



# STREET SMART

**W**alk into any village in Odisha today and there is a very high chance that you'll find a young boy or girl, who is studying engineering or working in the IT industry. Adapting to technological innovations seems to be in our blood! On the other hand, it is quite disconcerting that the socio-economic gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in the state is significant and on the rise. Is the adaptability specific to certain segments of the society only? Hard to believe! What we need perhaps, is a state policy to ensure that the advancement in technology percolates to the last individual of the state, in the remotest rural belt.

Odisha's capital Bhubaneswar, was the first among 20 Indian cities identified, to be transformed under the 'Smart City' revolution. There has been a sharp rise in the investments flowing into the state, in various sectors of business over the last two decades. The 'who's who' of the IT industry have their offices in the state capital. Many colleges and universities of the state that impart higher technical education, are also involved in technological research. Moreover, Odisha has been fortunate to have had stable governments in the state for several terms now and the region is largely peaceful, barring a few districts that are plagued by the Maoist menace. But then the issue of poverty and disparity of income is still widespread. We still yearn for a better public policy and appropriate implementation to provide opportunities for all segments of our population. The inclusion of all segments and geographies while advocating for a strong public policy on technology



**BY ASHWINI KUMAR RATH**  
Innovator, Author and Entrepreneur  
CEO and Founder of Batoi Systems Pvt. Ltd.

and digitalization is the key to combat this issue.

While the over-arching public welfare policy is a must to play on the state's strengths like mineral deposits, large river ecosystems, a long coastline, great potential in tourism etc.; a sound policy for technology, digitalization and communication would be imperative to deal with weaknesses like, being prone to natural calamities, malnourishment, unemployment etc.

The intent of using technology in different spheres in our lives would seriously demand a strong digital backbone of communication across the state and its reliability even in the wake of disasters. The government should focus on laying fibre optic cables across the state apart from making it mandatory for telecom players to avail the best possible voice and data network across all rural and urban circles. Needless to say, it will require close coordination with the central government, though initiatives can also be taken at the state level in PPP (Public Private Partnership) mode. Instead of free Wi-Fi in selected areas, it would be advisable to make its affordability

better for every individual.

The government of Odisha has increased its IT spending in recent years. A significant chunk of the funds go into creating different boutique software applications that are used by various government departments. We need to revisit this process. Instead of spending time and resources for narrow-based applications, we must come up with an integrated digital platform that can include varied forms of data and sensory devices connected to a public network. Let me elaborate this further.

We use different map services online, through Google and Microsoft apart from others. However, these maps mostly designate routes and geographical assets. It would be extremely useful if the government could make different maps accessible to the public, to use and build applications as suitable for specific needs. Maps may include slowly changing parameters like the spread of natural resources, demographic data, sanitation levels, farm land distribution, soil and weather conditions, apart from many others. Yes, we need to install and manage

those devices in a rather big scale.

A platform like this can be built using latest technologies like Cloud Computing, Big Data and IoT analytics may be used to get instant insights and alerts – this may be used by citizens and the government departments to take requisite action in time. The platform can connect locational data, those produced from activities of people and the government, to build sensible understanding of happenings in different spheres of life in the state.

Such a 'public cloud' by the Odisha government, will not only facilitate smooth information dissemination, but also create opportunities for people to build new and innovative software applications. Why can a local entrepreneur not think of aggregating cabs across the state and provide an alternative to the giant cab aggregators like Ola or Uber in the region? Why will somebody not plan to build a platform for connecting the farmers of Odisha with the outside world? The possibilities are limitless!

Of course, the government is not a software house; but they can rope in a proficient software company on a PPP mode to build such a platform. Good use of technology will bring people closer through participation in numerous activities that will push the social initiatives and invigorate commercial activities. This effort will connect the entire state and make the governance more responsive and accountable. The public policy will use technology as its backbone for formulation and implementation.

This would pave the path for Odisha's transformation into India's first 'Smart State'!

