

Standardization of Government of Assam Websites

(For building Useful, Usable and
Effective websites)

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1. Background: Need, Aim and Objectives

The Government web sites of Assam had a number of issues and challenges. Around 29 of the existing Government of Assam websites were studied to get a preliminary understanding of the status and issues. Issues related to the content, its non-availability, accuracy and low level of intuitiveness were the major findings. It was found that most websites did not comply to the Guidelines for Indian Web Site (GIGW) released by the Government for web site usability and standardization. Information that was available on the websites was found limited largely to the functions of the department, important documents and details of officials. The information that citizens looked for was possibly not kept in mind, as most websites were found lacking in information on their citizen centric services. Furthermore, many departments had more than a single website, each one completely different from the other in terms of content, interface and information. The government websites were totally inconsistent, difficult for common man to use and had inconsistent user interfaces.

Recognizing that websites reflect the image of department and good websites can improve the overall image of the government, a decision was taken to establish effective websites with the objective to make websites as the most trusted and preferred mode for obtaining information. In June 2015, the Government of Assam initiated a project named 'e-Prastuti' to enable Standardization of all Government websites. The aim was to establish a unified face and bring in an integrated web experience for the citizens across all government websites.

1.1 Initial Study and Survey of the existing websites

The existing Websites of Government of Assam for various departments were initially studied to understand the status and issues.

- What are the deeper problems in the websites that are inhibiting their wide scale usage;
- Whether desired information and services being provided in the right manner?

- Whether citizens get what they look for in minimum time with minimal efforts?

The study resulted in the following key findings viz: Inconsistent websites, incomplete and inadequate information, minimal information for citizens, many broken links and the sites had too many images and photos which are not consistent. Issues related to the content, its non-availability, accuracy and low level of intuitiveness were the major findings.

- Information on the website to be up to date
- There is a need to categorize information
- Images on the Websites to be of good quality and resolution
- Fonts to be eye-friendly
- More Visual appeal required
- Too many photos in the website that was distracting
- Links that did not work were present
- Navigating the site to be made easier in the website
- Sites were not bi-lingual
- Smart phone compatibility is required

Table 1: Findings from the initial study and survey of the existing websites

The major finding was that the information that citizens required or looked for was not kept in mind while developing the websites, as most websites were found lacking in information on their citizen centric information.

The following issues also emerged as the process of how the websites were developed and maintained:

- There was no defined process for updation of website content.
- There was no responsibility defined on the updating of website content.
- Many of the department officials were not aware of the website.
- Website content was managed by one or two persons.
- Capability of the department officials in managing the content was not built.

1.2 Specific objectives

- With Simple and easy to use for citizens
- Faster access to information
- Assured Content authenticity and accuracy
- Navigation to be possible with minimum external aid.

- Cater to all age groups
- Available on all types of devices
- Minimize the need for citizens to physically visit the department for availing the services.
- Establish process for department ownership
- Build the core competency within the departments for website content management

2. Approach taken

2.1 ePrastuti Institutional Mechanism

As a first step in this direction, an empowered structure was established under the overall leadership and guidance of the Chief Secretary, Assam who will be the Chief Responsible Officer (CRO) of the project. The senior most secretary of every department was designated as the Responsible Officer along with an Additional Responsible officer.

2.2 Establishment of Website Development Cell (WDC)

A Website Development Cell (WDC) was formed

- To assist and guide departments in designing and development of their websites
- Preparing the Web Site framework with Guidelines for Standardization.
- To support departments in achieving the required transition/ building new sites
- Capacity Building of Department Nodal Officials
- Monitor the progress of implementation of standardization of web-sites as per agreed framework

2.3 Awareness workshop on 27th June 2015

An awareness workshop for the Responsible Officers and Additional Responsible Officers on the need for 'Standardization of Government websites' was held at Assam Administrative Staff College on 27th June 2015. Experts from IIT Guwahati and IIM Ahmedabad were invited as speakers during this workshop.

2.4 ePrastuti Governance Structure

Governance Structure was established within each department and its sub-ordinate organizations. Every department had designated Responsible Officers, Content Managers, Master Trainers, and Website Administrator with defined roles and responsibility as a part of the Website Governance Structure. The aim was to ensure the regular and periodic review of content and for an enforcement mechanism for updating and maintaining the website.

2.5 Expert Committee from IIT Guwahati

The Government of Assam constituted an expert committee for guidance on Design, Usability and Human Interaction Aspects of Government Websites. This committee was **chaired by expert from IIT Guwahati** and had members drawn from IIT Guwahati.

3. Methodology

3.1 Establishment of a 'Standardized Website Framework (SWF)'

The SWF comprised of Technology, Information and Process requirements for the end-to-end development of Standardized Websites.

- To ensure that the websites are developed through a participative approach.
- The end user needs to be kept in mind while designing the sites.
- Standard approach is adopted for design and development of all websites
- Standardization of the layout and design of government websites will help the public in finding the information quickly.

3.2 Preparation of a handbook with Toolkits for the following:

Toolkits were developed for each area of the SWF:

- Identifying User and User needs
- Content Classification and Grouping
- Drawing up the Website Information Structure
- Standards and Guidelines for Websites.

3.3 Orientation Workshops

Initially conducted workshops to orient the departments to the need for Standardization of websites and its process.

3.4 Capability Building

Building the competency and

- Workshops for Content Managers
- Master Trainers Certification Programme
- Evaluation for certification
- Advanced Training at IIT Guwahati for qualified certified Master Trainers

3.5 Validation of SWF with Six websites and its sub-ordinate organizations

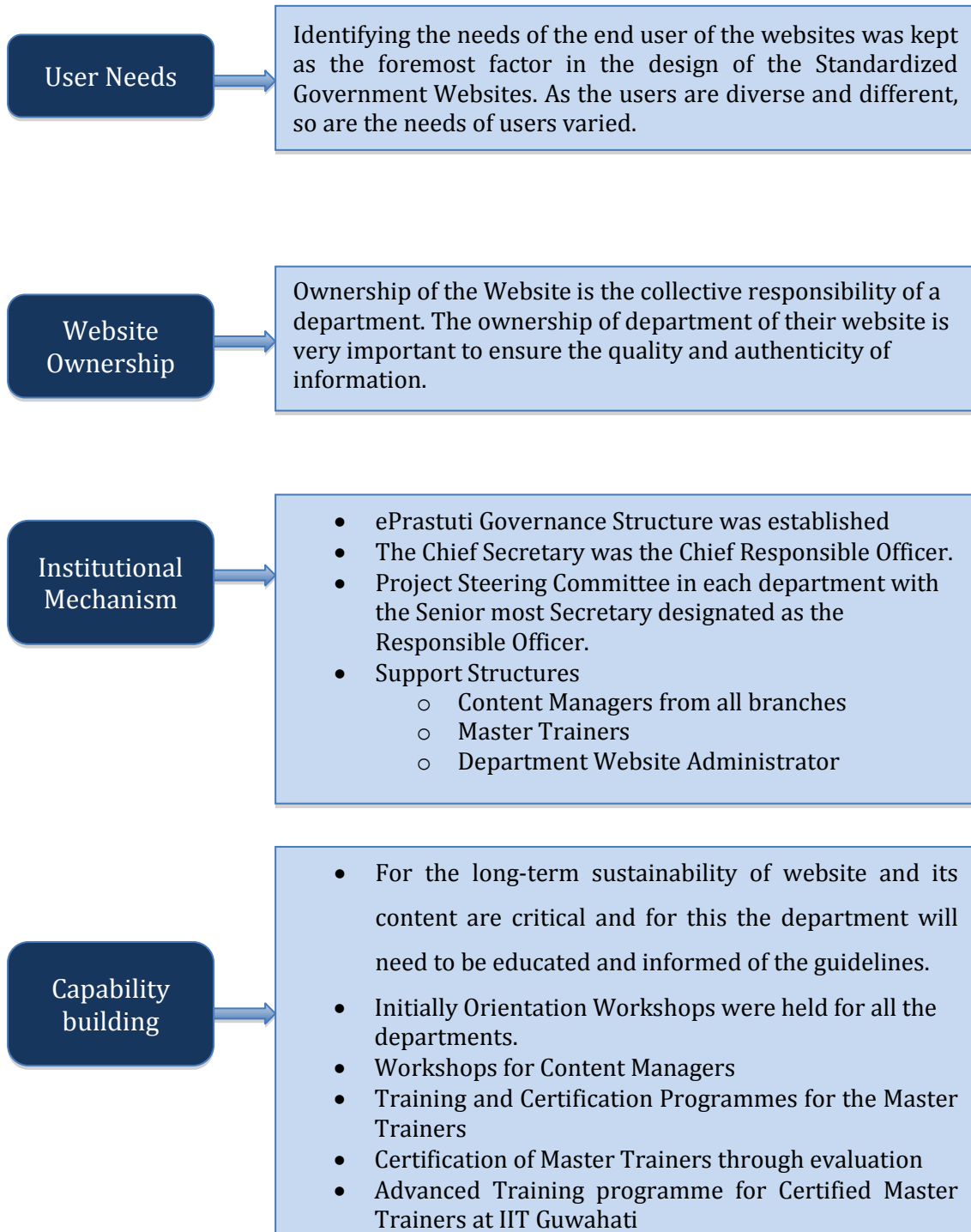
Validation of the Standardized Framework was done with the development of six department websites as pilot websites. The website development was outsourced to an external agency. At each phase of the development, the expert committee had reviewed the website design and structure. The initial prototype underwent several versions based on the review and suggestions of the expert committee. Some of the key recommendations with respect to the User experience and User Interaction are as follows

- Different views for Target user group
- Site to be made simple and clutter free
- Colour contrast of the website
- Logo colour and its placement
- Grids to be present
- Positioning of the portlets
- Colour code should be intuitively provide the linkage
- Tab Menus should have clear separators
- Font size of the text
- Size, Colour and Text Department and Sub department names

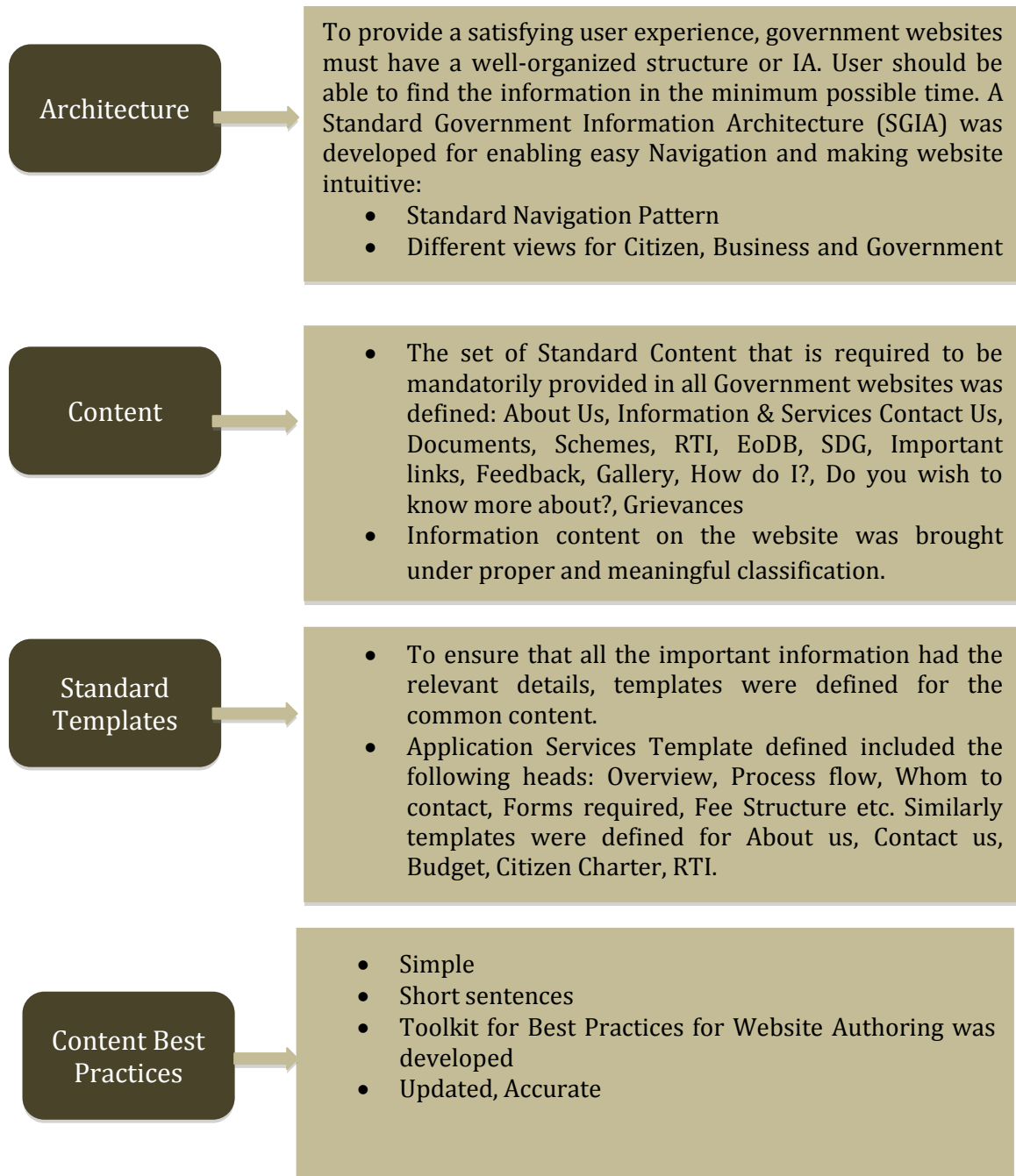
4. Implementation: Process, Information, Technology

ePrastuti model of building Government Websites differed from other Website development initiatives in States and Centre in its approach, with respect to Process, Information and Technology?

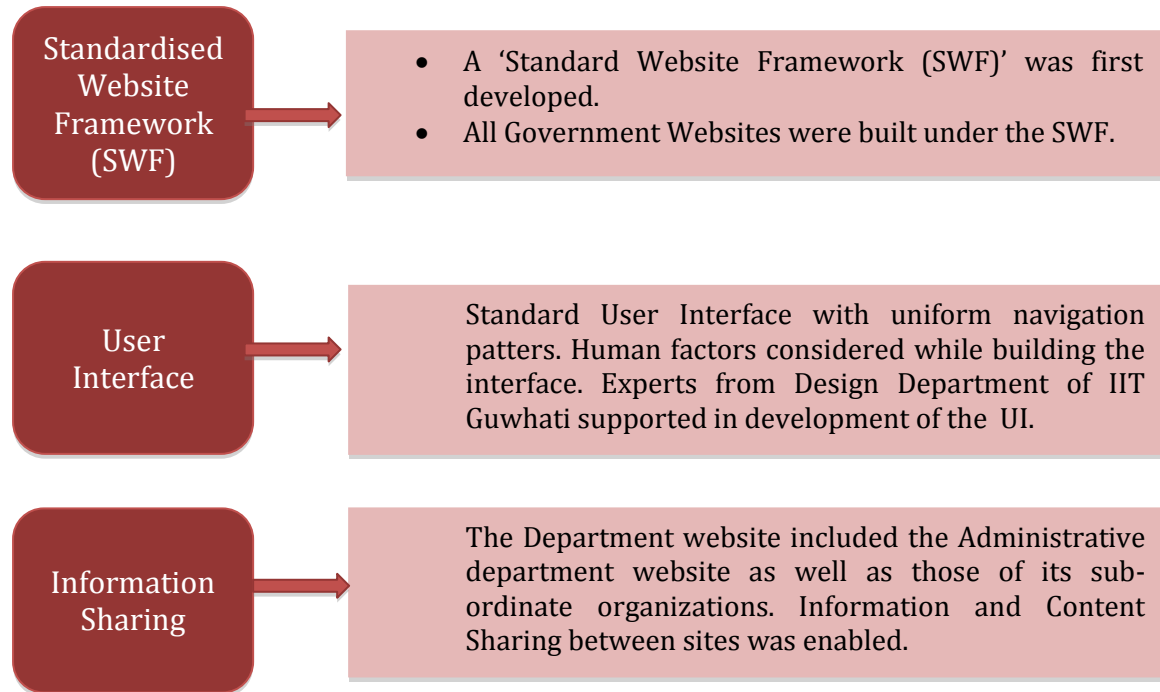
Process



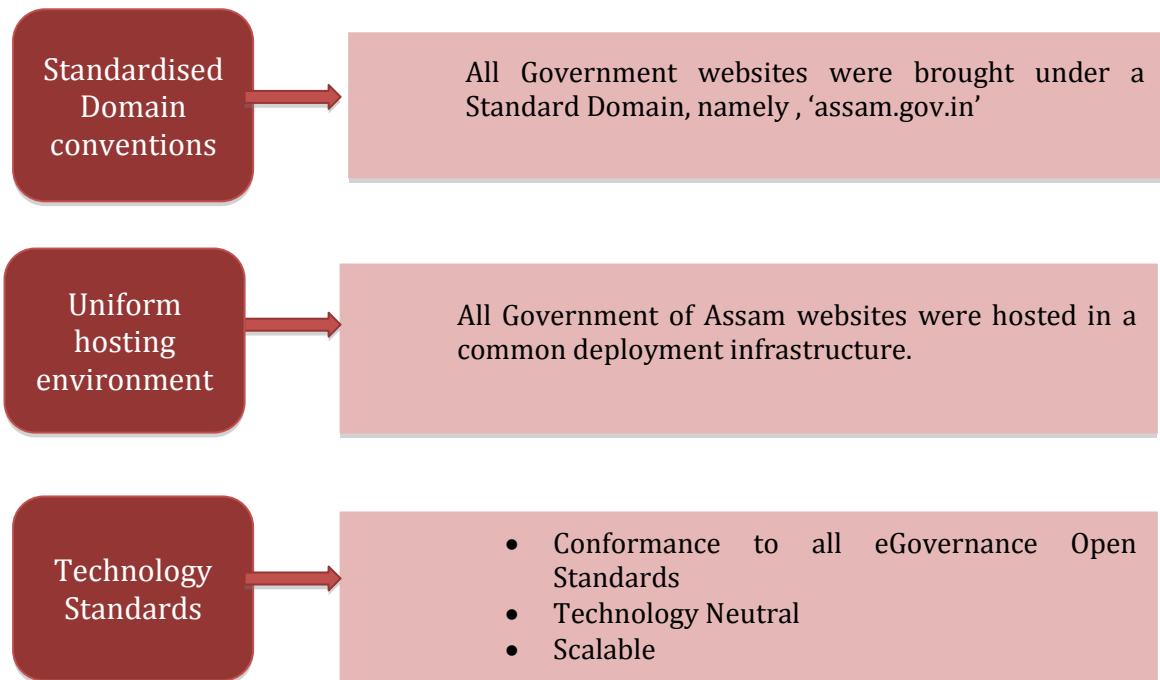
Information



Technology



Standards



5. Status after the Standarization of Websites

THEN (2015)	NOW (2017)
29 Websites	203 Websites
Information without considering needs of citizens	Citizen needs at the core
Inconsistent interfaces	Uniform and Consistent layout
Disconnected websites	Interconnected websites
Content updation	Enabled Department to manage content internally

Standards