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**YASHWANTRAO CHAVAN ACADEMY OF
DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION**

E - GOVERNANCE: Prospects and Challenges

R D Kumbhar

The concept of e-Governance has already made strides all over the world, including India. Besides speeding up the processes and reducing the workload, e-governance projects have set off other developments. Compared to the conventional system, e-Governance has helped in checking corruption, and generated 100-fold increase in the revenue in some areas, where it was implemented. This article highlights various aspects of e-Governance, namely concept, significance, applications, prospects and challenges in implementation of e-Governance. It also throws light on scope and opportunities for application of e-Governance in the Indian scenario.

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e-Governance or electronic governance may be defined as "delivery of government service; and information to the public using electronic means".

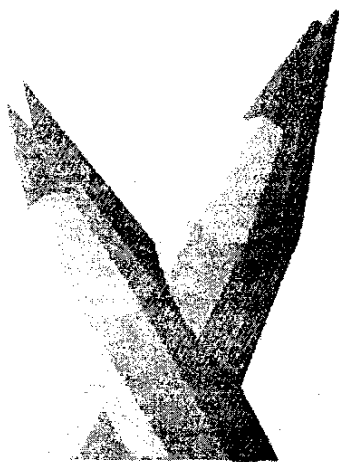
Such means of delivering information is often referred to as information technology or IT. Use of IT in government facilitates an efficient, speedy and transparent process for disseminating information to the public and other agencies, and for performing routine administrative activities. Ravi Kant, Special Secretary, IT, Government of West Bengal, describes, e-governance as "... the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance information access and the delivery of government services for the benefit of citizens, business partners, organisations and government functionaries... e-governance, however, is not merely the use of IT in governance, but as a tool to ensure good governance, e-Governance does not mean proliferation of computers and accessories; it is basically a political decision which calls for discipline, attitudinal change in officers and employees, and massive government process re-engineering."

India has six lakh villages. 70 percent of Indians live in villages, and 95 percent do not speak English. Therefore, e-governance models, which do not support the rural delivery system, will not contribute much to good governance. The goal of e-governance should be to benefit rural India and bridge the digital divide.

Goals of e-Governance

- Transparency in operations
- A credible government-public interface that becomes an interactive forum.
- Ease of information dissemination
- Equal access to information and administration
- Enhanced participation of the people in decision making and programme implementation
- A more efficient service delivery system
- Community linkage

The government has made e-governance one of its prime agendas since the past few years and has



processed proactive strategies for its implementation. While remarkable progress in IT sector has been made, its growth still remains a concern as it has not yet percolated down to the rural masses. This may create disparity and the rural population may not benefit fully from the e-governance system.

Scope of e-Governance

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

- Government to Citizen (G2C)
- Consumer to Government (C2G)
- Government-to-Government (G2G)
- Government to Business (G2B)
- Government to NGO (G2N)

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 a single point delivery mechanism. Some areas where e-governance has highest visibility are:

- Under initiatives like e-citizen, where integrated service centres are created. The purpose of these centres is to take over the various customer services in due course. They 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.
- The various aspects of transport 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 Challans, and Control of Pollution.
- e-Medicine involves linking of various hospitals in different parts of the country, to provide better

medical services to the citizen.

- Use of e-governance in registration and transfer of 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 time involved in registration process will be reduced.

Prerequisites for e-Governance

Information for All: For keeping the citizen informed and providing him with details of Government activities. The citizen will act as watch-dog to Government if the information will be available to him. Certain interest groups like journalists, opposition party will always keep an eye on the expenditure of the Government, status of which will be available on-line. The same will bring accountability amongst Civil Servants. The rationale is to increase the pressure on staff to perform well, and to improve public understanding of government.

Citizen Feedback: Citizen feedback is a must for improving Government services. Unless the Government listens to its customers, it will not be able to find out what the citizens want. The elected representatives who are said to be voice of citizens also are not the true voice, for they get their votes according to their offerings and these are not always according to customer needs. In short it is an effort to make the public sector decision making more responsive to citizens' view or needs.

Improving services: The world's best known corporations have done a lot to improve their services in terms of speed, quality, reliability, convenience and cost, and Indian corporations are also not an exception to this. Government elsewhere (outside India) has followed suit. The question is why the Indian government cannot do so? Information Technology will have a big role to play in the same; so that services can be delivered 24/7 by government offices online.

Consumer to Government (C2G)

Consumer to Government mainly constitutes the areas where the citizen interacts with the Government, which

includes areas like election when citizens vote for the Government; the Census where he provides information about himself to the Government; and taxation where he pays taxes to the Government.

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 policy making and governance. Taking the citizens' input (in the form of views/opinion) about the various government policies by organising an e-debate, will further strengthen 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. Elected members will also be provided with access to the local authority's Intranet and e-mail systems, so that they become available online for decision making, and people can easily access them.

For achievement of the above initiative, the citizen has to participate in the Government Business and therefore, spreading awareness becomes the responsibility of the State. The elections should not be fought on the principle of what one party or other has to offer, but on the principle of what the citizens require. Market research programs should be carried out using information systems to determine the needs of the citizens. GIS could be used as a tool to find potential gaps in the services offered.

Government to Government (G2G)

This can also be referred to as e-Administration. It involves improving government processes by cutting costs, by managing performance, by making strategic connections within government, and by creating empowerment. It will involve networking all government offices, so as to produce

synergy among them. The major areas are:

- Secretariat, which is the seat of power, has a lot of valuable information regarding the functioning of the State. The cross-linking of various departments and exchange of information amongst various components will simplify the process of governance.
- e-Police will help to build citizen confidence. There will be two databases: one of police personnel, and the other of criminals. The database of personnel will have the records of their current and previous postings. This will help to track policemen specialised in certain geographical regions and skills. For example, if want to look for a forensic expert, the database within seconds gives the list of all forensic experts. The same database will track their details like service record, family background etc which will also be helpful in intelligent posting and promotion of personnel. The second database will be of criminals. This database has to be upgraded to national database for its total utility. By just typing the name of a criminal, a police officer will be able to know the details of his past activities, including his modus operandi and the area of operation. Further, a database like this will help tap the criminals easily, because all the police stations will have simultaneous access to their record.
- The module will also include G2C activities like online filing of FIRs, finding the case status of an FIR etc. Creating a database of 'Lost and Found' can assist on locating valuables and missing persons.
- The pending court cases in India have brought the legal system to a halt. Not only are the consumers asking for changes in the administration, but also the system will collapse if it continues in this manner. IT can transform the system and bring court cases to a level of zero pendency. Creating a database of cases can do the same. In fact, such a system will help to avoid all the appeals to High Courts and Supreme Court, for the Judges in superior courts can consider the appeals from an intranet, wherein the case remains in the same

district court but the Higher Court gives their decision online based on the recorded facts of the case. Such a step will not only help the citizens, but will also reduce the backlog of cases. Further, the use of IT in the areas like recording of court proceedings, high resolution remote video to identify fraudulent documents, live fingerprint scanning and verification, remote probation monitoring, electronic entry of reports and paper work, will further speed up the court proceedings.

This will involve linking all the departments of the Government with various district headquarters and the capital, facilitating the flow of information between the various State departments and its constituents. Here various blocks will be linked to district Headquarters; district headquarters to State Headquarters; and State Headquarters to the National Capital. The benefits of such networks will be:

Cutting Expenditure: With proper process control, the input output ratio can be improved. The same can be achieved by cutting financial time costs. Cutting Government expenditure will lead to saving and accountability.

Organising around outcomes, not tasks. This principle suggests that a single person should perform all the steps in a process and that the person's job be designed around the outcome or objective rather, than single task. Say, for example, a citizen applies for a permit – it becomes the duty of the receiving authority that the citizen gets the same, rather than moving around to get it done.

Managing process performance: planning, monitoring and controlling the performance of process resources (human, financial and other). IT supports this by providing information about process performance and performance standards. The rationale is to make more efficient or effective use of process resources.

Establishing a network: Treat geographically dispersed resources as though they were centralised. Government can use databases, telecommunications networks, and standardised processing systems to get

the benefits of scale and coordination, while maintaining the benefits of flexibility and service. Strategic connections in Government should be established like central-to-local, ministry-to-ministry, executive-to-legislature, and decision maker-to-data store.

Delegation and Empowerment: Put the decision point where the work is performed, and build control into the process. Thus, for overall GPR to succeed, the decision-making should pass on to the people who do the actual work, from the people who are just monitoring it. People engaged in actual activities should be empowered to make decisions at the required focal point, and hence to delegate such activities on their own, so that the process itself can have built in controls. This will not only speed up the process but will cut cost as well.

Government to Business (G2B)

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.

Government to NGO (G2N)

G2N is building interactions beyond the boundaries of government, by developing communities, enhancing public-private partnerships, and by building civil society. It will involve creating various associations or interest groups that will ensure the betterment of society. Such initiatives deal particularly with the relationship between government and citizens: either as voters/stakeholders from whom the public sector derives its legitimacy, or as customers who consume public services. The means used could be:

Publishing: Delivering data to citizens. This will involve open access to Government Information. The citizen has a right to all government information and its activities.

Interaction: Delivering data to citizens and receiving data from citizens. This will involve taking feedback

from the citizens and interacting with the interest groups.

Benefits of e-Governance

e-Governance provides integrated government services through a single window by re-engineering of government processes.

e-Governance is capable of not only speeding up transactions, but also transparent functioning.

e-Governance can reduce the procedural and postal delays involved in the current system. This might help control corruption and increase participation of people in policy / decision process by improving the degrees of communication between government and public.

e-Governance helps common man to be governed with minimum red tape and zero corruption

Challenges

e-Governance market in India is gaining traction but there are challenges, which are stalling its progress. Despite the islands of excellence, e-governance has not been able to make rapid progress due to several operational, economic, personnel, planning and implementation issues. e-governance in India has also focused heavily on investing in hardware, and very little on developing software and services, which could maximise hardware investments.

Meaningful e- governance in India is unlikely before 10. India is in the picture due to slow response to cyber culture. When considering major social intervention for e-governance – developing social work practice, developing administration, and developing support communication – all have a coordinating role. There is a general idea in the mind of bureaucrats that services should be at nominal rates. Setting up e- governance systems in place will cost the government some money. This makes the service a bit more expensive than what it would cost by following normal procedure. Moreover there is general resistance from the bureaucrats for implementing e-governance initiatives; the main reason being it will put an end to bribe taking. The present e-governance

dishes out information just one way about government policies with a lot of statistics, and the recipient of information is not allowed to have a participatory role. Even the material provided is outdated and clouded with bureaucratic jargon. In most states e-governance relies on private participation. Hence some government employees feel that e-governance would deprive them of power and status. They allege that this is nothing but handing over some of the functions of the government to the private sector. They also fear that this may reduce government jobs and so they are reluctant to take to e-governance.

The transition from governance to e-governance takes place beginning with a 'presence' phase followed by 'interaction', 'transaction', and 'transformation' phase. Unfortunately, India is still in the earlier phase of its transition. Flexible demographic and geographic competition will eventually propel e-governance to prominence in India, though the constraints are significant enough to stymie any immediate advances.

Hurdles to e-Governance

Operational

- No clear revenue stream for the private sector
- Lack of coherent government policies
- Inappropriate processes for tendering

Economic

- Government unwilling to commit funding
- No above-the-line treatment of IT spending
- Viability of Public-Private Partnership uncertain

Planning and implementation

- No clear road map with measurable milestones
- Low emphasis on process reengineering

Personnel

- No champion identified for e-governance
- Lack of ownership of projects, and high frequency of personnel transfers

Conclusion

The Indian government is using IT to facilitate governance. The IT industry is doing its best to help such public-private partnerships become successful. The last couple of years have seen e-governance drop roots in India. IT enables the delivery of government services as it caters to a large base of people across different segments and geographical locations. The effective use of IT services in government administration can greatly enhance existing efficiencies, drive down communication costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments. It also gives citizens easy access to tangible benefits, be it through simple applications as online form filling, bill sourcing and payments, or complex applications like distance education and tele-medicine.

As of now, e-governance projects are being run only in certain departments. This approach will gradually be extended to all departments eventually, leveraging the power of IT to streamline administrative functions and increase transparency. The vision should be to focus on projects directly benefiting the citizens, and increasing the responsiveness, transparency and accountability to citizens. This should enable government to reach the common man living in both rural and urban areas.

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