E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA – PROBLEMS AND ACCEPTABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Governments and public sector organizations around the world are facing to reform their public administration organizations and deliver more efficient and cost effective services, as well as better information and knowledge to their stakeholders. E-governance is the effective use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) to improve the system of governance that is in place, and thus provide better services to the Citizens. e-Governance is considered as a high priority agenda in India, as it is considered to be the only means of taking IT to the "Common Public". Developments in e-Governance provide opportunities to harness the power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to make the business of governance inexpensive, qualitatively responsive, and truly encompassing. In this paper we discuss about the basic problems and acceptability of e-Governance in India.
Keywords: ICT, e-Governance, accountability, acceptability.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The actual term governance comes from an ancient Greek word, kebernon, which means to steer. In current usage, to govern means to steer, to control, and to influence from a position of authority. According to Former Secretary General of the United Nations: Kofi A. Annan, "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development." Therefore, governance is an exercise of power for steering social systems, as well as a process by which organizations are directed, controlled, and held to account to their society. It is a set of the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness, supervision and accountability of an organization. E-Governance involves new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding policy and investment, new ways of accessing education, new ways of listening to citizens and new ways of organizing and delivering information and services. e-Governance is defined as "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". In other words e-Governance is the implementation and delivery of government services through the information communication technology to provide Transparent, Effective, Efficient, Responsive and Accountable governance to the society.

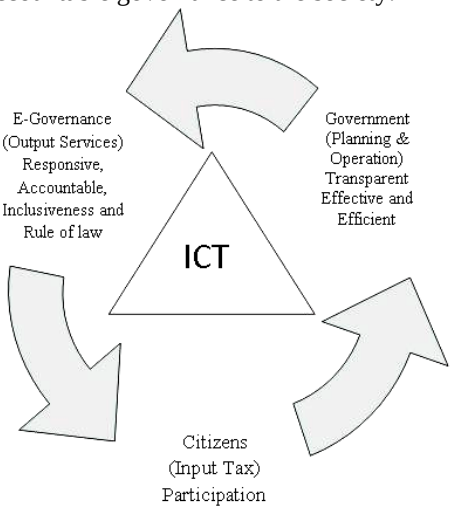

Figure 1: Conceptual model of e-Governance

Good governance has eight major characteristics i.e. *Participation, Transparency, Effectiveness*

and efficiency, Responsiveness, Accountability, Equity and inclusiveness, Rule of Law, as in [2] for the effective and efficient governance. If all these properties revolve around the ICT will explains innovative definition of e-governance as in figure1. This means e-Governance has all the above properties as well as innovative Information and communication Technology for the effective and efficient governance in any sector which assures that corruption is to be minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsible to the present and future needs of society. A conceptual model for e-Governance is shown in figure-1 which explains about the interrelation between citizens, government and the services accessed by the citizen's through information and communication technology followed by the major characteristics of good governance.

2. E-GOVERNANCE: MAJOR ISSUES IN INDIA

Countries like India people are poor and infrastructures are not up to the mark. Under such condition it becomes very difficult to provide government services to the people. There are number of reasons for that-

2.1 Poverty: Internet access is too expensive for the poor in developing countries like India. Installing the necessary telephone lines needed for internet or email access is equally unaffordable in most poor countries. In India, each telephone connection may cost as much as Rs30,000 in urban areas and Rs70,000–80,000 in villages, which is unaffordable by most low income families. It is also very expensive to gain internet access in India: it may cost about Rs25 per hour in cities and Rs150–1200 per hour in rural areas [3].

Table 1: ICT usage in various countries

Country	PC's /100	Telephone lines/100	Internet Users/100
India	2.76	3.37	6.93
Canada	94.58	55.48	76.77
UK	81.21	55.43	66.15
USA	79.89	53.35	71.94
Australia	75.70	47.05	54.19
Singapore	72.61	41.91	69.99
New Zealand	54.15	40.83	80.41

Source: International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators 2008 (September 2008 update)

2.2. Technical illiteracy: There is general lack of technical literacy as well as literacy in countries like India, the correlation between education level and use of electronic means or Internet and other ICT means are quite significant, for instance about usage of ICT is given above in the table1 [4].

2.3 Language Dominance: The dominance of English on the internet constrains the access of non-English-speaking population. It is found that of all the web pages in the world, about 84 percent are in English followed by 4.5 percent in German, 3.1 percent in Japanese, 1.8 percent in French, 1.2 percent in Spanish, 1.1 percent in Swedish, 1 percent in Italian and less than 1 percent in all other languages [5]. In the case of India, 95 percent of the population does not speak English [6]. Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over these communication channels, computers and the internet are quite useless in Indian villages, and the use of local languages does little to alleviate the problem due to the poor literacy level mentioned earlier.

2.4 Unawareness: There is general lack of awareness regarding benefits of e-governance as well as the process involved in implementing successful G-C, G-G and G-B projects. The administrative structure is not geared for maintaining, storing and retrieving the governance information electronically.

2.5 Lack of Participations of Society, Public and Private sectors: Designing of any application requires a very close interaction between the govt. department and the agency developing the solutions. At present the users in govt. departments do not contribute enough to design the solution architecture. Consequently the solution developed and implemented does not meet the requirements of an e-governance project and hence does not get implemented.

2.6 Inequality: Inequality in gaining access to public sector services between various sections of citizens, especially between urban and rural communities, between the educated and illiterate, and between the rich and poor.

2.7 Infrastructure: Lack of necessary infrastructure like electricity, internet, technology and ways of communications as in Table1 will affect the speed which delays the implementation.

2.8 Impediments for the Re-Engineering process: Implementation of e-governance projects requires

lots of restructuring in administrative processes, redefining of administrative procedures and formats which finds the resistance in almost all the departments at all the levels.

2.9 Operational Reluctance: The psychology of government servants is quite different from that of private sectors. Traditionally the government servants have derived their sustenance from the fact that they are important repositories of government data. Thus any effort to implement Documents Management and workflow technologies or bringing out the change in the system is met with resistance from the government servants.

3. E-GOVERNANCE: ACCEPTABILITY IN INDIA

e-Governance is a way to solve the social as well as economical problems exist in the developing countries like India. Deepak Ghaisas, former Chairman NASSCOM Product Forum and CEO India Operations estimate "23 percent of government spending goes on defense, while 46 percent of it on governance. If a small fraction is spent on technology, namely to streamline the processes. It will really boost the domestic tech industry" [7].

According to WEF Global Information Technology Report [8], India ranks 24th out of 134 countries with 5.38 score in accessing and overall priority of ICT. Therefore there is tremendous potential for e-Governance to provide exponentially benefit to their citizens and maximize return on government investment. Which represents the growth of e-Governance in India is quite encouraging.

3.1 Government Initiatives:

The policy-makers in India tend to justify the adoption and expansion of e-governance on the grounds that it costs less, reduces waste, promotes transparency, eliminates corruption, generates possibilities to resolve rural poverty and inequality, and guarantees a better future for citizens [9] in other words government tends to portray e-governance as the panacea for all ranges of problems confronting India, therefore Indian Government has set the target of delivering at least 25 percent of its dealings and services electronically [10]. To achieve the target Indian Government has decided to boost computer density by making computers easily affordable; to increase connectivity by improving the telecommunication based on optical fiber networks.

Indian government has taken major initiatives to setup institutions for making policy, control and account deployment of e-Governance which will provide effective and efficient services.

* One of the most important initiatives undertaken by the central government is the Information Technology Act (2000), which is to regulate cyberspace and define offences and penalties related to information technology (IT) such as tampering with computer source documents, breach of confidentiality and privacy, publication of false digital signatures and so on.
* Freedom of Information Bill that requires all public authorities to maintain information and records, and appoint Public Information Officers to assist citizens in gaining access to such information [11].
* Ministry of Information Technology (MIT) [12] plays a crucial role in facilitating e-governance by reinforcing knowledge based enterprises, encouraging coordination among users, adopting procedures based on international standards, promoting the internet and introducing it education.
* The Government has also decided to establish a National Institute of Smart Government [13] in order to enhance capacity-building in e-Governance at all administrative levels.
* Centre for Electronic Governance to promote IT and e-governance [14] in the country which is to identify the appropriate forms of ICT necessary for better service delivery, to conduct training for generating it awareness among government officials and to help state governments in implementing policies and reforms based on best e-governance practices.
* NeGP National e-Governance Projects (NeGP) [15] make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man. Indian Government has committed around 23 Crores for overall development for five year plan in 2006. In addition, various ministries and departments organizes summit, other mechanism to raise awareness programs to make varieties of information available to citizens through electronic links.

3.2 Status of e-Governance in India

e-Governance will able to provide the government services to the common man in a very cost effective manner. Following are few successful stories of e-governance in India:

Bhoomi – Automation of Land Records [16] (State Government of Karnataka) It provides computerized Record of Rights Tenancy & Crops (RTC) - needed by farmer to obtain bank loans, settle land disputes etc. It has also ensured increased transparency and reliability, significant reduction in corruption, exploitation and oppression of farmers. This project has benefited 20 million rural land records covering 6.7 million farmers.

Key Characteristics: Bhoomi facilitates computerization of entire 20 million records of land ownership of 6.7 million farmers.

***** It is uniquely designed for Karnataka State.

* Regional language dominance i.e Kannada.

* Generally target all citizens of the state.

* 177 taluks and 203 kiosks are developed for supporting the Bhoomi project.

Benefits: Kiosks (Bhoomi Center) provide RTC online at a very nominal cost of Rs. 15/- only. Efficiency for getting records of right is very high; it will just take only 5 to 30 min. whereas old system will take around 3 to 30 days. Mutation will takes place within 35 days whereas in old manual system it will take minimum of 200 days. Land record distribution is very high (Nearly 14 million records). Number of mutation per year is 1.6 million which is very high in comparison to old system.

Acceptability Reason: Easy & Fast access of land records, High efficiency of record of right, fast mutation, Bhoomi provides high reliability of records, regional language dominance which will allow citizens to participate and access information with a very nominal cost.

CARD – Registration Project [17] (State Government of Andhra Pradesh) Computer-Aided Administration of Registration Department (CARD) impacting 10 million citizens over a period of 3 years. It has completed registration of 2.8 million titles with title searches made in 1.4 million cases. The system ensures transparency in valuation of property and efficient document management system. The estimated saving of 70 million man-hours of citizen time valued at US$ 35 mil (investment in CARD - US$ 6million). Similar initiatives in other states like SARITA (State Government of Maharashtra) STAR (State Government of Tamil Nadu), etc. have further built upon this initiative. CARD was one of the ten finalists in the International Innovation awards program instituted by the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management.

Key Characteristics: The CARD project aimed at the complete computerization of the land registration process in AP. National Registration Act of 1908 did not make provision for the use of computers for registration purposes but Government of Andhra Pradesh amended the rule and allowing for the use of electronic devices for the land registration process.

Benefits: Within short span of three years, nearly 90% of registration transactions performed electronically in Andhra Pradesh.

Acceptability Reason: CARD Project changes the process of registration of legal documents at 214 offices in the State of Andhra Pradesh. The CARD project was well accepted by the citizens because of its quality and turnaround time for the registration process.

Gyandoot: Intranet in Tribal District of Dhar [18] (State Government of Madhya Pradesh) This project offers e-governance services including online registration of applications, rural e-mail facility, village auction site etc. It also provides services such as Information on Mandi (farm products market) rates, On-line public grievance redressal, caste & income certificates and Rural Market (Gaon ka Bazaar). It was winner of Stockholm challenge IT Award 2000.

Key Characteristics: It provides number of information and solutions for the citizens.

* It will provide information about cost of produced crops, local and other auction centers at a fee of Rs. 5/-only.

* Provides information about land records to be given on the spot at a fee of Rs. 15/-.

* Provides application for domicile, income, caste can be sent through e-mail at a cost of Rs. 10/-.

* Grievance for poor quality seeds/ fertilizers/drinking water/functioning or non-functioning of schools or panchayats, village committee etc can be logged at a cost of Rs.10/-.

* Auction facility for land, Machinery or any durable commodity at a fee of Rs.25/- for 3 months.

* Provides data regarding the families below poverty line.

Benefits: Farmers will be facilitated by the Gyandoot by providing the appropriate price for their crop which minimizes the role of mediators, fast and easy access of various types of forms, land records etc. Villagers can participate in the decision making of various functioning bodies for their welfare by effective grievance redressal.

Acceptability Reason: Citizens can access number of facilities and information on one stop shop at a very nominal cost by using e-Governance.

Vahan & Sarathi: Vehicle registration, permit driving license project [19] (State Government of Tamil Nadu) The software developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC) for use at Regional Transport Offices is a workflow system to carry out the activities using Computers. Vahan is for processing all transactions related to Vehicles and Sarathi is for processing Driving License and related activities. Vahan can be used to issue Registration Certificate, Fitness certificate and Permits. Sarathi can be used to issue a Learner's License, Permanent Driving License and Conductor License to the applicant. The system was implemented on pilot basis in RTO Chennai (North). The system was then approved for implementation in all RTOs in Tamil Nadu. Vahan & Sarathi Systems have been implemented in 71 offices.

Key Characteristics: There are number of services offered by the Vahan Project:-
* Registration of Vehicle.
* Issue & Modification and Hypothecation in RC.
* Transfer/Surrender/Cancellation of RC.
* Issue, modification or cancellation of Permit.
* Issue of NOC

Services provided by Sarathi Project are:-
* Issue and modification of Learner's License.
* Issue and modification of Driving License.
* Issue and modification of Conductor's License.

Benefits: Online availability of complete vehicle information. Monitors selling and purchasing of vehicle, Transfer of vehicle, address modification etc becomes very fast and easy.

Acceptability Reason: Collection of fee and taxes of registration, license, and permit are fast and efficient also minimizes corruption by the use of e-Governance.

These are few successful e-Governance projects in India and their characteristics which show the development of e-Governance is significant. Table2 shows the readiness of Indian government which helps improves the acceptability of e-Governance in India.

Table 2: Indian Government readiness

Govt. programs promoting use of ICT	Rank out of 134
Govt. Success in ICT promotion	23
Availability of Govt. services online	49
ICT use and Govt. Efficiency	33
Presence of ICT in Govt. Offices	67
e-Participation Index(quality, usefulness, relevance)	47

Source: World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey 2007, 2008

4. CONCLUSION:

In spite of poor infrastructure, poverty, illiteracy, language dominance and all the other reasons India has number of award wining e-governance projects. Effective promotion schemes by the Indian government will also a boosting factor to provide quality services to their citizens as in table 2, which means there is huge potential for the development of e-governance in various sectors.
According to Skoch consultancy New Delhi [20], 81% citizens report reduction in corruption, 95% find cost of e-governance affordable and 78% favors fast of delivery of services.
Therefore we can say that e-Governance is the key to the "Good Governance" for the developing countries like India to minimize corruption, provides efficient and effective or quality services to their citizens.

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