

E-GOVERNANCE: A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN RURAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA

MANJUNATHA J

Research Scholar, DOSR in Political Science, Tumkur University, Tumkur.

Abstract:

E-Governance is the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to provide citizens and organisations with more convenient access to government services and information. It has the potential to improve public service delivery, reduce corruption, increase citizen participation in governance, and foster economic development. The implementation of e-Governance in India faces Environmental, Social, Economic and Technical Challenges. The most important details in this text are the technical challenges faced by e-Governance projects and Local self-government. This study is based on secondary data collected from periodicals, journals, magazines, books, reports, and E-sources.

Keywords: E-Governance, Local Self Governments, ICT, Administration.

INTRODUCTION

Reinventing government has been a dominant theme since the 1990s, wherein governments the world over are attempting to improve the systems of public service delivery. Rapid strides made in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have facilitated the reinvention of governments and prepared them to serve the needs of a diverse society. The concept of electronic governance, popularly called e-governance, India has been at the forefront of the IT revolution

and has had its effect on the public administration systems.

E-governance involves the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet, mobile phones, and other digital platforms to provide government services, communicate with citizens, and streamline administrative processes. E-governance aims to transform traditional government systems into more transparent, accountable, and responsive

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systems that are accessible to all citizens.

This can include initiatives such as online portals for citizen engagement and participation, digital payment systems for taxes and other government services, electronic voting, and data-driven decision-making. E-governance has the potential to improve public service delivery, reduce corruption, increase citizen participation in governance, and foster economic development. However, it also requires careful planning, investment, and coordination to ensure that all citizens have equal access to digital platforms and services. It is not limited to the public sector only but also includes the management and administration of policies and procedures in the private sector as well.

E-readiness is defined as the ability to use information and communication technologies to develop one's economy and welfare. According to the Global Information Technology Report 2012, the e-Readiness rank of India is 69 with a score of 3.89 out of 10 which means the use of ICTs in India is very low. Many other factors like privacy and security related to users' personal information, the digital divide etc. are also huge challenges for the implementation of e-Governance in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To know the Concept of E-Governance
- To know the Issues and Challenges of E-Governance in Local Self Governments

THE CONCEPT OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-governance is the application of ICT to the processes of government functioning for good governance. In other words, e-governance is the public sector's use of ICTs with the aim to improve information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in decision-making and making government more accountable, transparent and efficient. The Ministry of Information and Technology states that e-governance goes far beyond mere computerisation of stand-alone back office operations. It implies fundamental changes in government operations; and a new set of responsibilities for the legislature, executive, judiciary and citizens. According to the Controller and Auditor General, UK, e-governance means providing public access to information via the Internet by government departments and their agencies. So in essence, e-governance is the application of ICT in government functioning to bring in SMART governance implying: simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance.

SMART governance, thus, helps in:

- Improving the internal organisational processes of governments;
- Providing better information and service delivery;
- Increasing government transparency in order to reduce corruption;
- Reinforcing political credibility and accountability; and
- Promoting democratic practices through public participation and consultation

E-GOVERNANCE & E-GOVERNMENT

E-governance and e-government are often used interchangeably, so distinguishing between them at this stage is imperative. According to Thomas B. Riley government and governance are both about getting the consent and cooperation of the governed. But whereas government is the formal apparatus for this objective, governance is the outcome as experienced by those on the receiving end.... E-government can be a more productive version of government in general if it is well implemented and managed. E-governance can evolve into participatory governance if it is well supported with appropriate principles, objectives, programmes and architectures.

E-government is, thus, the modernisation of processes and functions of government using the tools of ICT to transform the way it serves its

constituents. As per the World Bank, e-government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as wide area networks, internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses and other arms of government.

TYPES OF E-GOVERNANCE

Types of Government interactions in E-Governance There are basically four different types, namely, Government to Government (G2G), Government to Citizen (G2C), Government to Business (G2B), and Government to Employee (G2E).

GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT (G2G) INITIATIVES

G2G is said to be the electronic sharing of data or information systems between government agencies. The primary objective of government-to-government (G2G) is to support the initiatives taken under e-governance services for improving communication, data sharing and data accessing. The initiatives taken under G2G help in making the implementation of government procedures an effective and efficient manner. Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS), e-Procurement, e-courts and e-office are the electronic services offered under G2G.

GOVERNMENT TO CITIZEN (G2C) INITIATIVES

Government to Citizen Initiatives are the activities made by the government for delivering online information and services to the citizens. Various initiatives have been taken by the government under this category such as applying applications Right to Information (RTI), e-Payment, e-District and Dial.gov.

GOVERNMENT TO BUSINESS (G2B) INITIATIVES

Government to Business (G2B) is an initiative that has been taken to make an interaction between commercial business sectors and the government for accessing online business information and services. E-Procurement project and Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) 21 are the services provided under Government to Business (G2B) initiatives. E-Procurement is an internet-based business-to-business/business-to-consumers/business to consumers sales and purchases. Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) 21 is a project developed by the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs that aims in providing all registry-related online services in an easy and secure manner.

GOVERNMENT TO EMPLOYEES (G2E) INITIATIVES

Government to Employees (G2E) is the online facility provided to employees for applying for leave and

retrieving records for salary payment. The main objective of G2E is to bring the employees together and to improve knowledge sharing. It enables the relationship between employees, government institutions and their management.

ICT TOOLS USED FOR PROVIDING E-GOVERNANCE SERVICES

Various ICT tools have been used to offer e-governance services for rural citizens. Optical character recognition (OCR), Video Conference, Magnetic Ink Character Recognition (MICR), Cloud Services, Personal Digital Assistants and Biometric Technologies are six specific tools have been used to deliver e-governance services under common service centres.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR): It is the combination of software and hardware system that helps to identify the handwritten or printed text characters within the digital images of paper documents. It is also called text recognition. It is highly used to process cheques and credit card slips. It is also helpful for paperless governance by reducing unnecessary hard copies of receipts and documents.

Magnetic Ink Character Recognition (MICR): It is the commonly used device in the banking industry for identifying customer information and it is a 9-digit code that helps to translate

the characters in the cheques into the digital form for faster processing.

Video Conference: It is the technology that conducts conferences at different websites with two or more participants through computer networks by transmitting video and audio data. This system has been used to monitor several government projects, public grievances and government projects.

Personal Digital Assistant (PDA): It is a small hand-held device like a mobile phone that provides information storage to schedule calendars, retrieval of information and acts as a handy address book. PDA includes Windows Mobile, Apple IOS and Google's Android.

Cloud Computing Services: It is the model for convenient access to computing resources such as storage, services, applications, networks and servers. It offers three different types of e-governance services such as SAAS (Software as a Service), IAAS (Infrastructure as a Service) and PAAS (Platform as a Service).

Biometric Technologies: It is the device that receives immediate biometric information in a digital format. Some of the methods of gathering biometric information are Fingerprint recognition, Retina Scanning, Hand Geometry, Facial Recognition, Keypoint dynamics, Signature dynamics and Voice Recognition.

MODELS OF E-GOVERNANCE

Prof. Dr Arie Halachmi in his paper, namely, 'E-Government Theory and Practice: The Evidence from Tennessee (USA),' has given five important models of e-governance. These models are The Broadcasting Model, The Critical Flow Model, The Comparative Analysis Model, The E-Advocacy/Mobilisation and Lobbying Model, The Interactive-Service Model.

The Broadcasting Model is based on the dissemination/broadcasting of useful governance information, which is in the public domain into the wider public domain with ICT and convergent media. The strength of the model rests upon the fact that a more informed citizenry is better able to judge the functioning of existing governance mechanisms and make an informed opinion about them. Further, the use of ICT opens an alternative channel for people to access information as well as validate existing information from different sources.

The Critical Flow Model is based on disseminating/channelling information of critical value to the targeted audience or into the wider public domain with ICT and convergent media. The Comparative Analysis model is a highly significant model for developing countries and can be used for empowering people. Essentially, the model continuously assimilates best practices in the areas of governance and

then uses them as benchmarks to evaluate other governance practices. It then uses the result to advocate positive changes or to influence 'public' opinion on these governance practices.

The E-Advocacy/Mobilisation and Lobbying model builds the momentum of real-world processes by adding the opinions and concerns expressed by virtual communities. This model helps the global civil society to impact global decision-making processes. It is based on setting up a planned, directed flow of information to build strong virtual allies to complement actions in the real world. Hence, it creates a diversity of the virtual community and the ideas, expertise and resources are accumulated through this virtual form of networking.

The Interactive-Service Model opens avenues for the direct participation of individuals in governance processes and brings in greater objectivity and transparency in decision-making processes through ICT. Under this model, the various services offered by the Government become directly available to its citizens in an interactive manner.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN RURAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA

There are a large number of obstacles in the implementation of e-Governance in India. These can be categorized as environmental and social challenges,

economical challenges and technical challenges. The concept of e-Governance is claiming for increased efficiency and effectiveness of the government, but most of the people may have limited access to Information and Communication Technologies and devices. Therefore, the government has to provide internet access through public terminals as a part of its universal access efforts.

Confidence in technologies provided by government: The implementation of public administration functions via e-Government requires that the user must be confident and comfortable while using the technology. The government has to balance ensuring that a system prevents fraudulent transactions and the burden that extensive checks can take place on honest people.

Separation: The separation that exists between the individuals, communities and businesses that have access to Information Technology and those that do not have such access. Economic poverty is closely related to limited information technology resources. People who are living below the poverty line cannot afford a computer and internet connection for themselves to take the benefits of the e-Government and other online services. Economic poverty is not the only cause of this separation; it may also be caused by the lack of awareness among the people.

Struggle to Change: The struggle to change phenomenon can explain much of the hesitation that occurs on the part of the constituents in moving from a paper-based to a web-based system to interact with the government. Applications may also help with possible reuse by other administrators.

Maintenance of electronic devices: As Information Technology changes very fast and it is very difficult for us to update our existing systems very fast. Regulations of different devices and their different characteristics may vary and the system in use must be capable to handle all the emerging needs. Maintenance is a key factor for long-living systems in a rapidly changing technical environment.

Low per Capita income: Per capita income means how much each individual receives, in terms of money, of the yearly income generated in a country. This refers to what each individual receives if the yearly national income is divided equally among everyone. The per capita income of India is low as compared to the other countries. Therefore, people cannot afford online services provided by the government which is a challenge for the implementation of e-governance.

Limited financial resources: The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is one of the measures national income and a country's economy. GDP is defined as the total

market value of all final goods and services produced within the country in a given period of time. The GDP of a country is the measure of its financial strength. India has limited financial resources to implement and maintain the e-Government projects properly.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Interoperability: Interoperability is the ability of systems and organizations of different qualities to work together. The e-Governance applications must have this characteristic so that the newly developed and existing applications can be implemented together.

Scale of applications: e-Governance projects have to be designed to scale from day one. E-Governance is supposed to affect every citizen of the country, so e-Governance applications must have the scale to interface with every citizen.

Multimodal Interaction: Multimodal interaction provides the user with multiple modes of interfacing with a system. An e-Government application can be really effective if its users can access it using different devices.

Privacy and Security: A critical obstacle in implementing e-Governance is the privacy and security of an individual's personal data that he/she provides to obtain government services.

Scope of applications: The very first step in creating a good application is to

define its scope very well and everything else comes later. The applications which are provided by e-Government, their scope must be known in advance for the accurate implementation of e-Governance projects.

Tried and tested technologies: Technology tends to get out of date very fast. Our government may not be in a position to buy new servers every year. So, it is better and safer to use technologies and products which are tried and tested for longer periods of time than using the latest ones.

Geographical problems: e-Governance systems must have to use wireless networks like existing cellular networks to reach the applications in remote areas irrespective of the geographical issues.

Local language: In India we have people speaking different languages. The e-governance applications are written in English. That is why e-Governance projects do not get success. Hence, the e-governance applications must be written in the local language of the people so that they may be able to use and take advantage of these applications. In India we have people speaking different languages. The rural population does not know any other language than their native language. The multiplicity of types of people in the context of language is a huge challenge

for implementing e-Governance projects.

Illiteracy: Literacy can be defined as the ability to read and write with understanding in any language. The literacy level of rural India is very low. It is a huge obstacle in the implementation of e-Governance projects.

Low IT Literacy: The majority of the Indian people are not have much acquaintance with Information Technology (IT). Most of the rural population in India is not aware of the usage of Information Technology. With a low level of IT literacy.

Services are not accessible easily: Every service should be accessible by anybody from anywhere and anytime. The use of the Internet is growing but still, there is a major part of the Indian population which is not able to access e-Governance activities for a variety of reasons.

Awareness of the e-Governance facilities offered by the government is another challenge. Humans are always reluctant to change. Now e-governance also means a change of the existing system of manual working to computerize systems, which are generally disapproved by the employees and the common man. People generally dislike it as they need to learn new things in it, so they need to give in more time and effort.

SUGGESTIONS

- Government websites must be designed in an easier format.
- Internet access must be provided through public terminals.
- The government must provide measures to ensure users can trust the technology.
- Separation between the individuals, communities and businesses that have access to Information Technology and those that do not have access is caused by economic poverty and lack of awareness among the people.
- Indian government has to take steps to narrow this separation to effectively implement e-Governance projects

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, e-governance has the potential to transform local self-governments in India, but there are several challenges that must be addressed. These include the digital divide, the lack of technical expertise, the need for greater transparency and accountability, and the need for greater collaboration and coordination. Addressing these challenges will require sustained effort and a commitment to building strong partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector.

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