

A BRIEF STUDY OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

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Definition of E-Governance

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.

The Governance of India kick started the use of IT in the government in the right earnest by launching number of initiatives. First the Government approved the National E-Governance Action plan for implementation during the year 2003-2007. The plan is an attempt to lay the foundation and provide impetus for long-term growth of e-governance within the country. It proposed to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms at the center, state and local levels to provide a citizen centric and business centric environment for governance. The Government has given approval in-principle to the plan and overall programme content; implementation approach and governance structure. While endorsing the plan, it was observed that: weight age must be given for quality and speed of implementation in procurement procedures for IT services; suitable system of motivating the states for quick adoption be incorporated; provision of delivery of services to the citizens through a single window should be encouraged; Outsourcing of services wherever and whenever feasible; efforts be made to promote and develop public private partnerships to utilize the full potential of private sector investments; and connectivity should be improved and extended up to the block level in the states. Apart from the action plan, the following measures have also been introduced:

- Adoption of "Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 by the Government of India to provide legal framework to facilitate electronic transactions. The major aims of this act are to: recognize electronic contracts, prevent computer crimes, and make electronic filing possible. The Act came into force on 17 October, 2000;

- Establishment of the National Taskforce of Information Technology and Software Development in May 1998;
- Creation of Centre for e-governance to disseminate the best practices in the area of e- governance for the use by the Central and State Governments and act as a nodal center to provide general information on e-governance, national and international initiatives, and IT policies of the government(s);
- Developing e-office solutions to enable various ministries and departments to do their work electronically. Modules such as Workflow for Drafts for Approvals, e-file, notings, submission of reports, integrated personal information and financial accounting systems have been developed;
- Setting up of a High Powered Committee (HPC) with Cabinet Secretary as its Chairman to improve administrative efficiency by using Information Technology in Government;
- Designating a Joint Secretary level officer as IT manager in every Ministry/ Department; and
- Instituting websites by almost all Ministries and Departments and providing information on aspects such as their objectives, policies and decisions, contact persons, etc. Some of them have started their electronic newsletter for giving publicity to their activities on wider scale; and identifying departments, which have frequent inter-face with the citizens, and computerizing them on priority basis. Thus, it can be inferred from the above that a good beginning has been made to make e-government a reality in India, but still a lot needs to be done. Sincere efforts are required on sustained basis in future also to maintain the momentum.

E-Government Initiatives at the State Level Quite a number of state governments have initiated measures to introduce information technology and its tools in the governance process.

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 & Nagaland	social welfare, food civil supplies and consumer affairs, housing transport etc.

Source : PC Quest Article

Counters at these service centers are manned by public/ private agencies and multiple services are provided on-line at each location. Empirical evidence reveals that it has not been an easy task to implement. In this regard, it is, therefore, of utmost importance to study and examine the various experiences for evolving effective strategies for future.

Stages of E- Governance

Stage I – WEB PRESENCE- The first phase is marked by web presence of public institutions and dissemination of information. This has been facilitated by the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI) and this has been developed as a basic feature of all public services where type of service and service provider details are made available in a proactive manner. This information is also being integrated for citizen access through the National and State Portals which provide basic information on Government programmes and services. Web presence can range from basic and static information to access to databases, documents, policies etc with the aid of help features and site map.

Stage II – INTERACTIVE PRESENCE- The next stage is marked by an interactive interface with stakeholders with pro-active solutions to problem solving and electronic requests for services and financial transactions. The service starts on the internet but does not always end there. Applications related to property tax, land registration, property titles and programmes like 'bhoomi' are now being replicated at the national level. Efforts to widen the reach of these basic services to ordinary citizens through community access in several ways – through Online Sections at Government Offices, integrated service delivery through one-stop service centres – E kiosks, e-seva kendras etc, Post Offices, call centres, cooperative centres etc. – are now well tested in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, UP etc.

Stage III – TRANSACTIONAL PRESENCE- Completion of transactions on the internet and access to internet. This interaction in turn results in vertical and horizontal integration which changes the way a service is delivered, the effort being for completion of the transaction for the service through the internet with putting in place of back-end integration. The architectural model for this stage requires interoperability and convergence. There is electronic communication between the platform and citizen and the transaction is completed online.

Stage IV – NETWORKED PRESENCE AND E-PARTICIPATION- The fourth stage is marked by a Government to Citizen (G2C) framework based on an integrated network of public agencies, process certification and participation in basic process design and political processes. Web comment forms, upcoming events, on line polling mechanism, discussion forums and online consultation facilities are part of this stage. Integrated Portals are central to this integration. Web based political participation and institutionalization of stakeholder participation with tools like citizen polling mark important benchmarks in this stage. The promise of inclusion of all is an important hallmark of this stage. The Sixth Central Pay Commission's use of the online portal for inviting feedback and consultation on various relevant aspects through the questionnaire and processing of the same electronically is an instance the same.

The Advantages of Electronic-Government

The ultimate goal of the e-government is to be able to offer an increased portfolio of public services to citizens in an efficient and cost effective manner. It allows for government

transparency because it allows the public to be informed about what the government is working on as well as the policies they are trying to implement.

The main advantage while implementing electronic government will be to improve the efficiency of the current system(Paper based system). That would in return save money and time. The introduction would also facilitate better communications between governments and businesses.

For example: E-procurement facilitates G2G and B2B communication; this will permit smaller business to compete for government contracts as well as larger business. hence the advantage of creating an open market and stronger economy. Business and citizens can obtain information at a faster speed and it is possible at any time of the day.

The society is moving towards the mobile connections and the ability of an e-government service to be accessible to citizens irrespective of location throughout the country brings the next and potentially biggest benefit of an e-government service as we live in what is now termed as the Knowledge era.

The anticipated benefits of e-government include efficiency, improved services, better accessibility of public services, and more transparency and accountability.

The Disadvantages of Electronic-Government

The main disadvantage concerning e-government is the lack of equality in public access to the internet, reliability of information on the web, and hidden agendas of government groups that could influence and bias public opinions.

Potential implications of implementing and designing e-government, include disintermediation of the government and citizens, impacts on economic, social and political factors, vulnerability to cyber attacks and disturbance to the status quo in these areas.

Hyper-surveillance: Once the government begins to develop and become more sophisticated, the citizens will be forced to interact electronically with the government on a larger scale. E.g This could potentially lead to a lack of privacy for civilians as their government obtains more and more information on them.

Cost: Although large amount of money is spent on the development and implementation of e-government the outcomes and effects of trial internet-based governments are often difficult to gauge or unsatisfactory.

Inaccessibility: An e-government site that provides web based access and support often does not offer the potential to reach many users including those who live in the remote areas, have low literacy levels and exist on poverty line incomes.

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