

GIS Services and Local Governments

How GIS is helping local governments offer better services to citizens

Geographic information systems (GIS) can play a very useful role for local governments. A municipal GIS, for example, can help provide services to citizens in a much better way. It is extremely useful in public works, for elections, law enforcement, emergency response, planning, effective property tax, water tax, collection and infrastructure development.

GIS services enable staff in local authorities to access a single, central repository of land and property data which they can use to carry out a myriad of local government functions. These include zoning plans, planning permissions, property tax and so on.

Most local governments in the developed countries rely heavily on GIS services today. It's not a concept that has caught on in India, but will become widespread in the future. The benefits are far too substantial to ignore. GIS implementations by Municipalities in India have reaped huge benefits especially in the management and decision making level of the organization. GIS offers cost and time savings, increased accuracy, productivity and revenue for local authorities, not to mention better decision making.

To understand how municipal GIS is such an invaluable tool, let's take the example of a city council's waste division. When requests/ complaints come into the division, they are grouped into various categories like trash, recycling, household waste pickup, bulk waste removal etc.

The complaints are colour-coded on a map of the area - red for pending requests, yellow for work in progress and green for the work completed. Managers can thus get an idea of what's happening where with just a glance of the map. What's more, they can also identify areas where problems recur, and take preventive action.

One local government in the USA uses GIS to provide its county dispatch center with accurate address information. The accurate addresses are invaluable in attending to 911 emergency calls, reducing the time needed for police and medical personal to reach their destinations. More than 40,000 address points were created and added to the GIS that the county used.

In India too, some progress has been made in this direction. A lot of e-governance initiatives set up by state governments use GIS for the benefit of citizens. An NGO recently used GIS technology to survey and map slums in a city, generating critical

information that could be used to provide essential public services to slum-dwellers. The data enabled detailed analysis of slums, helping governments to better prioritize sanitation and housing.

Municipal GIS also opens the doors to a participatory role by citizens. It can enable information exchange between citizens and local authorities, and bring about a big improvement in governance.

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