



E-governance and its challenges

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Abstract

"People do not need more government or less government. They need only better government; to be more precise they need better governance - Osborne and Gaebler.

E-governance throughout the world has steadily evolved from computerization of Government Departments to initiatives that encapsulate the finer points of Governance, such as citizen centricity, service orientation, and transparency. Only after the Second World War, there was a paradigm shift in the role of the government. Information Technology and its evolution is the deciding factor in the later twentieth century. As all of us are aware of the fact that the technological changes have brought major changes in all aspects of human life including the governance.

Good governance is guaranteed by information technology and this needs to be taken into account. Needless to say, technological innovation ought to improve the quality of human life. An orderly functioning of the society demands good governance which also ensures the implementation of effective welfare measures. Good governance promotes furtherance of democracy, openness, transparency in administration, besides enhancing citizen participation in governance and application of information and communication in public administration. Information and communication technology is very effectively employed in e-governance and therefore e-governance can be described as a vehicle of good governance. E-governance comprises the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support public services, government administration, democratic processes, and relationships among citizens, civil society, the private sector, and the state.

Keywords: e-governance, information technology, paradigm, computerization, democracy

Introduction

Historical Development: E-Government to e-governance

In the early 1990s, the 'reinventing government' movement called for radical change from bureaucratic government toward an entrepreneurial government that is enterprising, catalytic, mission and customer driven, and results oriented. The term 'electronic government' was coined in this process. Successive governments began to promise to put people 'online instead of in-line.'

Good governance has always been the aim of society and the state. It is not a finished product but a dynamic and endless concept. Searching for good governance is a continuous exercise. It has been a never-ending challenge to rulers since the very dawn of state, irrespective of its nature, structure, and form. It means that the necessity of good governance has been universally accepted irrespective of time and space parameters.

Good governance means governance for the betterment of all, especially for the upliftment of downtrodden. It implies service to the people without any discrimination based on class, creed, sex, and religion. However, to ensure sustainable human development, action must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality. But the debate on good governance is not conclusive. It is a continuous process and therefore it is inconclusive.

In fact, good governance has a number of parameters. It is the destination point for every government and a number of vehicles attempt to converge at that point and e-governance is

one of them. Needless to say, the basic goal of e-governance is good governance.

E-governance - conceptual framework

E-governance or electronic governance has gained much prominence in the twenty-first century. It is basically the application of ICT in the processes of government functioning in order to bring about 'Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent' (SMART) governance. In other words, it can be defined as interaction between government and citizens and internal government operations to provide effective implementation of government policies with the use of ICT. It is a major weapon wielded to curtail corruption to make public delivery system clutter-free.

According to the World Bank, e-governance refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as wide area network, the internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relation with citizens, business and other arms of government. Citizen-government interactions, cost-cutting, generation of revenue and transparency can be enhanced through this system.

According to UNESCO, e-governance may be understood as the performance of the governance through electronic medium to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public and to other agencies and for performing administrative activity of the government. According to this definition the use of the electronic medium in the exercise of authority, in the management of a country's

affairs along with articulation of citizens' interests leading to greater transparency and efficiency.

Basically, e-governance is generally understood as the use of ICT at all levels of the government in order to provide service to the citizens, interaction with business enterprises and communication and exchange of information between different agencies of the government in a speedy, convenient, efficient and transparent manner. E-governance is basically a move towards SMART governance implying; simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance.

The definition of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is 'the use of information and communication technologies, and particularly the Internet, as a tool to achieve better government', meaning the achievement of better policy outcomes, higher quality services, greater engagement with citizens, and ... advancing the public reform agenda.

E-governance is a continuous journey which doesn't have any destination. It is defined as the delivery of services and information to the public by using electronic means. It is the application of ICT to the process of administration and does not mean computerization of the total administrative system. The fundamental change in the operation of the government is possible now. The basic goal of e-governance is good governance. E-governance is a tool to ensure good governance.

Scope of e-governance

E-Governance is a wider concept than e-Government, which is the use of ICT's in the dissemination of services of government. The Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development (COMNET-IT), in association with and with the financial support of UNESCO, has developed national profiles detailing current status and developments in this area. Whilst impacts of e-governance in the commercial, NGO and professional areas are covered in these studies, the main focus centres around specific government initiatives, such as

1. The Development of Cyber Laws
2. The Liberalization of Telecommunications
3. Plans for e-Governance
4. Plans for the Development of Community e-Centers
5. The Deployment of Community e-Centers
6. Instances of Public feedback to statements of direction, Draft Legislation, etc.
7. Websites of Government Agencies, particularly if these offer value beyond a public relation image

Objectives of e-governance

E-governance can be examined in terms of five interrelated objectives namely

- **A policy framework** - Information related statutes and policies are the essential legitimizing foundation for e-governance. They set policy goals and specify the rules and conditions under which information is gathered, used, protected, and shared by government, individuals, and the private sector to achieve them.
- **Enhanced public services** - E-governance goals for service enhancements embrace a common sense approach that replaces an organizational perspective with a customer orientation, providing access, convenience, and

choice to citizens and businesses seeking information or services from government.

- **High quality and cost-effective government operations** - A wide array of managerial, professional, and technical improvement goals address not only efficiency but also infrastructure investments, information management and use, organizational innovation, risk management, procurement reform, workforce capabilities, and performance assessment.
- **Citizen engagement in democratic processes** - It is often called "e-participation" engagement that covers the spectrum of democratic processes. It includes accessibility and usability of technologies and information content, public interaction with government, public discourse on political topics, and public consultation, or the processes of engaging people in the agenda-setting process.
- **Administrative and institutional reform** - With an emphasis on accountability, transparency, and trust, reform pertains to the structures and processes of government as well as to the roles and responsibilities government delegates to the private and non-profit sectors for carrying out public functions. Reform also addresses the culture of government and the way the public service perceives its role with respect to governance, citizens, and society.

E-governance is a sure remedy to reduce the corruption in public service delivery system. The following are the other objectives of the e-governance:

- To provide 24x7 days access of information for the citizen.
- To make the delivery system more efficient.
- To make the delivery procedure simple.
- To provide all basic services under one roof.
- To provide flow of information without any delay.
- To improve efficiency, consistency and effectiveness of government responses.
- To reduce processing delays.
- To provide the results without any error.

Advantages of e-governance

E-governance helps in simplifying the processes. The governmental functioning and process have become more transparent and accessible because of the accountability of appropriate technology and its adoption. The citizens can save a considerable amount of money, time and energy as they have access to updated government information. It is an effective tool for tackling corruption and is a dependable provider of hassle-free services to the people. The following are the advantages of e-governance:

Better access to information and quality services for citizens

ICT would make available timely and reliable information on various aspects of governance. In the initial phase, information would be made available with respect to simple aspects of governance such as forms, laws, rules, procedures etc. later extending to detailed information including performance reports, public database, decision making processes etc. As regards services, there would be an

immediate impact in terms of saving time, effort and money, resulting from online and one-point accessibility of public services backed up by automation of back end processes. The ultimate objective of e-Governance is thus to reach out to citizens by adopting a life-cycle approach i.e. providing public services to citizens which would be required right from birth to death.

Speed

Technology makes Communication speedier and internet, phones, cell phones, and smart phones, have reduced the time taken in normal communication.

Cost Reduction

Internet and phones make communications cheaper saving valuable money for the government. In paper-based communication needs a lot of stationery, printers, computers etc., which calls for continuous heavy expenditure.

Transparency

Use of ICT makes government more transparent. All the information of the government would be made available on the internet. The citizens can see the information whenever they want. It also makes the public ease to find out the status of their grievance raised by them.

Simplicity, efficiency and accountability in the government

Application of ICT to governance combined with detailed business process reengineering would lead to simplification of complicated processes, weeding out of redundant processes, simplification in structures and changes in statutes and regulations. The end result would be simplification of the functioning of government, enhanced decision making abilities and increased efficiency across government – all contributing to an overall environment of a more accountable government machinery. This, in turn, would result in enhanced productivity and efficiency in all sectors.

Convenience

E-government brings public services to citizens on their schedule and their venue.

Expanded reach of governance

Rapid growth of communications technology and its adoption in governance would help in bringing government machinery to the doorsteps of the citizens. Expansion of telephone network, rapid strides in mobile technology, spread of internet and strengthening of other communications infrastructure would facilitate delivery of a large number of services provided by the government. This enhancement of the reach of government – both spatial and demographic – would also enable better participation of citizens in the process of governance.

Improved customer service

E-government allows redeploying resources from back-end processing to the front line of customers' service.

In addition to the above, other advantages of e-governance are as follows:

- E-governance is a tool for good governance.
- It makes the administration citizen-friendly.

- It reduces the gap between the government and the public.
- It simplifies the procedures, rationalises administration and restructures the administrative system.
- It ensures accountability in public administration.
- It reduces red-tapism and corruption.
- It minimises paper work in government offices.
- It provides integrated services and information.
- It is known for better decision-making and planning.
- Re-structuring of administrative processes.
- Improved relations between the public authorities and civil society.
- Greater citizen participation in the governance process.
- Better planning and coordination between different levels of governance.
- Increased legitimacy of government.
- Flattens organisational structure i.e., less hierarchic.
- Cost reduction and revenue growth.
- Greater convenience to citizens and business.
- Better delivery of government services to citizens.
- Eco-friendly.

To put it in a nut-shell, e-governance is about reform in governance, facilitated by the creative use of ICT. It provides better access to information and quality of services for citizens. It leads to the simplicity, efficiency and accountability in the government. Rapid growth of communication technology and its adoption in e-governance would help in bringing government machinery to the doorstep of the citizens.

Challenges of e-governance

There are several challenges and barriers that can delay progress of e-government implementation. The variety and complexity of e-government initiatives implies the existence of a wide range of challenges and barriers to its implementation and management. This section, will briefly introduce the most important and common challenges Security, unequal access to the computer technology by the citizen, high initial cost for setting up the e-government solutions, resistance to change, digital divide, cost and privacy are some of the impediments in the path of implementation.

The implementation of e-government faces some technological difficulties such as lack of shared standards and compatible infrastructure among departments and agencies. Also, privacy and security are critical barriers in implementation of e- government in citizen concern. The guarantee by the government will not suffice unless accompanied by technical solutions, transparency of procedures and possibly independent auditing.

Organizational Challenges

The implementation of e-government is not a pure technical issue only, but rather an organizational issue. Organizational challenges include: Top management support, Collaboration and Lack of qualified personnel and training.

Trust

Trust and financial security are two critical factors limiting the adoption of e-government services.

Social Barriers

Social issues are mainly concerned with the usability by a

large variety of people. This implies that the interface must be usable by all kinds of people within the government. Social obstacles include many factors such as digital divide, culture, education and income. In this area the first two factors will be illustrated.

Cultural Barrier

The main barriers to the implementation of e-government are not technical, but cultural implications of new technologies. Culture was defined as a set of important assumptions, beliefs and values that all members of a society share in common. Cultural differences and individual behaviour patterns play a role in the acceptance and use of new technology. It is found that cultural issues have negatively affected the acceptance and adoption of e-government system in some developed countries such as the UK and Japan. However, cultural issue is not easily tangible, it must be given more planning so that technical change is implemented successfully.

Resistance to change

The resistance 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.

Digital Divide

The digital divide refers to the separation that exists between individuals, communities and business that have access to information technology and those that do not have such access.

Economic Poverty

It is closely related to limited information technology resources. An individual living below poverty line does not afford a computer for himself to utilize the benefits of e-government and other online services.

Lack of awareness

Awareness can only help to bring users to the service delivery channel. But lack of awareness among the people also causes to digital divide.

Procedures

The system is designed in such a way, which leads to a complicated procedure. So, the procedures need to be simplified to deliver concrete benefits. The clear guidelines to be provided to encourage the end users and reduce user's dependence on middlemen/intermediaries.

Cost

In the developing countries, cost is one of the most important prohibiting factors that come in the path of e-governance implementation. Some time elected officers and politicians do not seem to be interested in implementing e-governance.

Privacy and Security

A lack of clear security standards and protocols can limit the development of projects that contain sensitive information such as income, medical history.

The key challenges with e-governance are not technology or internet issues but organisational issues like, redefining rules

and procedures, information technology, legal issues, infrastructure, skill, awareness, access to right-information, inter department collaboration, tendency to resist changing in work culture. Other obstacles are geographical distances, lack of trained human resources and lack of ICT penetration in remote areas. For instance, a good e-governance application will not benefit anybody in remote areas if there is no supporting infrastructure such as electricity, computers and connectivity.

Financial Barriers

Lack of financial support is considered as significant obstacle to the implementation of e-government in many countries. It is necessary to ensure the availability of the existing and expected budgetary resources in order to achieve the goals. The most serious and significant barrier to the implementation of e-government is a lack of money; e-government implementation is expensive.

Conclusion

Online government is gaining importance all over the World in the 21st century. The use of ICT can be a powerful tool for good governance and making democracy more participatory in nature. The advent of the 21st century has witnessed the convergence of information technology and digital communication technology, which, in turn, has resulted in a paradigm shift in the people's expectation from government. Citizens expectations from government are very high and their dependence on government is increasing for variety of services. Citizens also expect flexible, convenient interactions, sophisticated online services and prompt responses to their requests. Now the citizens are demanding 24x7 access and rapid resolution. Citizens and business want greater access to government information and services, with simpler processes, less paperwork and more efficient interactions. It is through e-governance that the government reaches its citizens by not only providing online services, but also enabling them to participate in the process of governance. This phenomenon is seen all over the world. It is clear that e-government involves multiple stages or phases of development and it has many advantages to all sectors of government, citizens and business. However, the implementation of e-government is not an easy job it faces many challenges and barriers which have to be treated very carefully.

Given the nature and pace of technological change, ICT strategies, tools, and innovations will continue to shape the information environment of governance. The inevitable interactions among technology development, social trends, policy responses, and public management adaptations will continue to provide a dynamic field for learning and action. Consequently, the implications of technological change on the nature, structures, and processes of governance will remain a ripe area for both academic research and government innovation.

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