

31st Annual WGITA MEETING – SPEECH OF THE CAG OF INDIA

Good Morning! Good Afternoon! Good Evening!

- Distinguished members of the Working Group. A very warm welcome to the Annual meeting of the Working Group on IT Audit. Let me begin by extending a warm welcome to our new members, SAI Azerbaijan, SAI Montenegro and SAI Maldives to our group.
- It is the third year running that we cannot meet one another, shake hands, chat over a meal. Instead, we are using internet video conferencing systems from different locales. This is not the ideal and yet, we cannot but acknowledge how significant has been the manifestation of technology, enabling us to function through the pandemic.
- During the last few years, Information technology has pushed the boundaries of what is possible! IT has evolved from mere office automation to value aggregation and innovation. In today's world, strategy and IT have to be closely aligned; seeking creation of value through smart technologies and strategies.

- Like all sectors and organizations, even governments and governance have seen rapid digitalization in the last few decades.
- Any e-governance project goes beyond a spending and objective paradigm of project management. e-governance projects generally have two facets: one, creating an interface with citizens/customers; and second, the back end: Information System. While Governments may be more interested in the interface with citizens, even if that involves crisis management on a day to day basis at the Information System level, both facets are equally critical for the success of the e-Government project; and warrant focus from the auditor.
- It is imperative for auditors to strengthen audit of e-government systems so as to ensure fulfilment of governments' responsibility. While e-government systems improve the ease of life, they also raise concerns of data privacy, national information security, and associated risks of providing information technology services; creating new challenges and opportunities for SAIs.

- What does this mean to us? SAIs, to my mind, need to exercise their vigil on 3 Ps - Privacy, Performance, and Participation.

Privacy:

- Through the platforms for e-governance and digitalized public service delivery, governments automatically collect massive amount of data. From a compliance perspective, SAIs should evaluate robustness of IT security infrastructure to prevent data breaches and identity theft. Our audits would put a searchlight on the cracks through which the data can be breached; conversely, the audit would serve to reassure the public to trust their respective governments and build the groundswell required to further leverage e-governance to ease the life of its citizens.
- Inability to prevent cyber-attacks or disruption of public services and welfare programmes due to breakdown of backend tech infrastructure can have substantial, even crippling, economic and social consequences. For instance, a cyber-attack on a power grid can lead to hours of power outage. IT audits can help governments to continuously review and upgrade its security architecture.

Performance:

- Post pandemic there has been a massive shift in delivery of public services to digital platforms and dashboards. India too has undergone a massive digital transformation. In the last financial year, digitization enabled the Indian government to transfer close to \$75 Billion directly to accounts of citizens. This massive amount covered more than 5 billion transactions and included more than 300 welfare schemes being run by the national and state governments across the country. Such Direct Benefits Transfer brought savings in the cost of delivery to the tune of \$29 billion. Included in this scheme, were more than 300 million women across the country who received financial assistance directly in their bank accounts in the pandemic through the digital space. Even the world's largest vaccination drive, the ongoing Covid vaccination drive in India is supported by a completely digitized back-end process from giving appointments to issuance of vaccination certificates. Already, more than 1 billion individuals have got vaccinated under this digitally enabled programme.
- In such situation, as auditors, we need to provide timely inputs to the executive on the performance and resilience of these systems.

Participation:

- While technology is a great leveler, we could well miss the inequities that it could create or exacerbate. We as auditors must ensure that the gains of advancement in technology are shared equitably. We, in India, have consistently followed the principle of Antyodaya which means no one is left behind.
- Technology revolution has also transformed economic activity, enabling a formidable reach extending beyond geographical boundaries, as well as nurturing the start-up culture. Government can encourage as well as regulate such initiatives through e-Governance systems beyond delivery of citizen-centric services.
- A fundamental principle of auditing is always staying ahead of the curve. To achieve this goal, we must place capacity building within our organizations at the forefront. As technology makes deep inroads into public administration, creating its own complexities, it calls for continuous upgradation of not only infrastructure but the skill and knowledge among auditors. WGITA gains increasing relevance and importance in this context, to help understand and master the challenges through exchange of innovations across SAIs.

- To continue our excellent work under the current Work Plan, WGITA took up seven projects on IT audits. As this is the final year of the current Work Plan, we will comprehensively review and discuss the progress of these seven projects in this meeting. We conducted a survey seeking inputs from our members and observers on potential projects for the next Work Plan. I would like to express my gratitude for your inputs which have helped us in drafting the next Work Plan. We shall also discuss the projects identified for the next Work Plan in this meeting.
- Recent times have shown that technological processes can evolve quickly if people come together in collaborative ways to face a shared challenge. WGITA has been an excellent platform for collaboration and I cannot emphasize enough upon the relevance of IT and IT audit towards achievement of Sustainable Development Goals to create a better world for our people.
- On behalf of INTOSAI, I thank you for joining us in this meeting. I am confident that we will have an enriching and fruitful discussion.