advisor for policy and strategy." It seems the e-Governance Board has been emphasized for policy roles. However, the Gantt chart and implementation framework presented in 3.1.1 of the same blueprint seems to have given the e-Governance Board the responsibility of the implementation and program management office. Thus, the role and responsibility of the e-Governance Board set by the blueprint itself seem contradictory. Similarly, giving all the responsibilities from policy formulation to implementation to a single agency can lead to excessive workload and conflict of interest.

Establishment of institutions for the functional digital transformation

Under this blueprint, the various organizations will be created and developed for the functional arrangement of digital transformation, including the Department of Information Technology, Data Protection Agency, National Cyber Research and Training Center, National Cyber Security Center, Office of the Controller of Certification, Integrated Data Management Center, and Citizen Service Center. (3.1.3)

Some of the agencies mentioned above, such as the Department of Information Technology, the National Cyber Security Center, the Office of the Controller of Authentication, and the Integrated Data Management Center, are already in existence and are being operated under various other ministries. Similarly, the blueprint shows plans to set up some new agencies, such as the Data Protection Agency and the National Cyber Research and Training Center.

However, the blueprint fails to mention how synergy will be ensured between and among these existing and new entities and the e-Governance Board. In addition, there is no mention as to how the duties and jurisdiction of the existing bodies mentioned here which are currently operating under various ministries will be adjusted.

Narrow vision

Clause 2.1 of Blueprint outlines "the creation and promotion of digital ecosystems through the digital transformation of governance matters" under the vision of this blueprint. This vision appears to be a bit narrow and does not cover issues of governance such as transparency, citizen participation, inclusivity, seamless flow of public services, efficiency, and citizen-centric public service delivery. Therefore, the vision needs to be widened and expanded. For example, this blueprint's vision could be to "transform governance through digital innovation, ensuring transparency, efficiency, inclusivity, and uninterrupted access to citizen-centric public services."

Lack of an inclusive e-governance action plan or programme

Although the main objective of this e-governance blueprint is to make public service delivery citizen-oriented, its implementation framework does not have a clear strategy to include citizens outside the digital ecosystem, ensuring capacity building of the service seekers. Blueprint's programs and action plans appear to be more employee-oriented, with some of it covering the digital empowerment of the next generation. For example, section 3.4 mentions the inclusion of digital literacy in the school curriculum but does not include any concrete programs to enhance the capacity of citizens to use existing digital services.

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Although the main objective of this e-governance blueprint is to make public service delivery citizen-oriented, its implementation framework does not have a clear strategy to include citizens outside the digital ecosystem, ensuring capacity building of the service seekers. Blueprint's programs and action plans appear to be more employee-oriented, with some of it covering the digital empowerment of the next generation. For example, section 3.4 mentions the inclusion of digital literacy in the school curriculum but does not include any concrete programs to enhance the capacity of citizens to use existing digital services.

In public service delivery, both service providers and service seekers play an equal role. However, the blueprint does not prioritize the empowerment of service seekers, limiting their access. As efforts are made to deliver government services through digital systems, the lack of digital skills or capacity among citizens could hinder their inclusion, thereby restricting the effectiveness of digital governance.

In particular, rural areas, disadvantaged communities, women, Dalits, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups are already lagging behind in the absence of digital access. If inclusive strategies are not adopted in digital transformation, the e-governance system itself may create further barriers for these groups. Enhancing the digital capabilities of service seekers is essential to make service delivery effective, accessible, and inclusive. Therefore, it is necessary to include programs or plans aimed at bridging the digital divide and empowering citizens and marginalized communities digitally.

Neglect of the role of citizen and civil society

This blueprint does not mention anything about the role of civil society within the framework of e-governance

Civil society plays an important role in digital transformation and ensuring good governance, but it has been merely mentioned in the blueprint. Civil society plays a vital role in policy making, inclusive access to technology, protection of digital rights, and holding governments accountable. However, this blueprint talks about private sector participation but excludes civil society, which highlights the lack of an inclusive approach to digital infrastructure and service delivery. Therefore, there is a need to ensure civil society engagement from policy formulation to implementation, which will help make the digital system citizen-centric, transparent, and accountable.

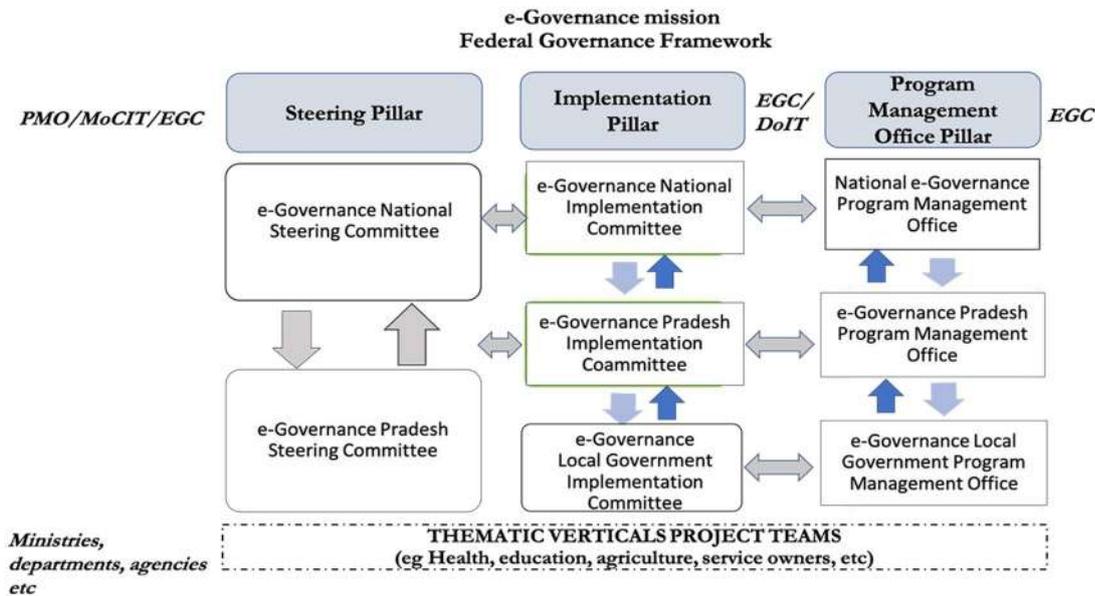
Moreover, the blueprint does not clearly mention the concept of the open-government partnership (OGP). While it talks about promoting e-governance, making government services technology-friendly, and enhancing transparency, it lacks clarity on the concept of open government, the necessary strategies for its implementation, citizen participation, and the openness of government data (Open Data).

Institutional structure envisioned by the blueprint

This blueprint outlines three pillars under the “Management Framework for Digital Governance” namely, institutional pillar, implementation pillar, and program management office pillar with parallel institutions, committees and offices at all three levels of government (3.1.1) Such an arrangement shows that there will be at least eight steering committees, 761 implementation committees and 761 program management offices. While the blueprint emphasizes improving public service delivery through e-governance, the proposed structure could lead to unnecessary expenditure of state resources due to the excessive number of committees and management offices.

Instead, it would be appropriate to establish one e-governance unit under each provincial government and one under each local government.

It will ensure the participation of the provincial government and the local government in the e-governance process and will also strengthen federalism. Further, it will also make the management of local service centers effective.



Furthermore, subclause (c) of the clause states that “Programme Management Offices (PMO) have been established in all the three levels of government - federal, provincial and local.” However, there is no public information available regarding when, where, and under what legal framework these offices were established. It is essential to ensure that the blueprint does not include any misleading or inaccurate information.

Incomplete arrangements For Citizen Service Centers

The blueprint, under section 3.4.2, proposes the establishment of Citizen Service Centers with the approval of the GoN for promoting public awareness, digital literacy, enhanced utilization of digital services, social gatherings, information exchange, capacity building, and reducing service costs while increasing accessibility.

While it is said that these centers will be operated in partnership with local governments, the blueprint does not specify whether such centers will be private or public. If such centers are set up outside the existing public service delivery structure, it could create an additional administrative layer, increasing the burden on citizens when accessing public services. Integrating these centers within local governments would be a more efficient approach. Moreover, if it is intended to operate such centers through the private sector, a thorough analysis is necessary to assess its impact on citizen privacy, data security, additional cost for public service access, and other potential implications.

Need for policy harmonization

In Nepal, policy making often seems to follow a stand-alone approach, leading to a lack of coordination and harmonization among various policies. The E-Governance Blueprint is directly linked to several aspects of Digital Nepal Framework, such as data security, cybersecurity, public administration, use of information and communication technology, privacy protection, and government service delivery. This blueprint interacts with multiple digital initiatives and legal frameworks, directly and indirectly, such as:

- Personal Privacy Act 2018
- Right to Information Act, 2007
- Statistics Act 2022
- Digital Nepal Framework, 2019
- National Information and Communication Technology Policy, 2015
- National Cyber Security Policy, 2023
- Electronic Transactions Act, 2008
- AI Policy, 2025 (Draft)

A comprehensive review is necessary to assess whether the provisions of the blueprint are complementary or contradictory to these legal and policy frameworks. For instance, clause 3.1.3.2 of this blueprint proposes the establishment of a Data Protection Authority, granting it the power to issue permits for data processing. However, the Individual Privacy Act, 2018, has already laid down certain rules for the collection, storage, processing, and use of data. Similarly, coordination is essential between this blueprint and the Digital Nepal Framework, the AI policy, and the National Cybersecurity Policy to ensure policy consistency and avoid regulatory overlaps or conflicts.

Vague and narrow provisions on data

The E-Governance Blueprint mentions several data-related provisions under "Pillar 2: Legal and Regulatory Framework," including the National Data Strategy (3.2.1), the Data Protection Law (3.2.4), and the One Time Principle (3.2.1). However, these provisions lack clarity and require further elaboration.

The one-time principle (3.2.1) is a crucial concept in data management, closely linked to both the National Data Strategy and Data Protection Law. But it is not necessary to separate it in this section. Instead, it could be integrated into the broader framework of data management and protection principles.

For example, 3.2.1 states that a national data strategy will be prepared with common standards, rules, and principles for data storage, exchange, management, and use. The 'one-time principle' could be included within this strategy rather than being isolated.

Further, the blueprint should provide detailed insights on the following areas:

- Data Privacy and Protection
- Cybersecurity and Data Breaches Management
- Open Data and Accessibility

- Ethical Use of Data and AI Governance
- Public-Private Data Sharing Framework
- Data Sovereignty and National Security
- Cross-Border Data Flow

Clause 3.6.2, for example, promotes cross-border data exchange with the aim of promoting international cooperation in the digital sector. However, Nepal currently lacks a clear legal framework for cross-border data transfers. Although some policies and laws address data security, they do not define the rules, regulations, or safeguards required when sharing data with foreign entities or governments. Without clear legal and technical safeguards, promoting cross-border data exchange could pose serious privacy and cybersecurity risks. Prioritizing data transfers without proper regulation could be a premature and risky decision.

Similarly, Clause 3.3.3 of the blueprint proposes establishing a data exchange platform to strengthen secure data exchange. However, it does not specify who will operate this platform. It is necessary to mention this clearly in the blueprint. Furthermore, when building such a national data exchange platform, measures need to be taken to protect privacy and encourage innovation while ensuring safe, transparent and effective data sharing.

Ambiguity in digital public infrastructure

Clause 3.5.3 of the blueprint states that digital public infrastructure will be developed. In addition, it has also envisioned establishing a common public infrastructure for all agencies to be involved, and to formulate and implement the necessary standards and guidelines. However, this blueprint does not explicitly define what constitutes digital public infrastructure. It would be appropriate to clarify which components fall under this category.

In addition, while the blueprint mentions the establishment of a shared public infrastructure open to all entities, it lacks clarity on whether this includes only government entities or also private organizations. Further, when setting the standards and guidelines for shared public infrastructure, it is essential to include clear provisions on how personal data protection will be ensured.

E-Governance Champion Program

Clause 3.5.5 introduces the E-Governance Champion Program, which aims to enhance the digital skills of federal, provincial, and local government employees. While this initiative is positive, instead of conducting a separate program, it may be more effective to integrate it into the existing induction training for government employees. Currently, various institutions in Nepal conduct training programs for government employees, and incorporating a mandatory e-governance module within these programs would eliminate the need for redundant resource management.

Further, digital competency can be further enhanced through regular refresher courses, online learning platforms, or self-paced learning mechanisms for existing employees. Following this, employees demonstrating exceptional performance can be recognized as "E-Governance Champions" and provided with further capacity-building opportunities.

Limitations of including programs in the e-governance blueprint

Clause 3.6.1 outlines the objective of strengthening engagement with Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNs) to leverage their knowledge, skills, capital, and technology in e-governance. However, this initiative represents a specific program rather than a policy-level matter that should be included in the blueprint.

If such programs are incorporated into a digital infrastructure and service delivery policy framework, it would necessitate the inclusion of hundreds of similar initiatives across sectors like health, education, and agriculture, ultimately weakening policy clarity.

In addition, efforts to connect NRNS for digital transformation can be included in separate action plans under relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labor, or Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. To enhance the strategic effectiveness of the e-governance framework, it is crucial to distinguish between policy-level provisions and implementation-level programs. Therefore, rather than being included in the e-governance blueprint, this initiative would be more appropriately placed within the action plans of the concerned ministries or agencies.

Need for a coordination across horizontal and vertical levels within government

The blueprint aims to make public service delivery more efficient and citizen-centric through the use of information technology. This involves strengthening and facilitating existing institutions and mechanisms rather than creating new ones. To achieve this, effective coordination and collaboration among government bodies across both horizontal (between ministries) and vertical (across federal, provincial, and local levels) dimensions of public service delivery is necessary.

However, the blueprint appears to fail in clearly presenting how data and information will be exchanged horizontally and vertically within the framework of e-governance. Furthermore, while the primary coordinating body for the implementation of e-governance is the e-Governance Board, the blueprint does not adequately address the jurisdictional aspects, particularly the roles and responsibilities of key ministries and agencies such as the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the e-Governance Board, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MoCIT), and local governments.

To ensure the full implementation of the blueprint, it is crucial to outline explicitly the roles of all relevant bodies. This will facilitate effective coordination and implementation. Moreover, the blueprint must also define the roles of local governments and ward offices, as they play a significant role in the public service delivery process at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

The e-Governance Blueprint (Draft) released by the Government of Nepal is a significant initiative aimed at promoting good governance and ensuring effective public service delivery through digital transformation. The blueprint is expected to contribute to strengthening Nepal's digital governance system by addressing issues such as promoting digital literacy, coordinating service delivery, and reinforcing legal and regulatory frameworks.

However, there is a need to refine certain aspects of the document, including the naming and legal status of the document, the lack of clarity in the current status analysis, the restructuring of strategic pillars, the absence of a SWOT analysis, contradictions in the role and responsibilities of the e-Governance Board, the lack of a clear institutional coordination roadmap, ensuring digital inclusion, and the participation of civil society.

For effective governance in the digital age, active participation from all stakeholders is essential. To make this blueprint more inclusive, practical, and impactful in the long term, the involvement of civil society, the private sector, and organizations working in the field of digital rights will be crucial. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate the principle of inclusivity in the policy-making and implementation processes, making the digital system citizen-centric, transparent, and accountable. Further efforts in this direction are essential to ensure the success of the blueprint.

About Us

Accountability Lab Nepal

Accountability Lab Nepal (ALN) was founded in early 2012 as an effort to work with young people to develop new ideas for accountability, transparency, and open government. It has evolved into a global network of local Accountability Labs that are finding new ways to shift societal norms, solve intractable challenges and build “unlikely networks” for change. ALN is a non-profit organization established with the mission to make governance work for people through supporting active citizens, responsible leaders and accountable institutions. We focus on building what we call “unlikely networks” to create change; and “naming and faming” the people, ideas and processes that can build positive energy for change. For more information reach out to nepal.accountabilitylab.org.

Digital Rights Nepal

Digital Rights Nepal (DRN) is a non-profit organization established in 2020, dedicated to safeguarding digital rights and fostering a secure online environment in Nepal. With a diverse team of advocates and experts, DRN conducts research, advocates for policy reforms, and engages in capacity-building initiatives to promote online freedom of expression, privacy protection, access to information, and cybersecurity. Led by passionate changemakers in human rights and digital advocacy, DRN plays a pivotal role in shaping the digital landscape of Nepal, both locally and on the international stage. For more information on DRN activities and resources, please visit www.digitalrightsnepal.org.