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E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA – A MULTIFACETED ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

E-governance is the application of information & communication technologies to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of informational & transactional exchanges within government, between govt. & govt. agencies of National, State, Municipal & Local levels, citizen & businesses, and to empower citizens through access & use of information. Terms such as “data resale”, “digital democracy”, “e-politics” etc. are also frequently mentioned within the same breath as “e-government. Neither

of these terms, however, observes the principle of leveraging the Internet to simplify government. Digital democracy is, in fact, “e-politics” rather than e-government; that is, leveraging the Internet to simplify the election process (rather than government). It is important that these terms not muddle the objectives of e-government.

Keywords - E-Governance, Digital Governance, Digital Government Services

INTRODUCTION

Global shifts towards increased deployment of IT by governments emerged in the nineties, with the advent of the World Wide Web. The technology as well as e-governance initiatives have come a long way since then. With the increase in Internet and mobile connections, the citizens are learning to exploit their new mode of access in wide ranging ways. They have started expecting more and more information and services online from governments and corporate organizations to further their civic, professional and personal lives , thus creating abundant evidence that the new “e-citizenship” is taking hold.

The concept of e-governance has its origins in India during the seventies with a focus on development of in- house government applications in the areas of defense, economic monitoring, planning and the deployment of IT to manage data intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration etc. The efforts of the National Informatics Center (NIC) to connect all the district headquarters during the eighties was a very significant development. From the early nineties, IT technologies were supplemented by ICT technologies to extend its use for wider sectoral applications with policy emphasis on reaching out to rural areas and taking in greater inputs from NGOs and private sector as well. There has been an increasing involvement of international donor agencies under the framework of e-governance for development to catalyze the development of e-

governance laws and technologies in developing countries..

While the emphasis has been primarily on automation and computerization, state governments have also endeavored to use ICT tools into connectivity, networking, setting up systems for processing information and delivering services. At a micro level, this has ranged from IT automation in individual departments, electronic file handling and workflow systems, access to entitlements, public grievance systems, service delivery for high volume routine transactions such as payment of bills, tax dues to meeting poverty alleviation goals through the promotion of entrepreneurial models and provision of market information. The thrust has varied across initiatives, with some focusing on enabling the citizen-state interface for various government services, and others focusing on bettering livelihoods. Every state govt. has taken the initiative to form an IT task force to outline IT policy document for the state and the citizen charters have started appearing on govt. websites.

For governments, the more overt motivation to shift from manual processes to IT-enabled processes may be increased efficiency in administration and service delivery, but this shift can be conceived as a worthwhile investment with potential for returns. Following are some of the recent e-governance projects implemented by various state govts.

State/Union Territory	Initiatives covering departmental automation, user charge collection, delivery of policy/programme information and delivery of entitlements
Andhra Pradesh	e-Seva, CARD, VOICE, MPHS, FAST, e-Cops, AP online—One-stop-shop on the Internet, Saukaryam, Online Transaction processing
Bihar	Sales Tax Administration Management Information
Chhattisgarh	Chhattisgarh Infotech Promotion Society, Treasury office, e-linking project
Delhi	Automatic Vehicle Tracking System, Computerisation of website of RCS office, Electronic Clearance System, Management Information System for Education etc
Goa	Dharani Project
Gujarat	Mahiti Shakti, request for Government documents online, Form book online, G R book online, census online, tender notice.
Haryana	Nai Disha
Himachal Pradesh	Lok Mitra
Karnataka	Bhoomi, Khajane, Kaveri
Kerala	e-Srinkhala, RDNet, Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services (FRIENDS)
Madhya Pradesh	Gyandoot, Gram Sampark, Smart Card in Transport Department, Computerization MP State Agricultural Marketing Board (Mandi Board) etc
Maharashtra	SETU, Online Complaint Management System—Mumbai
Rajasthan	Jan Mitra, RajSWIFT, Lokmitra, RajNIDHI
Tamil Nadu	Rasi Maiyams—Kanchipuram; Application forms related to public utility, tender notices and display
North-Eastern States	
Arunachal Pradesh,	Community Information Center. Forms available on
Manipur, Meghalaya,	the Meghalaya website under schemes related to
Mizoram &	social welfare, food civil supplies and consumer affairs, housing transport etc.

Nagaland	
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E-Governance signifies the shift in interaction between the Government and those who are governed. It aims for improving efficiency and effectiveness of Government by making the information services available any where and any time.

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

E-Government applications normally evolve through a four stage process. The first stage includes the publication of information on a web site for citizen to seek knowledge about procedures governing the delivery of different services. The second stage allows for interactivity online. Clients can download applications for receiving services. The third stage involves electronic delivery of documents. The fourth stage results in the electronic delivery of services where more than one department may be involved in processing a request or service.

E-Government is the use of IT in particular Internet , to deliver public services in a much more convenient , customer oriented cost effective and altogether different and better way. It comprises of an alignment of Information Communication Tools , institutional reform, business process and service content towards provision of high quality and value added e-services to citizens and businesses. The term e-government is sometime confused with e-governance and the two terms are often used interchangeably. E-Governance has been defined as the process of enabling transactions between concerned groups and government through multiple channels by linking all transaction points, decision points, enforcing implementation points and repositories of data using information and communication technologies, to improve the efficiency , transparency , accountability and effectiveness of a government. In other words a governance body having characteristics like , Simple , Moral , Accountable , Responsive & Transparent with focus around citizen services and prefixed with “e” (usage of ICT) is e-Government. Stake holders participation in democratic Governance process through ICT (Information communication tools) is e-Governance.

E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The Indian government is using IT to facilitate governance. The IT industry is doing its bit to help as public-private partnerships become the order of the day. The last couple of years have seen e-governance drop roots in India. IT enables the delivery of government services as it caters to a large base of people across different segments and geographical locations. The effective use of IT services in government administration can greatly enhance existing efficiencies, drive down communication costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments. It also gives citizens easy access to tangible benefits, be it through simple applications such as online form filling, bill sourcing and payments, or complex applications like distance education and tele-medicine.

As of now, e-governance projects are being run only in certain departments. This approach will gradually be extended to all departments eventually, leveraging the power of IT to streamline administrative functions and increase transparency

Agriculture, power and education are fields where the government makes use of IT to provide services to citizens. The revenue collection department is in the process of using information technology for applications such as income tax. Some notable examples:

A Kolkata-based hospital leverages e-governance for tropical medicine. The hospital employs tele-medicine to assist doctors in rural areas as they analyse and treat panchayat residents. This method does away with patients having to travel all the way to Kolkata for treatment. Patients feel better being examined in their own village. Using tele-medicine, the hospital is able to dispense its expertise to far-flung districts. The patient goes for an examination to the local doctor in the panchayat. This doctor is in contact via a voice & data connection with a doctor at the hospital for tropical medicine. Thus, the panchayat resident gets the benefit of being treated by both a local doctor and a hospital specialist.

The Karnataka government's 'Bhoomi' project has led to the computerisation of the centuries-old system of handwritten rural land records. Through it, the revenue department has done away with the corruption-ridden system that involved bribing village accountants to procure land records; records of right, tenancy and cultivation certificates (RTCs). The project is expected to benefit seventy lakh villagers in 30,000 villages.

A farmer can walk into the nearest taluk office and ask for a computer printout of his land record certificate for Rs 15. He can also check details of land records on a touch-screen kiosk by inserting a two-rupee coin. These kiosks, installed at the taluk

office, will provide the public with a convenient interface to the land records centre.

In Gujarat there are websites where citizens log on and get access to the concerned government department on issues such as land, water and taxes.

In Hyderabad, through e-Seva, citizens can view and pay bills for water, electricity and telephones, besides municipal taxes. They can also avail of birth / death registration certificates, passport applications, permits / licences, transport department services, reservations, Internet and B2C services, among other things.

eChoupal, ITC's unique web-based initiative, offers farmers the information, products and services they need to enhance productivity, improve farm-gate price realisation, and cut transaction costs. Farmers can access the latest local and global information on weather, scientific farming practices, as well as market prices at the village itself through this web portal-all in Hindi. eChoupal also facilitates the supply of high quality farm inputs as well as the purchase of commodities at the farm.

Given the literacy and infrastructure constraints at the village level, this model is designed to provide physical service support through a choupal sanchalak-himself a lead farmer-who acts as the interface between the system and the farmers. The

contents of this site in their entirety are made available only to the registered sanchalaks.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The national e-governance plan (2003-07) reflects the strategic intent of the central government in the right perspective. Many projects are earmarked under this plan, and it is trying to address the digital divide.

From a political perspective, after watching the performance of some IT-savvy states in the recent elections, the system has woken up to the need to focus more on rural development. "The political systems are keener to use IT to disseminate information faster to farmers, disburse loans, improve education and the health systems in villages, etc. There is a clear-cut incentive to do it as 60 percent of the vote-bank still lives in rural India."

The e-governance has to be supported by the will and resources of those who are in governance, be it at the central or state level. The central government has analysed and appreciated the concept by creating a separate e-governance department headed by a secretary to trigger e-governance in India. The World Bank, ADB and UN have been approached, and in response they are generously funding e-governance projects.

In future, education, agriculture, state wide area networks (SWANs) and Community Information Centre projects will be rolled out backed by a

strong public private participation model (PPP) to achieve long-term sustainability.

LIST OF WEBSITES AND BEST PRACTICES ON EGOVERNANCE IN INDIA:

<http://www.mit.gov.in/>

Govt. of India, IT Department, Ministry of Communication & IT

<http://egov.mit.gov.in/>

Here you can find an impressive coverage of a number of e-governance related projects in India, discussion forum, policy agenda, national and global initiatives etc.

Definitely the site to start with!

<http://www.undp.org.in>

Info on UNDP involvement in the area of ICT for poverty reduction and e-governance. Briefs on the programmes under implementation available (click on subprogramme briefs). For more info on these, please contact us!

<http://www.developmentgateway.org/content/search?searchtext=e-governance>

By typing "e-governance" at the developmentgateway.org site, a number of articles (both general and on India in particular) will appear. A valuable source of info with critical insights in the concept of e-governance.

<http://www.digitalgovernance.org/>

Interesting forum for discussion on "Building and Sustaining Democratic and Accountable Governance Structures using ICT". Case studies available. It is also possible to subscribe for

updated news. A number of good links at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/digitalgov/gov-links.html>

<http://www.partners.panasia.org.sg/nird/ita.htm>

Details on the book 'Government@net', by Kiran Bedi, Parminder Jeet Singh and Sandeep Srivastava is a must for e-governance in India.

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have launched special projects in certain areas for the integration of IT with the farm sector.

<http://gyandoot.net>

Probably the most well-known e-governance (intranet) experience in India (Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh). The site is under maintenance, but you can access useful info at <http://gyandoot.nic.in>

<http://www.indiachi.com/archive1.htm>

The Warana -Wired Villages- initiative (Maharashtra).

http://www.andhrapradesh.com/apwebsite/news/pr_1306a.htm

Andhra Pradesh has launched the 'Multi-purpose household survey (MPHS) project and computer-aided administration of registration department (CARD) project throughout the state. Worth a look!

<http://www.tiruvaruronline.com>

Information on India's first district online (Tiruvarun, Karnataka). Well structured, with articles, projects (implemented and under implementation) etc.

<http://himachal.nic.in/lokmitra2.htm>

Another interesting e-initiative in India (district of Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh).

<http://www.bangaloreit.com/html/egovern/egovern.htm>

E-governance initiatives in the State of Karnataka.

<http://www.rajcomp.net/>

Click on WWW and than on showcases and a number of e-initiatives in Rajasthan will be displayed. Particularly interesting is the MANDI case, a Web Site done by RajCOMP for the Agriculture Marketing Board, Rajasthan. The dynamic nature of the web site separates it from the rest of the lot. The daily Agriculture Mandi prices are available on the Web Site, which shows prices for important agricultural commodities traded in Mandi.

Here are some of the successful eGovernance models developed in Kerala and garnered international recognition.

CONNECTING PEOPLE—THE FRIENDS MODEL

One of the very first and the most successful initiatives Kerala government put in place was the Fast Reliable Instant Effective Network for Distribution of Services (FRIENDS). The aim of the FRIENDS project is to create a single window, enabling the citizens to pay taxes and other utility payments. The project was first launched in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation in 2000. The participating departments were given the freedom

to maintain payment counters in their office premises as well. The project was then rolled out to other districts. The FRIENDS counter today handles bill payments of seven departments – revenue, motor vehicles, civil supplies, local bodies, universities, electricity, water, and telephones. Close to around a million people have used the FRIENDS service so far and it is growing at about 150% every year. The FRIENDS centers were initially conceived as a multi purpose service center, helping not only bill payment services but also acting as information kiosks on government activities. But due to various constraints this has not been implemented so far, but the government recently has taken the lead and decided to set up a call center for the FRIENDS facilities. To start with, the Thiruvananthapuram facility will be enabled with a call center that would provide information to the citizens on various government procedures and norms. For instance, if anybody wants to acquire a ration card or a building permit, the person can just ring up the call center and get the procedural details.

THE AKSHAYA PROJECT

Launched in November 2002, Akshaya (perpetuating prosperity) is an effort on the part of the IT department to 'bridge the digital divide'. By the end of the 3-year project, organizers hope to have set up a network of 6000 information centers that have the potential to impart basic IT literacy to at least one member in each of the 6.5 million

families in Kerala; generate and distribute locally relevant content; improve public delivery of services; and create employment opportunities. The Akshaya project is being implemented through Panchayati Raj Institutions, and involves private enterprise in the development of training institutes and content generation.

The project has helped in taking IT to the remotest part of Kerala- Malappuram. Incidentally, Malappuram has become the country's first 100% eLiterate district. People of this district are today conversant with the use of IT and are even savvy with Internet usage. The project has created over 620 kiosks and generated employment to over 2500 people in the area. With the success we have derived from Malappuram, the government has decided to replicate the Akshaya model in other districts of Kerala. Now the project has been extended to other districts in Kerala. The Government's vision is that by 2006, Kerala should become India's first fully eLiterate State."

Akshaya eCenters provide training that not only familiarizes people with the basics and scope of IT, but also ensures hands-on skill in operating a computer. The project aims at providing e-Literacy to one person in every family. A carefully designed content module in Malayalam of 15 hours duration per person is a major highlight of the project. The process of providing the skill sets is creating a long lasting relation between the Akshaya centers and the families in the area. On a macro level, this will generate a statewide data warehouse and repository

of relevant content for the families. Around 6 lakh people in Malappuram were trained since June 2003.

THE ESAVVY PANCHAYAT

The Vellanad Panchayat in the state has been declared the first fully computerized Panchayat in the country. The Panchayat has been automated by two software solutions- Sulekha and Sevana. These solutions are being used for the operations of the Panchayat and the social security schemes respectively. The government is also in the process of putting in place initiatives that will replicate the Vellanad model in other Panchayat entities in the state.

SECRETARIAT WIDE AREA NETWORK (SWAN)

A massive automation process of the state Secretariat, which houses 37 departments across six blocks, is in full swing. The project christened SWAN, will link key areas of the Secretariat- the annexe, Vikas Bhavan and the Public Office in a phased manner. These implementations will also scale up the current system: Secretariat Internet Communication System (SICS). Meanwhile, the government is also in the process of establishing a statewide area network aimed at linking the various district head quarters with the capital. This infrastructure, once completed, will become a platform to deliver various eGovernance services. Also, the government has decided to set up accelerated data centers at Kochi and Kozhikode.

The bandwidth for interconnecting is also being given free of cost by the service providers - Asianet, Reliance and Bharathi.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from above discussion that objectives of achieving e-governance and transforming India goes far beyond mere computerization of standalone 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 proposed changes are likely to be met with a lot of inertia which can not be overcome by lower and middle level officials with half hearted attempts to diffuse

the technology. 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.

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