E-GOVERNANCE: A KEY TO GOOD GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

E-governance is not really about technology. It is about people, processes, and results – using information and communications technologies (ICT) to improve the transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of public institutions. Governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a community's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which community members and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.

The challenge for all societies is to create a system of good governance that promotes supports and sustains human development – especially for the poorest and the most marginal. Good governance is among other things participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable and it promotes the rule of law, ensures the political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society. One goal of good governance is to enable an organization to do its work and fulfill its mission. In this context, this paper makes an attempt to explore how far e-governance is useful for achieving good governance in India.

INTRODUCTION

Public Administration is concerned with the activities of the three branches of Government namely, Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, at national level, state level and Grass-root levels (district/sub-district levels) in the Country. Good Governance means providing opportunities and proper delivery of goods and services to the people in a fair, just, effective, responsible and open way. The concept of Accountability means government and its institutions must be duty bound to honestly account to the public and the media, in relation to their performance in carrying out their responsibilities.

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efficiency, and effectiveness of public institutions. The most obvious is simply putting an end to the sea of paper documents that flood many government offices, and storing information in digital form where it can be easily accessed and transferred to wherever it's needed. Of late, an increasing number of countries worldwide allocate significant resources in e-government initiatives in order to modernize the public sector. Among the objectives of these initiatives is the improvement of service provision to citizens and businesses, by employing information and communication technologies (ICT). Improved service provisions stands for increased quality, faster provision, accessibility of services anywhere and anytime independently of the government agencies offering them, and provision in terms of the needs of the respective customer at a low cost rate. One-stop government is a concept of e-government that strives for implementing these demands. One-stop government refers to the integration of public services from a customer's point of view. One-stop government is becoming a powerful driving vision for e-government initiatives worldwide. It suggests that customers may request any public service through a single point of access using the communication channel of their choice (e.g. citizen center, call center, Internet Cafes, etc.

E-governance is beyond the scope of e-government. While e-government is defined as a mere delivery of

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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[1] (Neetu Katyal).

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. Introduction of e-governance is a key to make information technology (IT) relevant to ordinary citizens in India where a large numbers of population are poor and a digital divide is a significant problem. E-governance will allow ordinary people to constantly interface with the government in both local and central level on various matters. E-governance must be a high priority for India, as it is the only means of taking IT to the masses.

EVOLUTION OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The major events, which facilitated the development of e-governance[2] (Nir Kshetri) in India, are as follows:

*   The government introduces new policies for electronics, software, telecommunication and other emerging industries (1984)
*   Formulation of National Association of Software and Services Company (NASSCOM)
*   Establishment of Software Technology Parks (STP) eg: Tidal Park in Chennai
*   IP connection with UVnet Technologies in US (1989) and connected to the US National Science Foundation Net (NSFNET) 1990
*   Economic reforms started (1991)
*   National IT task force established (1998) and recommended 3% reservation of the budget for bringing IT to masses
*   Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) launches a website to combat corruption
*   IT act 2000 was passed by the Parliament
*   2001: a year of e-governance declared by Ministry of Information Technology
*   Appointed 'Adjudicating Officers' (AO) under the Mumbai High Court brought pressure on the government (March, 2003)

In the year 2005, the Government of India has formulated the National E Governance Plan (NeGP), which consists of 25 Central, State and Integrated Projects to be implemented in Mission Mode along with 8 support components for rapid introduction of e-Governance in the country[3](Sarita Rani). The Plan envisions providing all government services in an integrated manner at the doorstep of the citizen at affordable cost and aims to radically change the way governments interact with citizens and businesses and deliver services. Currently, most government offices still function with the colonial

legacy handed to us by the British, which was designed to handle very few citizen government interactions on a daily basis, as opposed to the millions of interaction which are necessitated today. The result of course is delays, opaqueness, and a lot of discretion at the hand of a government employee. The aspiration levels of the government as expressed in the Plan mean that governments at the National, State and local level would have to radically change the way they function and government employees would have to learn a new way of doing business. The Technical and managerial implications of such an initiative are enormous and currently most government departments at the national State and local level are woefully in-equipped to meet this challenge.

The needs of managing such a programme at the State level to deal with issues relating to standards, security, ways of optimising costs through the use of common core infrastructure like networks, data centres and service delivery front ends requires not only a vision at the highest levels of the State Government, it also requires capacities at various levels of government to be able to implement this ambitious programme successfully, and in a time bound manner. The Government has recognised that the first step in being able to implement this plan needs capacities to be built, at the State level, where the maximum citizen government interface occurs. Considering the fact that most departments do not even have a department of Information Technology, or if they do it usually consists of 2-3 persons, who often have very little expertise to deal with the complexities of the task at hand, it is here that first capacities need to be built. Accordingly the Government of India is funding a capacity building exercise across all States through the funds made available by the Planning Commission under the head of Additional Central Assistance to States[4] (Pandey.A.B).

The guidelines formulated by the Government recognise the fact that not only are the States at different levels of e-Governance, they may also have different aspirations and priorities. Accordingly the guidelines are based on the premise that the highest level of leadership at the State level would have to see value in e-Governance and that an e- Governance Plan, particularly one as ambitious as the NeGP, requires political buy in at the highest level. The guidelines highlight the fact that it is the political leadership, which would have to provide the leadership and vision to ensure the successful implementation of the various initiatives in the State. It is also recognised that while the buy in at the highest level is essential if the plan is to success, this is not a sufficient condition for its success. Thus what is needed is an optimal mix of knowledge and authority to ensure the success of this plan. It is also recognised that currently most States do not have any institutional structure in place, which could handle the implementation of e-Governance initiatives across the State. The guidelines also acknowledge that currently, the skill sets needed to ensure effective implementation do not fully exist within most State Governments and that there is a need to bring

in expertise from the private sector and marry it to the domain expertise from within government, thereby creating a resource which would be adequate to meet the requirements of the tasks at hand.

HURDLES IN IMPLEMENTING E-GOVERNANCE

However, implementation of e-governance architecture is a formidable task[5] (Kiran Bedi et al). The hurdles in implementing e-governance are the following:

Lack of clarity of objectives

Lack of planning and unclear objectives result in poorly designed systems and cost overruns. A clear motive and understading of the benefits of computerization is required. E-governance initiatives should be financially self-sustained.

Inadequacy of Funds

Though funds are available in plenty under various heads, project cost underestimations are common, resulting in unfinished projects and highter maintenance costs. Hence, careful funds flow planning for short and long terms should be done.

Human Resources Aspect

Dearth of quality IT personnel is another problem. The existing manpower mostly is not IT-ready to be deployed into e-governance projects. Training costs might be high due to geographical spread. A favorable element is availability of versatile manpower who can be relocated, or re-trained to other functions.

Leadership and Change management

The e-governance implementation leader should be strong in project management and human resource management. More than technical issues it is management of change that is of prime concern.
A project manager at Computer aided Administration of Registration Department (Andhra Pradesh) describes his distribution of time and effort as below:
- 45% - Change Management
- 35% - Re-engineering of Processes
- 15-20% - Software
- 5% - Other factors

This clearly proves that change management and process reengineering play a vital role in e-governance implementation.

Lack of Catalysts

Evolution of e-governance evangelists is essential for handholding the e-governance effort in the initial period. They act as catalysts to accelerate acceptance process among users and to ensure rapid deployment internally, by
- Facilitating acceptance
- Motivating the front-end service people
- Create an awareness and curiosity among the users by explaining the benefits.

An ideal catalyst would be a computer savvy person who has power and authority in the governmental system and high credibility among service department and user

communities. However, awareness is increasing in Tamilnadu because of efforts of IAS officers like Mr.Umashankar, who implemented e-governance in Tiruvarur district. The catalytic role of media to create awareness among public should not be underestimated.

Lack of coordination

Lack of coordination across administrative and policy boundaries will affect program effectiveness and program efficiency.

Internet and System Readiness of the e-governance eco-system

Lack of cost efficient and technically superior Internet backhaul is a drawback. Use of existing obsolete equipment that cannot support recent Internet technologies is a constraint. Separate Internet backbone for individual departments might prove costly. Instead, if various departments collaborate, the cost is shared.
Database and internal processes should be reorganized to facilitate easy computerization. The applications should be future-proof. Back up and disaster recovery should be built in.

Service orientation and Motivation of Staff and Intermediaries

Customer orientation of the existing manpower is critical. Low productivity and lack of professionalism and work ethics will prove an indirect bottleneck to implementation. E-governance eliminates corruption practices in the hallowed portals of Taluk office and the like. Hence, miscreants could moot anti-establishment activities to resist change. Use of motivated IT-savvy intermediaries can help to bridge the gap between the computer-illiterate rural masses and e-governance. The government should motivate staff and entrepreneurs to shift to rural pockets and startup activities as intermediaries.

Citizenry Readiness

At least moderate literacy levels are required to derive benefit out of e-governance process. Poor attitude towards new technology and widespread poverty are also major bottlenecks. Computer-savvy citizens and willingness to try out new system will help easy acceptance. Cities are early adopters but acceptance and usage in villages will increase only after persistent follow-ups and training, demonstrations, free trials etc.

However, it is to be noted that good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development, actions must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality. Good Governance opens new intellectual space. It provides a concept that allows us to discuss the role of government in coping with public issues and the contribution that other players may make. It facilitates reflection on strategies that may be adopted by a society in instances of government incapacity. It opens one's mind to the possibility that groups in society other than government may have to play a stronger role addressing problems. It is accident that much of the discourse about governance is directed toward the subject

of partnerships among different sectors of society, and toward public participation in decision-making. Finally, it invites us to consider to what extent the attainment of desired social and economic outcomes may depend upon governance arrangements, and to ask which kinds of arrangements result in what kinds of impacts.

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