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E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:-Lack of good governance is among the most important causes of state failure and underdevelopment. Hence innovations and reforms in the governmental and bureaucratic apparatus are an important prerequisite for development. The rapid development of information technology has revolutionized every sector. It has emerged as panacea for all ills in 21st century. The beginning of century has been so much dominated by information technology that it has become a joke that in the dictionary that all words will begin with the letter “e”. Hence it is not surprising to find that everybody is talking about E governance, e-citizen, e-policies etc. E-governance or Electronic Governance or Digital Governance is the effective use of IT to improve the system of governance that is in place, and thus provide better services to the citizens. E-Governance aims to provide a Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, Responsible and Transparent Government. In India the push for public reforms has brought in its wake the pervasive harnessing of information and communication technology (ICT) to achieve declared social goals. E governance began with national Informatics Centre’s effort to connect all the district headquarters through computers in 1980s. It paved for connectivity, networking and technology up gradation etc with the development of array of software solutions. The present paper seeks to focus on the benefits/opportunities of e-governance and challenges faced by the government in implementing the same. Section 1 deals with the concept and development of E-Governance in India. Section 2 will cast light on the challenges faced in the implementation and how the problems affecting the nation will find a solution it. For our population over a billion it is a great challenge. In the words of APJ Abdul Kalam “No country has so far implemented an e-Governance system for one billion people. It is a big challenge before us.”

However the present government has embarked on it.

Keywords: E-Governance , Benefits And Challenges.

SECTION-1 Concept of e Governance

Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority for managing a country’s affairs. It includes taking care of the interest of its citizens at the same time helping them in exercising their legal rights and duties. To achieve their objectives government needs a fair, efficient and transparent administrative system. In a big country like ours it is very difficult and time consuming process. By the use of information technology the performance of this governance can be improved to a great extent as E-governance facilitates an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public and other agencies and for administrative activities by the government.

E-governance can bring forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of citizen needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage, enable and empower the citizen. 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.

Why introduce e-governance?

The purpose of implementing e-governance is to enhance good governance or "SMART" governance. SMART being acronym of Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent government. The advances in information technology and internet provide opportunities to transform the relationship between the government and the citizens in a new way, thus contributing to the achievement of good governance goals. Governments may provide better services in terms of transparency and accessibility due to decrease in time, manpower, lower transaction cost. The citizen participation may also help to achieve good governance objective by online discussions making pressure groups and through RTI.

However, this would require the government to change itself – its processes, its outlook, laws, rules and regulations and also its way of interacting with the citizens. It would also require capacity building within the government and creation of general awareness about e-Governance among the citizens.

In India, the main thrust for e-Governance was provided by the launch of NICNET in 1987 – the national satellite-based computer network. This was followed by the launch of the District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DISNIC) program to computerize all district offices in the country. NICNET was extended via the State capitals to all district headquarters by 1990. In the ensuing years, with ongoing computerization, tele-connectivity and internet connectivity established a large number of e-Governance initiatives, both at the Union and State levels[1] Gyandoot project of Dhar District of Madhya Pradesh, Bhoomi project of Karnataka, Project Friends in Kerala, MCA 21, SmartGov project of Andhra Pradesh, etc. are a few initiatives in this field. The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) has been formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEITY) and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) in 2006.

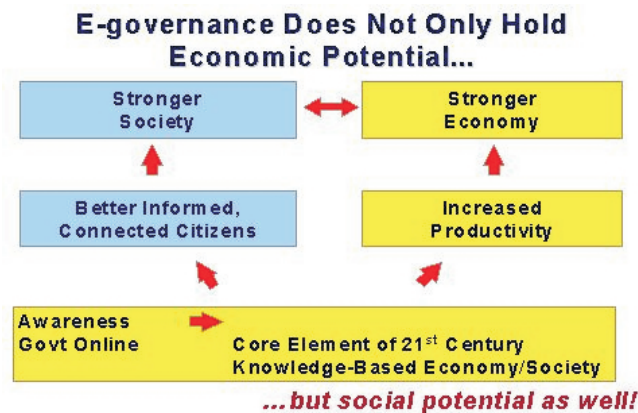


Figure 1: Benefits of e-Governance

The NeGP aims at improving delivery of Government services to citizens and businesses with the following vision: “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.” The Digital India programme was launched by Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) India with the aims to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy[2].

BENEFITS OF E-GOVERNANCE

E- governance does not hold only economic potential but it has social potential also. When the awareness of the people increases the productivity also enhances, leading to a stronger economy. Better informed citizens create a stronger society .If the society is stronger it complements the economy as well. Hence, a stronger society and a stronger economy are the two basic pillars for the E - governance vice versa the development of the e governance creates a stronger society with good economy.

E- governance brings about automation of administrative Processes. A truly e-governed system would require minimal human intervention and would rather be system driven. Today administrative departments are

computerized and connected through network. Departments have launched their websites and apps to provide information. This will surely bring about reduction in delays, errors, misappropriations etc. and thus enhance the efficiency in office operations and processes.

Automation of processes would result in less paper work as all Communication, storage and retrieval of information would take place electronically. This would lead to emergence of "paper less office" and a greener and safer environment.

With the introduction of ICT all information will be available instantaneously on various departmental websites or portals. Quality of services will be improved substantially in terms of time, cost and convenience. Central monitoring, reporting and face to face communication electronically will assure better and effective service delivery by officials.

It would also reduce the procedural delays due to hierarchy in the offices. E governance will check the bureaucratic behaviour of officials and make delivery of public services effective and efficient. With e-governance, public actions coming under public glare would certainly induce norms and values of accountability, openness, integrity, fairness, equity, responsibility and justice in the administrative culture. This will surely lead to transparency and accountability in the system

E governance will foster economic development of the country. All the relevant information regarding health schemes, agriculture schemes, weather forecast, products and services etc. if is readily available to the people concerned will lead to better and more opportunities to the various sections of the society and thus induce prosperity in the country.

Easy accessibility of information will increase citizen participation by making pressure groups, online discussions and through laws like RTI. Thus empowering them in formulating and implementing government policies. This will also help reduce discrimination among various caste, creed and religious groups and help reduce social differences existing in the society.

With the introduction of ICT strategic information system could be developed to help management in effective decision-making in routine as well as strategic matters.

SECTION 2

Challenges

Although the government has come up with several initiatives to facilitate the access to public services, the desired outcomes are yet to be fully realized. The challenges in the implementation of E governance projects in India can be categorized under the following heads Social Challenges, Economical Challenges and Technical Challenges. These challenges in detail are explained below:

A. Social Challenges

In the words of APJ Abdul Kalam "No country has so far implemented an e-Governance system for one billion people. It is a big challenge before us Creating a database of all the citizens of India and continuously monitoring, updating and provision of unique ID is a major challenge for providing the E governance services to the whole population of the country.

Secondly, the literacy rate in India is very low as compared to other countries of the world and is a major impediment in the successful implementation of e governance projects. Also a large number of educated people do not know how to operate the computers especially the senior citizens. They need some assistance from others to carryout computer operations.

The success of e-governance also depends on communication with the people in their local languages. Currently, the most widely used language is English for e-government. But given the Indian social conditions, unless we develop interfaces in vernacular languages, it would remain out of reach of many people who are not capable of accessing these services in English.

There exists a vast difference in socio economic condition of its people which is also a major cause of Digital divide prevailing in India. Those who are rich are also generally more educated and have better access to ICT while economically poorer people lack means to afford a computer and internet connection for themselves to reap the benefits of e governance and other online services. Government has therefore a gigantic challenge to provide e connectivity to all its citizen

Mostly the government websites are quite complex and not user friendly. Users find it difficult to extract the relevant information and utilize the same for their benefit. It will be advisable to design the government websites in an easier format so that these will be more usable for the users who are not expert users of IT.

Lack of trust and confidence on the system or tools is another major drawback in implementing E governance in India. People hesitate to furnish their personal information for fear of misuse and fraudulent transaction specially in the absence of effective cyber laws and trained police system to check cyber crimes.

Generally most of the e-governance services of the central and state governments are not integrated

resulting in lack of communication between different government departments and causing duplication and delays.

People are not aware of the benefits of e-Governance services as the government has not paid enough attention to reach its real beneficiaries specially in the rural sector limiting the proper implementation of e governance projects.

E-governance is new phenomenon which in the work place means the transformation from manual methods of work to electronic ones. These new changes will create a new advanced environment completely different to what has been used for many years in government departments .People are not ready to come out of their comfort zone and learn new methods of doing things. To familiarize and train its existing staff in information technology is another challenge for the government in effective implementation of e governance project.

B. Economical Challenges

India is a developing country inhabited by a huge population over 1.25 billion where majority of its population is living below poverty line. Approximately 22% of the total population lives below the poverty line[4]. The GDP and the per capita income is low as compared to other countries of the world. People cannot afford online services. As such it has to be made affordable by cutting the cost. A huge budget is required to meet the cost of implementing this project in a country that has limited financial resources.

Creating infrastructure to enable its citizens access to e government services will require a huge expenditure to be incurred by the government. The field of information and technology is fast changing and it is essential to keep pace with the changing environment. The task of updating and maintaining is quite significant . Applications must be independent from hardware or software platforms. It further adds financial burden on the exchequer to maintain several platforms for running various applications.. Thus generating resources and strengthening masses to afford it depends on the subsidies which government can provide to attract people to use it without denting their pockets.

Hence financial challenge is very important consideration for its smooth application.

C. Technical challenges.

A major stumbling block in the success of E - governance project is citizens lack of trust in furnishing their personal sensitive data such as income, age, sex, credit card and debit card details, medical history etc. as they fear their privacy being intruded sometimes misused threatening their security as well. Assurance from Government of a high level of privacy and security in its applications is of prime importance to achieve the goal of E-governance in India.

Corporate networks reside on reliable and controlled networks. Government networks have to go into all areas which are even unfriendly to live posing a great challenge in reaching the remote areas and difficult terrain.

The e governance applications must be simple , interesting and user friendly. Also the applications should be such that it can be accessed using various devices.

Use of English as an official language for providing information is a limiting factor. It would be better if the local level database is maintained in regional and local languages to facilitate penetration and accessibility among the masses.

Technology becomes obsolete very fast. Keeping pace with the fast changing technology and its implementation is a major challenge .Selection of tried and tested technologies for longer periods of times is preferred.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS:

Good life and good governance are inseparable..E-governance is the only remedy to ward off maladies. To do so effectively, it has to rest on a value system/ code of ethics, a set of principles like transparency, accountability etc. which are fundamental to E- governance and therefore non-negotiable. There is an urgent need to usher an environment of transparency and accountability and public scrutiny are essentials of good governance or e-governance. A few suggestions are here to make the governance a reality in Indian scenario.

• **Infrastructure:** Development and propagation of telecommunication infrastructure to every nook and corner of the country is basic to e governance. To strengthen the infrastructure, „The National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development“ in 1998 recommended broadband connection linkage for IT Applications Service Providers (ASPs), Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and IT promotional organizations, either by fiber optics or by radio communication. This will boost efficiency and enhance market integration“ through Internet/Intranet for sustainable regional development.

• **Capital:** In spreading telecommunication services to all parts of the country and creating a supporting environment requires a high rate of investment. Government alone cannot meet the requirement. Hence there is a need to generate resources from the market and private sector. Public-private partnership may be beneficial in this regard, as the private sector can participate and contribute with capital and expertise support.

• **Access:** In India nearly 10 million out of 1.25 billion people have internet connections. Ironically 75% of them are urban users. Government is making serious efforts to link rural India through computerized Gram Panchayat yet a large number of rural population and underprivileged sections have not been reached. Therefore a lot have to be done in this field.

• **Utility of Information:** To achieve the goals of good governance the information regarding the government welfare schemes and programs must reach the beneficiaries in simple, interesting and appealing manner. Govt of India and some state governments have prepared vision documents for e governance keeping in mind the needs of the citizens. Publicity efforts through print and electronic media and through citizen charter of many departments are required to make the citizens aware and help them to access the necessary information..

• **Human Resource Development & capacity building :**In recent years the number of IT professionals in India has grown substantially , yet there exists a gap in demand and supply of quality IT manpower. Government should open more technical institutes to impart quality IT education and training to build a pool of human resources in this field.To make service delivery efficient better trained computer professional force is the need of the hour. Hence there is a nationwide need to launch "train the teachers program"(TTT)

• **Changing the Mindset of Government Functionaries :**To change the mindset government employees orientation and training programs should be organized to persuade them to act as service providers to clients as per the policies and programs of the government.

• **Language :**To reach out to our multilingual crowd use of English as official language is not appropriate. It is essential that a clear strategy be formulated to provide access to local level database maintained in regional and local languages. The center for development of advanced computing has been providing immense help in developing multilingual software for the purpose. More such organizations should come forward.

• **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** An effective and efficient grievance redressal mechanism is the need of the hour as it will help in building the trust and confidence of the citizens in the system of e governance .

• **Cyber Laws:** Cyber security in India must be improved so that public services can be better developed through the mode of E governance .Indian government is also required to formulate adequate e-governance cyber security policies for India and implement the same in its true spirit.

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