ORIGINAL ARTICLE

UBIQUITOUS APPROACH OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIAN SCENARIO

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Abstract:

This paper visualises the various efforts made & the promising possibilities of using ICTs in promoting efficient governance in India.

E-Governance is the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens and provide government services.

It is a paradigm shift over the rotten approaches of traditional governance thereby rendering of government services and information to the public using electronic means. A revolution has erupted through this new paradigm in quality of services rendered to the citizens, ushering benefits like single window clearance facility, Transparency, procedural simplification, saving of time and cost, reduction in corruption with citizen centric services.

With rising public awareness, citizens and businesses are demanding greater access to government information and services 24X7 with simpler processes & less paperwork.

E-governance initiatives –
At national level:
NeGP, Centre for E-Governance, IT Act, 2000, IT Manager in every Ministry/Department, Setting up of HPC etc.

At state level:
Rajswift (Rajasthan), Gyandoot(Madhya Pradesh), SARI(Tamil Nadu), Bhoomi (Karnataka), Smartgov (Andhra Pradesh), WARANA in Maharashtra, FRIENDS (Kerala), Sampark in Chandigarh (Punjab).

Though a good beginning has been made a lot has to be done for making e-governance a roaring success, Uphill efforts are required on sustained basis in future also to maintain the momentum in a poor country like India.

KEYWORDS:

Traditional Governance, E-Governance, Transparency, Citizen centric services.

INTRODUCTION

India is a country of great diversity accompanying varied culture, lifestyles, languages and beliefs and states having different social and economic development levels. It is a well established fact that well being of community depends upon the choices made by the people and granted by the authority. Moreover, the essential prerequisites for quality governance are that the system should be good and suited to the needs, aspirations, background and ethos of the people concerned and those selected for system operating must be endowed with the character and competence and motivated by the feeling of public service.

However, in times bygone the mechanism of service delivery of government departments left much to be desired in India. Traditional governance is characterised by inherent evils like inefficient

working, discourteous dealing personnel, shabby surroundings, long queues, greasing the palm (bribe), complex procedures, jam-packed spaces, habitual absenteeism, procrastinating officials etc. (see chart I)

(Chart I: Traditional Governance v/s E-Governance)

Traditional Governance	E-Governance
→ Corruption at Peak	→ Transparency
→ Discourteous Dealing Personnel	→ Saving in Cost & Time
→ Habitual Absenteeism	→ Single Window Clearance
→ Long Queues	→ Reduction in Corruption
→ Inefficient Working	→ Procedural Simplification
→ Jam-packed Spaces	→ Efficient Management
→ Complex Procedures	→ Citizen Centric Services
→ Dissatisfied Customers	→ Better Customer Satisfaction

By and large, visiting a government department by a citizen to make use of any service meant an unforgettable horrowing experience. With passing of time rising citizen awareness and their better experiences with the private sector- the demand for better services on the part of Government departments became more pronounced. The emergence of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) played an eminent role in inculcating such demand. With the advent of e-governance, the metamorphosis in the quality of delivery of services by the government to the citizens has been more pronounced in recent time. What is E-Governance?

"E-Governance is the use of information technology to support government operations, engage citizens and provide government services" – D. Sharon

It is a paradigm shift over the rotten approaches of traditional governance thereby rendering of government services and information to the public using electronic means. A revolution has errupted through this new paradigm in quality of services rendered to the citizens, ushering benefits like single window clearance facility, Transparency in government working, procedural simplification, saving of previous time and cost, improved office and record management, improved staff attitude, reduction in corruption, job handling capacity of staff and above all citizen centric services.

Why E-Governance?

With rising public awareness, citizens and businesses are demanding greater access to government information and services with simpler processes, less paperwork and more efficient interactions. Expectations of flexible, convenient interactions, sophisticated online services and prompt responses to the requests of citizens are also emergent. Increasingly frustrated by inherent evils of traditional governance like the need to visit multiple locations and the need to execute multiplicity of transactions to satisfy simple requests, citizens are overwhelmingly demanding 24X7 access and rapid solution.

The traditional bureaucratic structure has failed to respond to the changing requirements of the present times since it tended to be rigid, laying too much emphasis on red-tapism; sap creativity; thwarted initiative; wore out dynamism of justice denied as of resultant delays. Additionally the focus was overwhelmingly on following procedures and keeping records, resultantly, the government moved at snail's pace, that too after guzzling scarce public resources. This criticism brings to light the sordid and murky picture of the system. Evidently, the clarion call is of revamping the government and the archaic governance system.

A Corollary of E-Governance Efforts in India –

India was one of the earliest to respond to the promising possibilities of using ICTs in promoting efficient governance in the developing world.

The government of India has kick started IT use in governance in the right earnest by launching number of initiatives both at the National and State level. A brief review is as follows:

I.At National Level –

1)National E-Governance Action Plan (NeGP):

The government approved this plan for implementation during year 2003-07. It was an attempt to lay the basic foundation and provide impetus for long-term growth of e-governance within the country. This plan emphasized on providing a citizen centric and business centric environment for governance by creating right governance and institutional mechanisms at the centre, state and local levels. Endorsement of this plan meant providing services to citizens through a single window clearance, outsourcing of services wherever and whenever possible, motivating states for quick adoption of IT services, promoting and developing public – private partnerships in IT sector etc.

2)Creation of Centre for E-Governance:

It was established to act as a nodal centre to provide general information on e-governance, national and international initiatives and IT policies of the government(s).

3)Information on Technology (IT) Act, 2000:

This act was adopted by government to provide legal framework to facilitate electronic transactions. The major goals of this act are to prevent computer crimes recognition of electronic contracts, making electronic filling etc.

4)National Taskforce of Information Technology and Software Development:

It was established on May 1998.

5)Development of E-Office Solutions:

These were developed to enable various departments and ministers to perform work electronically. Modules were developed like workflow for drafts for approvals, e-file, e-notings, integrated personal information and financial accounting systems, submission of reports.

6)Websites for Ministries and Departments:

Creation of websites for almost all departments and ministries and giving information on facets such as their policies, goals, decisions, objectives, contact persons etc.

7)Appointment of IT Manager in every Ministry/Department:

Designating a Joint Secretary level officer as IT manager in every ministry/department.

8)Setting up of High Powered Committee (HPC):

Establishing HPC Committee with cabinet secretary as its chairman and thereby improving administrative efficiency by using Information Technology in government.

II.At State Level –

Considerable number of state governments have launched E-Governance services for improving service delivery to their citizens. Evidences reveal that implementing ICT related reforms, particularly at the state level is quite on uphill task. Thus, it becomes all the more important to study and examine the various experiences for evolving effective strategic for future. Some e-projects launched at state level are as follows:

S.No.	Project Name	State Launched	Aim/Services Offered
1.	RajSWIFT (Rajasthan Statewide Intranet on Fast Track)	Rajasthan	Facilitating online data, text & email communication between CM office and 32 district collectors on one-to-one basis.
2.	Single Window Clearance System	Rajasthan	All facilities at one place, reducing time required for obtaining licence/statutory approvals etc. from various government departments and agencies.
3.	Gyandoot	Madhya Pradesh	Information regarding current crop-rates, land records, total families below poverty line, domicile/income/ caste certificates etc.
4.	SARI (Sustainable Access in Rural India)	Tamil Nadu	Providing email, voice-mail and web-cam services in rural Tamil Nadu at very descent rates.
5.	Bhoomi	Karnataka	Facilitating computerisation of entire 20 million records of land ownership of 6.7 million farmers.
6.	Smartgov (Smart Government)	Andhra Pradesh	Improving decision making and introducing paper less file processing system in Andhra Pradesh secretariat.
7.	Warana	Maharashtra	Providing agricultural, medical and educational information to villagers.
8.	Sampark	Punjab (Chandigarh)	Providing online services like tax payments, paying electricity, water and sewage bills, issuing birth/death certificates, passport applications etc.
9.	FRIENDS (Fast, Reliable, Instant, Effective Network for Disbursement of Service)	Kerala	Payment of telephone, water, electricity bills, university exam fees, licence, ration cards etc.
10.	"At Your Service" or "Mee-Seva"	Andhra Pradesh	Servicing 50,000 requests per day involving departments like revenue, registration, municipality, education etc.

1)Rajswift (Rajasthan Statewide Intranet on Fast Track) launched in Rajasthan:

The project has been developed by Rajasthan Government's department of I.T. This internet system which has been developed using internet technology and tools would facilitate online data text and e-mail communication between Chief Minister's office and all the 32 district collectors on one-to-one basis thereby bringing the chief executive of the state and the district administration at a distance of just a mouse click away.

2) Mechanism of Single Window Clearance System launched in Rajasthan:

In an effort to overcome the inordinately long time for obtaining the statutory approvals/licence etc. from various government agencies/departments, the Bureau of Industrial promotion and office of the commissioner (investment and NRIs), Government of Rajasthan has launched a Single Window Clearance System, through a single composite application form.

3)"Gyandoot" in State of Madhya Pradesh:

This project was launched on 1 January 2000, in poverty stricked, tribal-dominated rural areas of Madhya Pradesh with a network of 31 kiosks covering 311 Panchayats (village communities), over 600

villages and a population of around half a million (i.e. about 50% of the entire district).

The services provided at these kiosks include:

a)On spot information of land records documents at a fee of Rs. 15;
b)Data regarding families below poverty line;
c)Applications regarding domicile or income or caste certificates can be sent through e-mail costing Rs. 10;
d)All information on government development programmes and grants on various development projects; and
e)Availing information about current crop rates at local and any other auction centres in the country at an extremely nominal fee of Rs. 5;
f)Auction facility for land, machinery and any other durable commodities at a fee of Rs. 25 for three months;
g)Lodging complaints at a fee of Rs. 10 relating poor quality of seeds/fertilizers, drinking water, non-functioning of schools, panchayats, village committees etc.
h)Miscellaneous services like matrimonial advertisements; Photostat, STD, PCO, horoscope services etc.

4)SARI (Sustainable Access in Rural India) in Tamil Nadu:

Around 30 villages in and around Pathinettangudi 35 km from Madurai, Tamil Nadu are covered under this project and are being provided facilities through 'Public Access Internet Kiosks', these kiosks provides services like –

a)Downloading application forms for caste, birth and death certificates and forwarding it through e-mail to the 'Tehsildar'
b)Family members of youth staying abroad are saving huge money on telephone bills.
c)Free online counselling facility to farmers on agricultural problems is being made possible with the help of experts.

5)"Bhoomi in Karnataka:

Being an agrarian state Karnataka was faced with the problem of maintaining immense land records and updating them as per procedure could take years for obvious reasons.
The project "Bhoomi" facilitated computerizations of entire 20 million records of land ownership of 6.7 million farmers in the state of Karnataka. Currently, computerized land record kiosk popularly known as "Bhoomi Center" is functioning in all the 177 talukas in the State. Farmers are provided online facilities at a fee of Rs. 15/- Project "Bhoomi" has resulted in –

a)Determining number of executed and pending mutation orders;
b)Fixing responsibility and holding officials accountable;
c)Simplification of procedures;
d)Putting an end to corruption;
6)Smart Government (Smartgov) in Andhra Pradesh:

In its endeavour to provide simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance to citizens, Andhra Pradesh government has launched project "SMART GOVERNMENT" at the secretariat level. Under this on receipt of a document, it is scanned to generate a number for the file and is e-mailed to the concerned officer. The official notings are done electronically. The system being automatic, enforces the desired checks and balances. Thus, paper less file processing system has been introduced in Andhra Pradesh Secretariat through project 'Smartgov', Thereby not only file processing time has reduced but also there is significant improvement in quality of decisions besides curbing corruption.

7) Project "WARANA" in state of Maharashtra:

This project has been launched to showcase the effective use of IT infrastructure in the accelerated socio-economic development of 70 villages around Warana Nagar in the Kolhapur and Sangli districts of the State of Maharashtra.
The project aims to provide agricultural, medical and education information to villagers by establishing networked facilitation booths in the villages.

8)FRIENDS (Fast, Reliable, Instant, Effective Network for Disbursement of Service) Launched in Kerala: Kerala has been a frontrunner in implementing e-governance in India. FRIENDS is another feather in its cap. (FRIENDS was launched as a pilot project in June 2000 with the concept of using ICT for better citizen government interface).

This project involves various government departments/agencies like BSNL, Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), Kerala Water Authority (KWA), Kerala University, Civil Services, Motor Vehicles and Revenue Department, Electrical Inspectorate etc.

It's success can be accessed from the fact that from a mere Rs. 568 lakhs (2000-01), its collection has risen to Rs. 23,500 lakhs (2010-11). Similarly the number of transactions increased from 1.25 lakhs to 3.52 lakhs during the same period.

9)Project Sampark in Chandigarh (Punjab):

This project was launched in Chandigarh, common capital of Punjab and Haryana to provide multiple services through a single window with a wide geographic spread.

Under this project electronic service centres named 'Sampark Centers' are established at various city locations, providing variety of government services like issue of birth and death certificates, tenant/domestic servants registration, payment of water, sewerage and electricity bills, payment of taxes, issue of senior citizen cards, bus passes, passport applications etc. under a single roof thereby saving precious time and costs of the customers.

Moreover, courteous staff, better physical infrastructure and enhanced timings have made these centres very popular.

10)"At Your Service" launched in Andhra Pradesh:

"At Your Service" or Mee-Seva is Andhra Pradesh government's e-window to its citizens. Under this project nearly 6000 Mee-Seva canters are servicing over 50,000 requests per day, which are prepared to handle 1,00,000 transactions a day. It has ended the "tyranny of ink signatures".

It involves departments like revenue, registration, education, municipal administration and various other channels.

CONCLUSION –

Thus, an analysing various e-governance services generated at National and State level, it can be concluded that –

(a)Introducing e-governance applications has definitely made an impact on traditional government service delivery mechanism thereby making a clear departure from the past horrifying experiences of customers like – long queues, cramped spaces, delaying tendencies of officials, bribery etc.

(b)Introducing e-governance in governance process has brought about a revolution in the quality of service delivery to its citizens and has ushered into:

Transparent Administration.
Single Window Clearance Mechanism
Check on Corruption
Efficient Management
Citizen Centric Services etc.

(c)Achieving success in e-governance requires active partnership between government, private entrepreneurs and citizens.

(d)Though a good beginning has been made a lot has to be done for making e-governance a roaring success,. Uphill efforts are required on sustained basis in future also to maintain the momentum in a poor country like India.

Hence, e-governance has to be a shared and nurtured vision with all the stakeholders – government and non-government participating in defining this vision.

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