

E-Government in India - Challenges and Prospects

Dr. A. Devikala*

ABSTRACT

E-Government is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the activities of government agencies. The e-readiness index of India is found to be low as compared to other countries. There are various challenges for the implementation of e-government in India. These challenges are like low literacy, low per capita income and limited financial resource. In this paper a conceptual framework is suggested for the effective implementation of e-government in India. The conceptual framework can be further validated in the real life situation. administration requiring the application of complex legislation and regulations. Most efforts of public administration to bring transactions online have been restricted to simple transactions requiring little or no knowledge of the law, such as change of address notifications.

Keywords: E-Government, India, Challenges and Development

* Assistant Professor in Economics, Department of Commerce, Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts & Science, Sulur, Coimbatore – 641 402.

Email:devikala@rvsgroup.com devieco@gmail.com

E-Government in India - Challenges and Prospects

Dr.A.Devikala*

Introduction

Electronic government or E-government refers to the delivery of national or local government information and services via the Internet or other digital means to citizens or businesses or other governmental agencies (Palvia and Sharma, 2007). World economies have recognized Information Technology as an effective tool in catalyzing the economic activity in efficient governance and in developing human resource. They have made significant investments in it and successfully integrated it with the development process, thereby reaping the benefits to their society. In India also, these developments have impacted the industrial, education, service and Government sectors and their influence on various applications is increasingly being felt of late. As the era of digital economy is evolving, the concept of governance has assumed significant importance. The e-Governance has consequently become an accepted methodology involving the use of Information Technology in improving transparency, providing information speedily to all citizens, improving administration efficiency and improving public services such as transportation, power, health, water, security and municipal services

National e-governance Plan (NeGP) Developments:- The Government of India accords high priority to improve the quality of the citizens by providing basic services at their doorsteps and has formulated a National e- Governance Plan (NeGP) covering 27 Mission Mode Projects and eight support components to be implemented at Central, State and Local would include services like road transport, land records, commercial taxes, employment exchanges, agriculture, civil supplies, treasuries, land registration, policy and education, while at Central level, it will cover areas such as insurance, central excise, National ID, pensions, e-Posts, banking, passport, visa and income tax.

* Assistant Professor in Economics, Department of Commerce, Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts & Science, Sulur, Coimbatore – 641 402.

Through this paper, I will attempt to provide an insight regarding :

- A definition of e-Governance to build a business case for its adoption
- A brief discussion on evolution of e-governance technologies
- Present Scenario of e-governance efforts in India
- Challenges For Development

Background

E-governance is more than just a government website on the Internet. But what is it exactly? What are the benefits of e-governance? What can governments do to make it work? Solutions to development issues often require changes to government processes, example by decentralisation. Objectives are generally to improve efficiency and effectiveness and to save costs. The driving force can also be public demand for online services and information that increase democratic participation, accountability, transparency, and the quality and speed of services. The implementation and use of ICT solutions can support governance reforms. E-governance will become more and more present around the world in the next few years. Internationally most countries are in the early stages of e-governance. A good start has been made in Europe, USA and in other Westernised countries such as Australia and Singapore. Over the coming years also developing countries and their citizens can also benefit from e-governance.

What is e Government?

e-Government is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the activities of public sector organisations. Some definitions restrict e-government to Internet-enabled applications only, or only to interactions between government and outside groups. Here, we do not - all digital ICTs are included; all public sector activities are included. In our definition, then, governments have been practicing e-government for more than 50 years: using

that first mainframe in the Statistics Office was "e-govemment". We just didn't give it that name 50 years ago.

Definition of E-Government

“E-Government” refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

Traditionally, the interaction between a citizen or business and a government agency took place in a government office. With emerging information and communication technologies it is possible to locate service centers closer to the clients. Such centers may consist of an unattended kiosk in the government agency, a service kiosk located close to the client, or the use of a personal computer in the home or office.

Analogous to e-commerce, which allows businesses to transact with each other more efficiently (B2B) and brings customers closer to businesses (B2C), e-government aims to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, hospital information, libraries, and the like and inexpensive.

E-Government Initiatives in India: An Overview

The Government of India kick started the use of IT in the government in the right earnest by launching number of initiatives. First the Government approved the National E-Governance Action plan for implementation during the year 2003-2007. The plan is an attempt to lay the

foundation and provide impetus for long-term growth of e-governance within the country. It proposed to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms at the center, state and local levels to provide a citizen centric and business centric environment for governance. The Government has given approval in-principle to the plan and overall programme content; implementation approach and governance structure. While endorsing the plan, it was observed that: weight age must be given for quality and speed of implementation in procurement procedures for IT services; suitable system of motivating the states for quick adoption be incorporated; provision of delivery of services to the citizens through a single window should be encouraged; Out sourcing of services wherever and whenever feasible; efforts be made to promote and develop public private partnerships to utilize the full potential of private sector investments; and connectivity should be improved and extended up to the block level in the states. Apart from the action plan, the following measures have also been introduced:

- Adoption of “Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 by the Government of India to provide legal framework to facilitate electronic transactions. The major aims of this act are to: recognize electronic contracts, prevents computer crimes, and make electronic filing possible. The Act came into force on 17 October, 2000;
- Establishment of the National Taskforce of Information Technology and Software Development in May 1998;
- Creation of Centre for e-governance to disseminate the best practices in the area of e-governance for the use by the Central and State Governments and act as a nodal center to provide general information on e-governance, national and international initiatives, and IT policies of the government(s);
- Developing e-office solutions to enable various ministries and departments to do their work electronically. Modules such as Workflow for Drafts for Approvals, e-file, e noting,

submission of reports, integrated personal information and financial accounting systems have been developed;

- Setting up of a High Powered Committee (HPC) with Cabinet Secretary as its Chairman to improve administrative efficiency by using Information Technology in Government;
- Designating a Joint Secretary level officer as IT manager in every Ministry/Department; and
- Instituting websites by almost all Ministries and Departments and providing information on aspects such as their objectives, policies and decisions, contact persons, etc. Some of them have started their electronic newsletter for giving publicity to their activities on wider scale; and identifying departments, which have frequent inter-face with the citizens, and computerizing them on priority basis.

Thus, it can be inferred from the above that a good beginning has been made to make e-government a reality in India, but still a lot needs to be done. Sincere efforts are required on sustained basis in future also to maintain the momentum.

E-Government Initiatives at the State Level

Quite a number of state governments have initiated measures to introduce information technology and its tools in the governance process. Most of these states are using these applications for improving service delivery to their citizens. They are moving from manual processes to on-line delivery by using conveniently located service centers in public places. Counters at these service centers are manned by public/ private agencies and multiple services are provided on-line at each location. Empirical evidence reveals that it has not been an easy task to implement ICT related reforms particularly at the state level and hence needs to be planned carefully for their successful implementation (Bhatnagar, 2004). In this regard, it is, therefore, of

utmost importance to study and examine the various experiences for evolving effective strategies for future.

Improving Government Processes: e-Administration

e-Government initiatives within this domain deal particularly with improving the internal workings of the public sector. They include:

Cutting process costs : improving the input: output ratio by cutting financial costs and/or time costs.

Managing process performance : planning, monitoring and controlling the performance of process resources (human, financial and other).

Making strategic connections in government : connecting arms, agencies, levels and data stores of government to strengthen capacity to investigate, develop and implement the strategy and policy that guides government processes.

Creating empowerment : transferring power, authority and resources for processes from their existing locus to new locations.

Connecting Citizens: e-Citizens and e-Services

Such initiatives deal particularly with the relationship between government and citizens: either as voters/stakeholders from whom the public sector should derive its legitimacy, or as customers who consume public services. These initiatives may well incorporate the process improvements identified in section B1. However, they also include a broader remit:

Talking to citizens : providing citizens with details of public sector activities. This mainly relates to certain types of accountability: making public servants more accountable for their decisions and actions.

Listening to citizens : increasing the input of citizens into public sector decisions and actions. This could be flagged as either democratisation or participation.

Improving public services : improving the services delivered to members of the public along dimensions such as quality, convenience and cost.

Building External Interactions:e-Society

Such initiatives deal particularly with the relationship between public agencies and other institutions - other public agencies, private sector companies, non-profit and community organisations. As with citizen connections, these initiatives may well incorporate the process improvements identified in section B1. However, they also include a broader remit:

Working better with business : improving the interaction between government and business. This includes digitising regulation of, procurement from, and services to, business to improve quality, convenience and cost.

Developing communities : building the social and economic capacities and capital of local communities.

Building partnerships : creating organisational groupings to achieve economic and social objectives. The public sector is almost always one of the partners, though occasionally it acts only as a facilitator for others.

Challenges For Development

In this part of the challenges of e-governance for developing countries are investigated. Four SWOT analyses are presented, with a focus on the following aspects of e-governance:

- Political
- Social
- Economic
- Technological

SWOT-Analyses e-governance

The SWOTs are kept at a high level. Going into detail would be a problem because situations vary for each country, for each moment and for each e-governance solution.

Political Aspects

Political aspects related to e-governance are example the formulated strategy and policy, laws and legislation, leadership, decision making processes, funding issues, international affairs, political stability.

Implementation and maintaining of e-governance solutions

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Combination with democratisation reforms Internet as pull factor Modern image	Budget Cyber laws not available No problem owner within government No expertise about technology Slow decision making process Hierarchy in organisations Short term approach due to elections Integration and reform	Raise external funding Show competitive edge Transparency causes natural change of processes Reinvent government	Bureaucracy Piracy, misuse Corruption Maintaining disorder, no transparency Political instability Resistance

Social Aspects

Examples of some of the social aspects related to e-governance are people, (level of) education, employment, income, digital divide, rural areas vs. cities, rich vs. poor, literacy, IT skills.

Implementation and maintaining e-governance solutions

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
People eager to learn IT skills Skilled people possible export product	Basic education poor: trainers needed No IT literacy Low literacy Different languages Public acceptance of self-service models Skill shortage: competition with private sector	Employment increases Education system improve People learn structural job Cheap manpower widely available Promotion of internet Better healthcare	Brain drain IT skilled people after training Resistance of people Digital divide Privacy

Economic Aspects

Economical aspects related to e-governance are funding, cost-savings, business models, e-Commerce, spin-offs of e-governance.

Implementation and maintaining e-governance solutions

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
E-Governance good argument for external funding Transparency for businesses (procurement)	Investors Budget control	Cost efficiency through e-governance New business More efficiency tax revenues	Corruption

Technological Aspects

As discussed in the previous chapter, technology will be a bottleneck for e-governance in developing countries. Technological aspects involve software, hardware, infrastructure, telecom, IT skilled people, maintenance, safety and security issues.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Everything is new: no negative legacy Leapfrogging possible Internet as driving (pull) factor Lack of IT standards?	Shortage IT skilled people High cost of internet Heterogeneous data Lack of IT standards? Costs of software licenses	2nd hand hardware available Use one standard	Dependency of technology

E-governance for All by 2020

Recognising the importance of e-governance, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (SARC) has given a call for making e-governance available to all by 2020. The Commission, among other things, has recommended that “A clear road map with a set of milestones should be outlined by Government of India with the ultimate objective of transforming the citizen-government interaction at all levels to the e-Governance mode by 2020.

Conclusion

It is evident from above discussion that objectives of achieving e-governance and transforming India goes far beyond mere computerization of stand alone back office operations. It means , to fundamentally change as to how the government operates, and this implies a new set of responsibilities for the executive and politicians. It will require basic change in work culture and goal orientation, and simultaneous change in the existing processes. Foremost of them is to

create a culture of maintaining, processing and retrieving the information through an electronic system and use that information for decision making. It will require skilled navigation to ensure a smooth transition from old processes and manual operations to new automated services without hampering the existing services. This can be achieved by initially moving ahead in smaller informed initiatives in a time bound manner and avoiding large and expensive steps without understanding the full social implications. Every small step thus taken should be used to learn about hurdles and improve upon the next steps, both in terms of direction and magnitude. The change in the mindset to develop and accept the distributed and flat structured e-governance system is required at the top level system to beat the inertia.

References

Bedi, K., Singh, P.J. and Srivastava, S. (2001); government net: new governance opportunities for India, New Delhi: Sage.

Bhatnagar Subhash (2004), e-government from vision to implementation, sage publications, New Delhi.

R.Chandrashekhar is Additional Secretary, in the Department of Information Technology, Government of India. He is responsible for National Planning and Strategy for E-Governance. He can be reached at jsegov@mit.gov.in

Government of India, 'Information Technology Action Plan: IT for All Indians by 2008', <http://it-taskforce.nic.in>.

Kumar, R., & Best, M. L. (2006). Impact and sustainability of e-government services in developing countries: Lessons learned from Tamil Nadu, India. *The Information Society*, 22(1), 1-12.

Palvia, S.C.J., and Sharma, S.S. (2007); E-Government and E-Governance: Definitions/Domain Framework and Status around the World, *Foundation of e-government*, ICEG, 2007, pp.1-12