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E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: CONCEPT, INITIATIVES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

While Governance relates to safeguarding the legal rights of all citizens, an equally important aspect is concerned with ensuring equitable access to public services and the benefits of economic growth to all. It also ensures government to be transparent in its dealings, accountable for its activities and faster in its responses as part of good governance. 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. This paper is an attempt to study the initiative taken by Govt. and issues and challenges faced in the successful implementation of its schemes.

KEYWORDS: *Safeguarding, Implementation, Equitable*

INTRODUCTION

CONCEPT

In India, the main thrust for e-Governance was provided by the launching 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) programme to computerize all district offices in the country for which free hardware and software was offered to the State Governments. 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.

Types of Government Interaction in E-governance

- **G2G:** Government to Government.
- **G2C:** Government to Citizen.
- **G2B:** Government to Business.
- **G2E:** Government to Employee

Some Initiatives Taken by Government

- **Computerization of Land Records:** In collaboration with NIC. Ensuring that landowners get computerized copies of ownership, crop and tenancy and updated copies of Records of Rights (RoRs) on demand.
- **Admission to Professional Colleges – Common Entrance Test (CET):** With the rapid growth in the demand as well as supply of professional education, the process of admission to these institutions became a major challenge in the early 1990s. Recourse was then taken to ICT to make the process of admission transparent and objective.
- **Online admission process: Now the Govt. is emphasizing on the making admission process at all levels and courses across universities and professional and technical institutes online making it a transparent and easy for the admission seekers.**
- **MCA 21:** By the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. The project aims at providing easy and secure online access to all registry related services provided by the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs to corporates and other stakeholders at any time and in a manner that best suits them.
- **E-office:** The Government of India has recognized the need to modernize the Central Government offices through the introduction of Information and Communications Technology. e-Office is aimed at increasing the usage of work flow and rule based file routing, quick search and retrieval of files and office orders, digital signatures for authentication, forms and reporting components.
- **UID:** The unique identification project was conceived as an initiative that would provide identification for each resident across the country and would be used primarily as the basis for efficient delivery of welfare services. It would also act as a tool for effective monitoring of various programs and schemes of the government.
- **Pensions:** The pensions MMP is primarily aimed at making the pension/ retirement related information, services and grievances handling mechanism accessible online to the needy pensioners, through a combination of interactive and non-interactive components, and thus, help bridge the gap between the pensioners and the government.
- **Banking:** The Banking MMP is yet another step towards improving operational efficiency and reducing the delays and efforts involved in handling and settling transactions. The MMP which is being implemented by the banking industry aims at streamlining various e-services

initiatives undertaken by individual banks. Implementation is being done by the banks concerned, with the banking Department providing a broad framework and guidance.

- **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems:** Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) MMP aims at creating a comprehensive and integrated system for enhancing the efficiency and effective policing at all levels and especially at the Police Station level through adoption of principles of e-Governance, and creation of a nationwide networked infrastructure for evolution of IT-enabled state-of-the-art tracking system.
- **Public Distribution System:** Computerization of the PDS is envisaged as an end-to-end project covering key functional areas such as supply chain management including allocation and utilization reporting, storage and movement of food grains, grievance redressal and transparency portal, digitization of beneficiary database, Fair Price Shop automation, etc.
- **E-procurement:** Ministry of Commerce & Industry (Department of Commerce) has been nominated as the Nodal Ministry for implementation of e-Government Procurement (e-GP) Mission Mode Projects (MMP). The vision of the e-Procurement MMP is “**To create a national initiative to implement procurement reforms, through the use of electronic Government procurement, so as to make public procurement in all sectors more transparent and efficient**”.
- **E-Courts:** The e-Court Mission Mode Project (MMP) was conceptualized with a vision to transform the Indian judiciary by making use of technology. The project had been developed, following the report submitted by the e-Committee under Supreme Court on national policy & action plan on implementation of information communication tools in Indian judiciary.
- A clear objective – to re-engineer processes and enhance judicial productivity both qualitatively and quantitatively to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost effective, transparent and accountable.
- **E-Biz:** The e-Biz Mission Mode Project, being executed by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, was conceptualized with the vision. Its vision is “**To transform the business environment in the country by providing efficient, convenient, transparent and integrated electronic services to investors, industries and business throughout the business life cycle**”.
- **Common Services Centres:** The CSCs would provide high quality and cost-effective video, voice and data content and services, in the areas of e-governance, education, health, telemedicine, entertainment as well as other private services. A highlight of the CSCs is that it will offer web-enabled e-governance services in rural areas, including application forms, certificates, and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills.
- **Direct Cash transfer:** To facilitate disbursements of Government entitlements like NREGA, Social Security pension, Handicapped Old Age Pension etc. of any Central or State Government bodies, using Aadhaar and authentication thereof as supported by UIDAI.
- **Aadhar Enabled Payment system (AEPS):** AEPS is a bank led model which allows online interoperable financial inclusion transaction through the Business correspondent of any bank

using the Aadhaar authentication. This has helped in financial inclusion. The four Aadhaar enabled basic types of banking transactions are as follows:-

- Balance Enquiry
- Cash Withdrawal
- Cash Deposit
- Aadhaar to Aadhaar Funds Transfer
- **Digital India program**
- **Digital Locker for every Indian:** Certificates issued by the government — education, residential, medical records, birth certificates, etc. — are to be stored in individual ‘digital lockers’ and a communication protocol established for government departments to access them without physically having to see the hard copy. The purpose of government is that copies of certificates issued by the government itself not to be carried around by people to government offices for various services.
- **Mobile Seva:** It aims to provide government services to the people through mobile phones and tablets. It has been developed as the core infrastructure for enabling the availability of public services through mobile devices. It enables a government department to integrate both web and mobile based services seamlessly and enhances the access to electronic services tremendously leveraging the very high penetration of mobile phones, especially in rural areas.

The list is endless and Govt. is making all efforts to make the digital India successful and making all the areas to be covered in the electronic area as far as possible.

WHY E-GOVERNANCE?

Following are some of the main advantages of E-Governance.

- **Speed:** Technology makes communication speedier. Internet, Phones, Cell Phones have reduced the time taken in normal communication.
- **Cost Reduction:** Most of the Government expenditure is appropriated towards the cost of stationary. Paper-based communication needs lots of stationary, printers, computers, etc. which calls for continuous heavy expenditure. Internet and Phones makes communication cheaper saving valuable money for the Government.
- **Transparency:** Use of ICT makes governing process transparent. All the information of the Government would be made available on the internet. The citizens can see the information whenever they want to see. But this is only possible when every piece of information of the Government is uploaded on the internet and is available for the public to peruse. Current governing process leaves many ways to conceal the information from all the people. ICT helps make the information available online eliminating all the possibilities of concealing of information.
- **Accountability:** Once the governing process is made transparent the Government is automatically made accountable. Accountability is answerability of the Government to the

people. It is the answerability for the deeds of the Government. An accountable Government is a responsible Government.

- **Convenience:** *E-Government brings public services to citizens on their schedule and their venue.*
- **Improved Customer Service:** *E-Government allows to redeploy resources from back-end processing to the front line of customer service.*
- **Increased access to information:** *E-Government improves the accessibility of government information to citizens allowing it become an important resource in the making the decisions that affect daily life and so it helps in empowerment of citizens*

The guiding principle for successful implementation of E-Governance projects

- Form simplification and field reduction – Forms should be made simple and user friendly and only minimum and necessary information should be collected.
- Online applications and tracking - Online applications and tracking of their status should be provided.
- Online repositories - Use of online repositories e.g. for certificates, educational degrees, identity documents, etc. should be mandated so that citizens are not required to submit these documents in physical form.
- Integration of services and platforms – Integration of services and platforms e.g. Aadhaar platform of Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI), payment gateway, Mobile Seva platform, sharing of data through open Application Programming Interfaces (API) and middleware such as National and State Service Delivery Gateways (NSDG/SSDG) should be mandated to facilitate integrated and interoperable service delivery to citizens and businesses.

Challenges before Govt.in successful implementation of e governance

There are large numbers of potential barriers in the implementation of e-Governance. Some hindrance in the path of implementation, like security, unequal access to the computer technology by the citizen, high initial cost for setting up the e government solutions and resistance to change. Challenges identified as trust, resistance to change, digital divide, cost and privacy and security concerns.

Trust

Trust can be defined along two dimensions: as an assessment of a current situation, or as an innate personality trait or predisposition. The implementation of public administration functions via e-government requires the presence of two levels of trust. The first is that the user must be confident, comfortable and trusting of the tool or technology with which they will interact. The second dimension of trust pertains to trust of the government].

There has to be a balance between ensuring that a system prevents fraudulent transactions and the burden that extensive checks can take place on people who are honest. Recently, confidential information on military veterans was compromised when a computer containing their personal information was lost. This type of incident can erode trust and user confidence in government

systems. Trust, along with financial security, are two critical factors limiting the adoption of e-government services.

Resistance to change

The innovation diffusion theory states that over time an innovation will diffuse through a population, and the rate of adoption will vary between those who adopt early, referred to as early adopters and to those who adopt the innovation much later, referred to as —laggards.

The resistant to change phenomenon can explain much of the hesitation that occurs on the part of constituents in moving from a paper based to a Web-based system for interacting with government. Citizens, employees and businesses can all have their biases with respect to how transactions should be processed. However, government entities and public policy administrators cannot ignore the changes that occur as a result of the implementation of information and communication technology (ICT). Education about the value of the new systems is one step toward reducing some of the existing resistance. It can also be particularly useful for a leader or manager, to buy into the new system at an early stage in the adoption process

Digital Divide

The digital divide refers to the separation that exists between individuals, communities, and businesses that have access to information technology and those that do not have such access. Social, economic, infrastructural and ethno-linguistic indicators provide explanations for the presence of the digital divide. Economic poverty is closely related to limited information technology resources

An individual living below poverty line does not afford a computer for himself to harness the benefits of e-government and other online services. As the digital divide narrows, broader adoption of e-government in the public domain becomes possible. Economic poverty is not the only cause of digital divide. It can also be caused by the lack of awareness among the people. Even some of the economic stable people don't know about the scope of e -governance. Awareness can only help to bring users to that service delivery channel once. It cannot guarantee sustained use of the system unless the system is also designed in such a way as to deliver satisfactory outcome. Procedures need to be simplified to deliver concrete benefits and clear guidelines provided to encourage their use by the actual end users and reduce user's dependence on middlemen/intermediaries

Cost

Cost is one of the most important prohibiting factor that comes in the path of e-governance implementation particularly in the developing countries like India where most of the people living below the poverty line. Elected officers and politician don't seem to be interested in implementing e-governance

Privacy and Security

There will be three basic levels of access exists for e-government stakeholders: no access to a Web service; limited access to a Web-service or full-access to a Web service, however when personal sensitive data exists the formation of the security access policy is a much more complex process with legal consideration. With the implementation of e-government projects, effective

measures must be taken to protect sensitive personal information. A lack of clear security standards and protocols can limit the development of projects that contain sensitive information such as income, medical history.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the concept of e-governance and m-governance has evolved in Indian scenario and how much it is required for transparency and accountability on the part of government and at the same time it is also a toll to increase the participation of people in policy making by empowering them with the right information at right time. The penetration of internet, telecommunication services in India has increased in the last decade and this gives a ray of hope to the citizens of India to fight with the long persisting problems of poverty, corruption, regional disparity and unemployment. But at the same time, due to slow pace of project completion, red-tape and resistance from the side of government employees and citizens too has not given the desired result.

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