

Second Response to Draft National Policy on Open Standards for e-Governance

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The government is in the process of drafting a national policy on open standards for e-governance. The National Informatics Centre recently released draft version 2 of the policy, and CIS sent in its comments on the draft.

CIS has been following the drafting of the national policy on open standards for e-governance with much interest. Last year, we offered our comments on the first draft of the policy. The policy has since gone through two more iterations (copies of which are kept on the Fosscomm site), labelled versions 1.15 and 2, and we have again offered comments on the latest version. The evolution the draft policy has been mired in controversy, as documented by Venkatesh Hariharan of Red Hat. It seems that the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has been trying to nullify the effect of the policy by pushing for recognition of proprietary standards within the policy, and that too without consultation with its members.

We believe that proprietary standards go against the interests the government, which as the primary consumer of the standards would have to pay royalties and would face vendor lock-in, of small and medium enterprises, which provide direct and indirect services to the government, since they would be required to invest in those closed standards to service the government, and most of all, of the citizens of India.

Based on that view, we have noted four deficiencies in version 2 of the draft policy: the possibility of following the letter of policy while violating its spirit; the possibility of patenting and closed licensing of government-developed standards; that no framework provided for review or phasing out interim standards; and certain problematic definitions in the glossary to the policy.

All these points are elaborated upon in the comments we submitted to the Department of Information Technology.