

E- GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India has been harnessing the benefits provided by the Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) to provide integrated governance, reach to the citizens faster, and provide efficient services and citizen empowerment through access to information. The aim is to redefine governance in the ICT age to provide SMART GOVERNANCE. This paper discusses the broad issues surrounding the readiness for E-Governance in India. Geographical, social, & economical disparities are the biggest barriers for full-fledged e-governance. Illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, security and privacy of personal and financial data are other constraints. It looks into the relationship and application of information, knowledge, information systems, and information and communication technologies in the process of government. This paper even discusses about the various initiatives that have been proved to be beneficial in different states of India.

INTRODUCTION

When we hear the term government services, a picture of piles of paper, long queues and procrastinating officials automatically crops up in our minds. It is true that as compared to the other countries, India is quite late in getting into the e-governance ecosystem. But, one must not forget that India is a huge country and we are talking about serving a population of more than 1 billion and other entities involving multiple agencies, stakeholder entities catering to over 35 languages and 150 dialects. Thus, implementing e-governance projects in India poses a greater challenge, but we are catching up.

E-government is the implementation of interactive and inter-organizational processes by electronic means. It has flourished its fragrance to major cities of many countries but still rural areas are not getting full benefits upto its extent. India is aiming to redefine governance in the ICT age to provide SMART GOVERNANCE. For this several initiatives have been taken at state & central level.

At central level, the government has promoted use of IT for managing its internal processes & has drawn up a minimum agenda of e-governance. Further departments have provision of 2 to 3 % of their annual budget to be spent on IT related activities.

E- Government (which is also known as e-Gov, digital government, online government or in certain context transformational government) refers to government's use of information technology to exchange information & services with citizens, businesses & other arms of

government & may be applied by legislature, judiciary or administration in order to improve internal functioning of the system.

The term E-Governance has different connotations:

- **E-Administration**—The use of ICT to modernize the state; the creation of data repositories for MIS, computerization of records.
- **E-Services**— The emphasis here is to bring the state closer to the citizens. Examples include provision of online services. E-administration and e-services together constitute what is generally termed e-government.
- **E-Governance**— The use of IT to improve the ability of government to address the needs of society.
- It includes the publishing of policy and program related information to transact with citizens. It extends beyond provision of on-line services and covers the use of IT for strategic planning and reaching development goals of the government.
- **E-Democracy**— The use of IT to facilitate the ability of all sections of society to participate in the governance of the state. The remit is much broader here with a stated emphasis on transparency, accountability and participation. Examples could include online disclosure policies, online grievance redress forums and e-referendums.

The **objective** of E-Governance involves access to government information and services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in a way that is focused on the needs of the citizens. E-Governance relies heavily on the effective use of Internet and other emerging technologies to receive and deliver information and services easily, quickly, efficiently and inexpensively. E-Governance helps simplify processes and makes access to government information easier. The other anticipated benefits of e-governance include efficiency in services, improvement in services delivery, standardization of services, better accessibility of services, and more transparency and accountability. It is convenient and cost-effective for the Government also in terms of data storage and access to the stored data. The government benefits from reduced duplication of work. In addition, the processes of data collection, analysis and audit are simplified, and become less tedious. Another cherished goal of e-governance is greater citizen participation in the governance of the country. In the context of the statement, a government may theoretically move more towards a true democracy with the proper application of e-governance. With increasing concern about the environment, e-governance has an important benefit. Online government services would lessen the need for hard copy

forms and thus produce significant savings in paper, contributing to a greener planet! E-governance holds advantages for the business community too, playing the role of a catalyst and a channel for e-business, a fact evidenced by developments in the US and Singapore. But perhaps the single-largest benefit of e-governance is its potential to give birth to an entire web-based economy.

How is E-Government important to the context of India? The answer may be found in the following lines quoted by **Dr APJ Abdul Kalam** the former President of India, “Delivery of services to citizens is considered a primary function of the government. In a democratic nation of over one billion people like India, e-Governance should enable seamless access to information and seamless flow of information across the state and central government in the federal set up. No country has so far implemented an e-Governance system for one billion people. It is a big challenge for us”.

E-Governance originated in India during the seventies with a focus on in-house government applications in the areas of defence, economic monitoring, planning and the deployment of ICT to manage data intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration, etc. The efforts of the National Informatics Center (NIC) to connect all the district headquarters during the eighties was a watershed. From the early nineties, e-governance has seen the use of IT for wider sectoral applications with policy emphasis on reaching out to rural areas and taking in greater inputs from NGOs and private sector as well. While the emphasis was initially on automation and computerization, later on forays began to be made into connectivity, networking, setting up systems for processing information and delivering services. At a micro level, this ranged from IT automation in individual departments, electronic file handling, access to entitlements, public grievance systems, service delivery for high volume routine transactions such as payment of bills, tax dues to meeting poverty alleviation goals through the promotion of entrepreneurial models and provision of market information. The thrust has varied across initiatives, with some focusing on enabling the citizen-state interface for various government services, and others focusing on bettering livelihoods.

SCOPE OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-Governance is the use of information and communication technologies to support good governance. It has the following main dimensions:

1. GOVERNMENT TO CITIZEN (G2C)

G2C will aim at connecting citizens to government by talking to citizens and supporting accountability, by listening to citizens and supporting democracy, and by improving public services. It will involve better services to the citizens through single point delivery mechanism and will involve areas like:

i) E-Citizen

Under e-citizen integrated service centres will be created. The purpose of these centres will be to take over the various customer services in due course. It will offer services like issue of Certificates, Ration Cards, Passports, Payment of Bills and taxes etc. These centres will become one-stop Government Shops for delivery of all services.

ii) E-Transport

The transport aspects that can be easily e-governed include: Registration of motor vehicles, Issue of driving licenses, Issue of plying permissions (Permits), Tax and fee collection through Cash and Bank Chillan's and Control of Pollution.

iii) E-Medicine

It will involve linking of various hospitals in different parts of the country and provide better medical services to the citizen.

iv) E-Education

E-Education will constitute various initiatives of educating the citizen and the Government with the various Information technologies

v) E-Registration

E-Governing the registration and transfer of the properties and stamp duty to be paid thereon will bring substantial reduction of paper work and reduce the duplicating of entries. Further the transparency in work will increase and the overall time of process registration will reduce.

Essentials for achievement

- Information for All
- Citizen Feedback
- Improving services

2. CONSUMER TO GOVERNMENT (C2G)

C2G will mainly constitute the areas where the citizen interacts with the Government. It will include areas like election when citizens vote for the Government; Census where he provides information about himself to the Government; taxation where he is paying taxes to the Government.

E-Democracy

The e-democracy is an effort to change the role of citizen from passive information giving to active citizen involvement. In an e-democracy the Government will be informing the citizen, representing the citizen and encouraging the citizen to vote, consulting the citizen and engaging the citizen in the Governance. Taking the citizens input about the various government policies by organizing an e-debate will further strengthen the e-democracy. The concept of e-debate is similar to chat over the Internet, wherein not only the citizens but also the political leaders contesting the elections participate. The citizens give their feedback about the various policies of the parties and particularly the manifesto of the party. The initiative will further strengthen the process by enhancing the representative role, improving accessibility of citizens to their elected members and developing the capacity of elected representatives to engage in e-government.

Essentials for achievement:

- Citizen Participation in government business & marketing research programs to carry out.

3. GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT (G2G)

This can also be referred as **e-Administration**. It will involve networking all Government offices so as to produce synergy among them. The major areas are:

i) E-Secretariat

Secretariat which is the seat of power has a lot of valuable information regarding the functioning of the State.

ii) E-Police

E-Police will help to built citizen confidence. There will be two databases- one of police personnel and the other of criminals. A database like this will help tap the criminals easily for all the police stations will have simultaneous access to their record. The module will also include G2C activities like online filing of FIR's, finding the case status of an FIR. Creating a database of Lost and Found can assist further lost and found of valuables and individuals.

iii) E-Court

In such a system the use of IT in the areas like recording of court proceedings, high resolution remote video to identify fraudulent documents, live fingerprints scanning and verification, remote probation monitoring, electronic entry of reports and paper work will further speed up the court proceedings.

iv) State Wide Networks

This will involve linking all the departments.

Essentials for achievement

- Cutting Expenditure
- Organize around outcomes, not tasks
- Managing process performance
- Establish a network use databases, tele communications networks, and standardized processing systems
- Delegate activities and empower the people

4. GOVERNMENT TO BUSINESS (G2B)**• E-Taxation**

This will constitute the various services a business house needs to get from the Government, which includes getting licenses etc. In a similar scenario, it can also flow from a business house to the Government as in the case of procurements, from such business houses by the Government. This will become a B2G service.

Essentials for achievement

- Standards for Electronic Transactions or E-Commerce needs to be built
- secure payment mechanism
- Public key Infrastructure is required for secure and authentic transactions

HOW CITIZENS ARE BENEFITED?

E-governance is the application of information & communication technologies to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of informational & transactional exchanges with in government, between govt. & govt. agencies of National, State, Municipal & Local levels, citizen & businesses, and to empower citizens through access & use of information.

E Governance has proved beneficial in many ways by the different initiatives of the government in different states of India whether it's a big city or a small town.

Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad and Secunderabad and Ranga Reddy district) Launched on the 25th of August 2001, electronic seva (e-Seva) which is an improved version of TWINS project launched in 1999, but these services are mainly popular only in urban areas not in

rural areas. E-Seva centres offer 118 different services like payment of utility bills/taxes, registration of births/deaths, registration of applications for passports, issue of births/deaths certificates, filing of Sales Tax returns, Trade licenses of MCH, B2C services like payments of Tata Teleservices, Reliance, sale of Airtel Magic cards. These services can be availed at any counter in the centre and at any place in the city. 21 more services like railway reservations, TTD services, bill payments of Airtel, Hutch etc. are in the pipe line. Though the e-Seva had a very lukewarm response from the citizens, the initiative has picked up tremendous confidence on the way and has so far netted a thumping collection of close to Rs 2,000 crore (February-end 2003) from a meager collection of Rs 43 lakh in August 2001. The government has rolled out the project to other parts of the state, including rural areas like the West Godavari district.

In Andhra Pradesh one more project namely CARD (Computer Aided Administration of Registration department) is designed to eliminate the maladies affecting the conventional registration system by introducing electronic delivery of all registration services. CARD was initiated to meet objectives to demystify the registration process, bring speed, efficiency, consistency and reliability, substantially improve the citizen interface etc. Six months following the launch of the CARD project, about 80% of all land registration transactions in AP were carried out electronically. Since 60% of the documents, Encumbrance Certificates (ECs) and certified copies relate to agricultural properties, the success of the CARD project has great benefit for the rural farming community. CARD is operational at 387 Sub-registrar offices in the entire state of Andhra Pradesh since 1998.

In Kerala FRIENDS Project for IT mission counters handle 1,000 types of payment bills originating out of various PSUs. The payments that citizens can make include utility payments for electricity and water, revenue taxes, license fees, motor vehicle taxes, university fees, etc. Firewalls safeguard data from manipulation. FRIENDS i.e. Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services is providing services exactly according to its name. The application has provisions for adding more modules and for rolling back incorrect entries without affecting the database even at the user level. One important feature of FRIENDS is a provision for adding more modules and a queue management system.

The government is not taking only urban section of the country as beneficiaries from e-governance. They are also keeping in mind the benefits of rural people. Like in Madhya Pradesh a project named Gyandoot which is proved itself a milestone for the rural people. It Gyandoot project was initiated in January 2000 by a committed group of civil servants in consultation with various gram panchayats in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. Gyandoot

is a low cost, self-sustainable, and community-owned rural Intranet system (Soochnalaya) that caters to the specific needs of village communities in the district. Thirty-five such centres have been established since January 2000 and are managed by rural youth selected and trained from amongst the unemployed educated youth of the village. They run the Soochanalayas (organized as Kiosks) as entrepreneurs (Soochaks); user charges are levied for a wide range of services that include agricultural information, market information, health, education, women's issues, and applications for services delivered by the district administration related to land ownership, affirmative action, and poverty alleviation. Kiosks are connected to the Intranet through dial-up lines, which are soon to be replaced by wireless connections using Cor DECT technology. The Soochanalayas have been equipped with Pentium multimedia color computer along with dot matrix printers. The user interface is menu based with information presented in the local Hindi language and the features of the Gyandoot software are continuously being updated.

So we can say in current scenario not only urban but rural people are also included in the list of beneficiaries from e – governance though urban people being more used to of IT are getting more benefits as compared to rural people.

ISSUES

Funding Funding is the foremost issue in e-Governance initiatives. The projects that are part of the e-governance initiatives need to be funded either through the Government sector or through the private sector. For the private sector to step into the funding activity their commercial interests need to be ensured. The projects can be built either on BOO (Built Own Operate) or BOOT (Built Own Operate Transfer) basis. Also the Government interest of Value Addition in services also needs to be taken care of while transferring the services to private sector. Advertising, sharing of Government information etc could be a few revenue generators for the Government.

Management of Change delivery of Government services through the electronic media including EDI, Internet and other IT based technologies would necessitate procedural and legal changes in the decision and delivery making processes. It demands fundamental changes in Government decision management. The employees need to be delegated more authority Reengineering process needs to be carried out for the same. This will involve training of the personnel at all levels, more so, at the lower rung of Government management

organizations. There will also be a loss of vested interests and power amongst the legislature and the executive, which may lead, to resistance to change.

Privacy The privacy of the citizen also needs to be ensured while addressing the issues. Whenever a citizen gets into any transaction with a Government agency, he shells out lot of personal information, which can be misused by the private sector. Thus, the citizen should be ensured that the information flow would pass through reliable channels and seamless network.

Authentication The identity of citizens requesting services needs to be verified before they access the services . Here digital signature will play an important role in delivery of such services. But the infrastructure needed to support them is very expensive and requires constant maintenance. Hence a pertinent need still survives, compelling the authorities to ensure the authenticity in their transactions thereby gaining absolute trust and confidence of the citizen.

Interoperability A major design issue for integrated service delivery sites is, how to capture data in a Web-based form and transfer it to an agency's systems for processing and sharing that information in a common format. Infact the interoperation of various state Governments, the various ministries within a state Government is a critical issue. Further how the various islands of automation will be brought together and built into one is another key issue of e-Governance.

Use of local languages The access of information must be permitted in the language most comfortable to the public user, generally the local language.

Standardization Defining the standards for the various Government services is another issue that needs to be addressed. The standards need to be worked out not only for the technologies involved but also for issues like naming of websites to creating E-Mail addresses.

Technology Issues A number of organizations, both in the Centre and the States, have taken commendable initiatives to develop hardware and software platforms to address the challenges offered by e-Governance. At the central level in particular, the C-DAC, CMC and a number of others are noteworthy. The e-Governance initiative would have to address these Technology Issues/Objectives by identifying the appropriate hardware platforms and software application packages for cost-effective delivery of public services. This knowledge repository should be widely available through appropriate Demo- Mechanisms. Offering a basket of these models to the State departments, both in the Center and the State, could be suitably customized as per location and work specific requirements.

STRATEGIES FOR E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

To build technical infrastructure across India India lacks a full fledged ICT framework for implementation of e-governance. Complete implementation of E-governance in India will include building technical Hardware and Software infrastructure. It will also include better and faster connectivity options. Newer connectivity options will include faster Broadband connections and faster wireless networks such as 3G and 4G. The infrastructure must be built by Government, Private Sector as well as individuals. Infrastructure will also include promotion of Internet Cafes, Information and Interactive Kiosks. However while building technical infrastructure, disabled persons must also be considered. The technology implemented, shall incorporate the disabled persons.

To build institutional capacity Apart from building technical infrastructure, the Government needs to build its institutional capacity. This will include training of Government employees, appointment of experts. Along with the Government has also to create an Expert database for better utilization of intellectual resources with it. Apart from this, the Government has to equip the departments with hi-technology and has also to setup special investigating agency.

To build legal infrastructure For better implementation of e-governance, the Government will need to frame laws which will fully incorporate the established as well as emerging technology. Changing technology has changed many pre-established notions; similarly the technology is growing and changing rapidly. It is important, that the Government makes laws which incorporate the current technology and has enough space to incorporate the changing future technology. These IT laws need to be flexible to adjust with the rapidly changing technology. Currently India has only the IT Act, 2000 which is mainly an E-Commerce legislation. India has also modified many laws to include electronic technology; however it is not sufficient to cover e-governance completely.

To build judicial infrastructure Overall technological awareness in current Judges is very low. The judiciary as a whole needs to be trained in new technology, its benefits and drawbacks and the various usages. The judiciary may alternatively appoint new judges with new judges and setup special Courts to deal with the matters relating to ICT. The Government can also setup special tribunals to deal with matters relating with ICT.

To make all information available online The Government has to publish all the information online through websites. This can be facilitated through centralized storage of information, localization of content and content management. The information of government

is public information; therefore the citizens are entitled to know every piece of information of the Government, because the Government is of the People, by the People and for the People.

To popularize E-governance Literacy percentage in India is alarming. The whole world is moving towards e-governance, but India still lacks in the literacy department. The people need to be educated and made e-literate for e-governance to flourish. There are very few e-literate people in India is very low. The Government needs to campaign for e-governance, increase people's awareness towards e-governance. Government can only encourage people to go online if it can make people feel comfortable with e-governance. This can be done through educating the people about the advantages of e-governance over physical governance. This can also be done through raising awareness of the leaders who can motivate the people to go online.

Centre-State Partnership Indian setup is quasi-federal. Therefore Centre-State and inter-state cooperation is necessary for smooth functioning of the democratic process. This cooperation is also necessary for successful implementation of e-governance. This cooperation shall extend to Centre-state, inter-state and inter-department relationships. For the same the Government can setup a Central Hub like the current Government of India portal, for accessing the information of all the organs of the central government and also all the state government. The states can cooperate with the Centre to create a National Citizen Database.

CONCLUSION

In spite of poor infrastructure, poverty, illiteracy, language dominance and all the other reasons India has number of award winning e-governance projects. A long term and a short-term strategy for E-Governance implementation is the need of the hour. For successful implementation Standards, Infrastructure, Legislations, Strategy all needs to be in place. It also requires establishment of various institutions under the Ministry of Information Technology. Experts states that it is better to first create strong administration, to bring all government employees under confidence, only then we can think to bring e- governance, to connect each & every person to E- Governed world and to provide basic facilities to the citizens while sitting at home.

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