



E- GOVERNANCE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE: BEST PRACTICES IN INDIA

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Abstract

E-governance has become the key to good-governance in a developing country like India. To be at par with developed countries, the Government of India had made out a plan to use Information Technology extensively in its operation to make more efficient and effective and also to bring transparency and accountability. However, for successful implementation of E-Governance, government officials have to realize that E-Governance is no longer a matter of choice, but an absolute need of the day. Cooperation from government officials and staff will be crucial in realizing the goals of modernizing this nation through E-Governance. While the developed countries have been able to benefit greatly from the wide use of Information Technology, many developing countries are still grasping to make sense of how IT fits into their problems. In every developing country, E-Governance has been talked about a lot, E-Governance refers to the process of automation for providing efficient and effective delivery of government services to the citizens.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology is one of the most democratic tools. For clear visibility, e-governance is essential. In our information rich environment, we need to find ways to improve information sharing. We have to change our perspective. In Indian perspective, things are yet to be changed. We are deprived from information and hence, the real motive of public service is never fulfilled. The country would prosper only if complete transparency and the flow of information is ensured by the government.

Much has been written about the applications of the advances in the field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to the field of Governance or public management. This application of ICT has brought about a new ray of hope, that of the potential benefits accruing out of these applications. India, even while carrying on with its stiff bureaucracy and a rigid governance structure, has been strangely at the forefront of this new development, especially among the South Asia nations particularly in India.

This paper attempts to showcase some projects that have taken off in the area of e-governance in India in the past few years. It not only analyses projects that have won accolades in the world forum but also smaller and relatively unsung initiatives that deserve attention at the both national and international levels. An attempt is made to address issues particularly relevant to Indian e-governance scenario, like relevant barriers, digital divide and above all implementation issues and challenges E-governance is beyond the scope of e-government. While e-government is defined as a mere delivery of government services and information to the public using electronic means, e-governance allows direct participation of constituents in government activities. E-governance is not just about government web site and e-mail. It is not just about service delivery over the Internet. It is not just about digital access to government information or electronic payments. ***It will change how citizens relate to governments as much as it changes how citizens relate to each other.*** It will bring forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of needs and responsibilities. E-governance will allow citizens to communicate with government, participate in the governments' policy-making and citizens to communicate each other. The e-governance will truly allow citizens to participate in the government decision-making process, reflect their true needs and welfare by utilizing e-government as a tool.

E-GOVERNANCE: A POWERFUL TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

In a country like India, where corruption has become a normal phenomenon, government fears to announce negative activities or publicize everything in fear from opposition and general public. The United Nations Millennium Declaration emphasized the role of democratic and participatory government in assuring the right of man and women to 'live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice'.

It also noted that good governance within each country is a prerequisite in 'making development a reality for everyone and to free the entire human race from want'. But it is a matter of shame for us even after 62 years of independence that we have not attained the status of a developed nation. This is because of our democratic system and government. The government has failed to provide all necessities required by people, especially all those who are still below poverty line. The poverty is increasing and so is hunger.



Experience demonstrates that without good governance, nationally or internationally, and an efficient, competent, professional, responsive and highly dedicated public service sustainable development and livelihood is jeopardized. The key role of any government is to work for the welfare of its people. For any successful government, the relation between government and public is must. There must be transparency in the system.

The “e” in e-Governance stands for ‘electronic’. Thus, e-Governance is basically associated with carrying out the functions and achieving the results of governance through the utilization of ICT (Information and Communications Technology). While Governance relates to safeguarding the legal rights of all citizens, an equally important aspect is concerned with ensuring equitable access to public services and the benefits of economic growth to all. It also ensures government to be transparent in its dealings, accountable for its activities and faster in its responses as part of good governance.

However, this would require the government to change itself – its processes, its outlook, laws, rules and regulations and also its way of interacting with the citizens. It would also require capacity building within the government and creation of general awareness about e-Governance among the citizens.

TYPES OF E-GOVERNANCE

- G2G: Government to Government
- G2C: Government to Citizen
- G2B: Government to Business
- G2E: Government to Employee

Some Initiatives in the same field

1. Government to Citizen (G2C) Initiatives

Computerization of Land Records: In collaboration with NIC. Ensuring that landowners get computerized copies of ownership, crop and tenancy and updated copies of Records of Rights (RoRs) on demand.

Bhoomi Project: Online delivery of Land Records. Self-sustainable e-Governance project for the computerized delivery of 20 million rural land records to 6.7 million farmers through 177 Government-owned kiosks in the State of Karnataka. Gyandoot: It is an Intranet-based Government to Citizen (G2C) service delivery initiative. It was initiated in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh in January 2000 with the twin objective of providing relevant information to the rural population and acting as an interface between the district administration and the people

Lokvani Project in Uttar Pradesh: Lokvani is a public-private partnership project at Sitapur District in Uttar Pradesh which was initiated in November, 2004. Its objective is to provide a single window, self-sustainable e-Governance solution with regard to handling of grievances, land record maintenance and providing a mixture of essential services.

Project FRIENDS in Kerala: FRIENDS (Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services) is a Single Window Facility providing citizens the means to pay taxes and other financial dues to the State Government. The services are provided through FRIENDS *Janasevana Kendrams* located in the district headquarters.

E-Mitra Project in Rajasthan: e-Mitra is an integrated project to facilitate the urban and the rural masses with maximum possible services related to different state government departments through Lokmitra-Janmitra Centers/Kiosks.

E-Seva (Andhra Pradesh): This project is designed to provide ‘Government to Citizen’ and ‘e-Business to Citizen’ services. The highlight of the eSeva project is that all the services are delivered online to consumers /citizens by connecting them to the respective government departments and providing online information at the point of service delivery.

Admission to Professional Colleges Common Entrance Test (CET): With the rapid growth in the demand as well as supply of professional education, the process of admission to these institutions became a major challenge in the early 1990s. Recourse was then taken to ICT to make the process of admission transparent and objective. One of the pioneering efforts was made by Karnataka. The State Government decided to conduct a common entrance test based on which admission to different colleges and disciplines was made.



2. Government to Business (G2B) Initiatives: e-Procurement Project in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat: To reduce the time and cost of doing business for both vendors and government. MCA 21: By the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The project aims at providing easy and secure online access to all registry related services provided by the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs to corporates and other stakeholders at any time and in a manner that best suits them.

3. Government to Government (G2G) Initiatives: *Khajane* Project in Karnataka: It is a comprehensive online treasury computerization project of the Government of Karnataka. The project has resulted in the computerization of the entire treasury related activities of the State Government and the system has the ability to track every activity right from the approval of the State Budget to the point of rendering accounts to the government.

Smart Gov (Andhra Pradesh): Smart Gov has been developed to streamline operations, enhance efficiency through workflow automation and knowledge management for implementation in the Andhra Pradesh Secretariat.

Health Programme

ICT for programme management has been undertaken by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in the Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) programme and the Ministry envisages a more comprehensive use of ICT including for Hospital Information Systems, supply chain management for drugs and vaccines, providing ICT tools to ASHA and ANM workers, programme management of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), etc through this MMP.

E-Panchayaths

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are saddled with the problems of inadequate physical and financial resources, technical capabilities and extremely limited computerization. As a result, the potential of PRIs as the preferred delivery channel for the schemes of State and Centre as well as for citizen services has not been fully realized. While some computerization efforts for PRIs have been made by NIC over the years, the e-Governance revolution sweeping the country has not touched the PRIs yet in significant measure. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India has therefore decided to take up the computerization of PRIs on a mission mode basis.

E- Courts

The e-Court Mission Mode Project (MMP) was conceptualized with a vision to transform the Indian judiciary by making use of technology. The project had been developed, following the report submitted by the e-Committee under Supreme Court on national policy & action plan on implementation of information communication tools in Indian judiciary.

FOLLOWING ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF E-GOVERNANCE

Speed: Technology makes communication speedier. Internet, Phones, Cell Phones have reduced the time taken in normal communication.

Cost Reduction: Most of the Government expenditure is appropriated towards the cost of stationary. Paper-based communication needs lots of stationary, printers, computers, etc. which calls for continuous heavy expenditure. Internet and Phones makes communication cheaper saving valuable money for the Government.

Transparency: Use of ICT makes governing process transparent. All the information of the Government would be made available on the internet. The citizens can see the information whenever they want to see. But this is only possible when every piece of information of the Government is uploaded on the internet and is available for the public to peruse. Current governing process leaves many ways to conceal the information from all the people. ICT helps make the information available online eliminating all the possibilities of concealing of information.

Accountability: Once the governing process is made transparent the Government is automatically made accountable. Accountability is answerability of the Government to the people. It is the answerability for the deeds of the Government. An accountable Government is a responsible Government.

Convenience: E-Government brings public services to citizens on their schedule and their venue.

Improved Customer Service: E-Government allows to redeploy resources from back-end processing to the front line of customer service.

Increased access to information: E-Government improves the accessibility of government information to citizens allowing it become an important resource in the making the decisions that affect daily life and so it helps in empowerment of citizens.



CHALLENGES FOR E GOVERNANCE

There are large numbers of potential barriers in the implementation of e-Governance. Some hindrance in the path of implementation, like security, unequal access to the computer technology by the citizen, high initial cost for setting up the e government solutions and resistance to change. Challenges identified as trust, resistance to change, digital divide, cost and privacy and security concerns.

The digital divide refers to the separation that exists between individuals, communities, and businesses that have access to information technology and those that do not have such access. Social, economic, infrastructural and ethno-linguistic indicators provide explanations for the presence of the digital divide.

Awareness can only help to bring users to that service delivery channel once. It cannot guarantee sustained use of the system unless the system is also designed in such a way as to deliver satisfactory outcome.

SPECIALISED AND CONVERGENT APPROACHES TO E-GOVERNANCE

As has been suggested at the end of the last section, an exclusive mainstreaming approach can result in us losing sight of the big picture. ICT based changes often impact at a systemic level. Over time, they can significantly transform the whole architecture of governance. Such a systemic change can work for what may be the highest, politically articulated, objectives of governance reform like decentralization, a rights based approach, right to information, community monitoring etc. or can work in the opposite direction. What may look like greatly improving efficiency may centralize power rather than decentralise it. New modes of service delivery that reduce costs may in fact be causing significant exclusion. Community may find services available at their doorstep, but, at the same time, processes of participation and monitoring may vanish or become even more remote.

E-governance is as political a process as any other area of governance reform, its techno-managerial 'neutral' projections notwithstanding. At every step, it may involve political trade-offs and therefore e-governance decisions should be guided by clear principles and policies, and subject to wide stakeholder consultations, and community monitoring and social audits at every stage. Decisions that have a very far-reaching impact on our governance systems are currently being taken, which can largely get hardwired in the near future. This will greatly constrain subsequent maneuverability with regard to our governance architecture and systems. Avoiding such an eventuality requires articulation of a clear e-governance policy, which is lacking at present.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the concept of e-governance has evolved in Indian scenario and how much it is required for transparency and accountability on the part of government and at the same time it is also a toll to increase the participation of people in policy making by empowering them with the right information at right time. The penetration of internet, telecommunication services in India has increased in the last decade and this gives a ray of hope to the citizens of India to fight with the long persisting problems of poverty, corruption, regional disparity and unemployment. But at the same time, due to slow pace of project completion, red-tape and resistance from the side of government employees and citizens too has not given the desired result. Any way e- governance policy and practices in India definitely improved service delivery and saved time and cost of citizen.

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