Inception of E-Governance Initiatives in India: A Journey towards Good Governance

Deepak Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration,
Panjab University, Chandigarh
deepaksharma49@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

India is passing through a stage, where huge changes are taking place both in the business sector as well as in government sector. New prospects of growth and prosperity are opening up and tremendous opportunities are unfolding from which business world as well as governments can benefit. The role of knowledge is crucial in coping up with the rising demands and expectations of the people. Governance issues are multifaceted and simple to get incorrect, but E-Government success depends on getting them right. E governance is one of the important tools which brought a revolution in leadership, organizational structure, quality of services, transparency and accountability process of governance. Constitution of National knowledge commission is one the serious step in transforming India into global knowledge nucleus. The study throws light on initiatives of E Government and assesses its impact on society across the country. The paper points out various gaps hindering implementation of E-Governance and provides a range of remedies to overcome problems faced in process of E-Government.

Key Words: - *E-governance challenges, E-governance scopes, E-governance projects.*

Introduction

In the history, machinery of the government departments left much to be preferred in India. Red tapism, corruption, obsolete personnel and their casual attitude, were some of the adverse features of the working of the government departments. As a result, a visit to government department by a citizen to make use of any service used to be a traumatic practice. With the rising expectations and growing economy, the demand for smoother, quicker and transparent working on the part of government departments was much desired. The introduction of E-Governance has played an important role in escalation such rising demands. E-Governance's aim to strengthen the connection between public officials and communities thereby leading to a stronger, more answerable and complete democracy[1]. E-Governance permits new ways for the participation of citizens and communities for debating (Taylor and Williams, 1994; Rogers and Shukla, 2001; Gupta et al., 2004; Heeks and Nicholson, 2004)[2]. Initiatives to combat corruption propose that e-Governance will help which is very pivotal for growing nation like India. The National Knowledge Commission was entrusted with the task of preparing a plan for reform of knowledge related institutions and infrastructure. The focus on five key areas of enhancing access to knowledge, reinvigorating institutions where knowledge concepts are imparted, is creating a world class environment for creation of knowledge, promoting applications of knowledge for sustained and comprehensive growth and using knowledge applications in efficient delivery of public services[2].

Knowledge Commission on E-Governance

National Knowledge Commission has formed a special group under the chairmanship of Nandan Nilekani, to study e-Governance. The report of this cluster was discussed at the Planning Commission and presented to the Minister for Communications and Information Technology. Afterwards, several discussions were held with other stakeholders including the Administrative Reforms Commission. Based on these discussions, National Knowledge Commission is persuaded that e-Governance is more about a prospect for administrative reforms than merely about electronics and information technology and infrastructure. National Knowledge Commission's recommendations on e-Governance which broadly relate to Processes & Standards, Infrastructure and Organization is simply digitizing the existing government processes, merely adds an additional layer of expense, complexity, impediment and uncertainty. It is essential to first renovate the government processes keeping the citizen at the centre, providing for the enablement of citizens, businesses,

IJCSMS International Journal of Computer Science and Management Studies, Vol. 12, Issue 01, January 2012 2
ISSN (Online): 2231-5268
www.ijcsms.com

producers and consumers, replacing the old mistrust and control regime of the colonial past. This re-designing of government processes will drastically reduce the numbers and duration of successive steps required to obtain services. It will also provide traceable records; enable enforcement of individual performance, accountability, efficiency and productivity, as well as transparency of policies and processes. National knowledge commission recommended an urgent impact on citizens it is critical to identify and simplify important processes and services, say ten to twenty to begin with, which are currently awkward, bureaucratic and horizontal to red tapism and even dishonesty. These processes can be simplified and made available as web-based services. Initially, these services could include birth certificate, death certificate, proof of residence, and ration/ID cards. Other works can be added over a period of time. For national e-Governance to succeed, it is critical to create an appropriate central organization with structures that can operate in a mission mode, with full autonomy and accountability. NKC recommends creation of an organization with a Chief Executive Officer , with board members drawn from the IT industry and government to redesign processes and procedures, to represent 67 a multiplicity of stakeholders and diversity in domain expertise, and to drive the national e- Governance plan with facilitation from the CIT Ministry. The task of this organization shall include but not be limited to

- Administrative reforms related to process re-engineering
- Providing and maintaining common national ICT infrastructure for e-Governance
- Providing leadership and framework for implementation, with immediate focus on selected mission mode projects;
- Providing a neutral consulting framework and standards for e-Governance with the help of CITOs.

As a next step, National Knowledge Commission recommends focusing on the organizational issues related to reengineering government processes with strong committed leadership, self-sufficiency, flexibility, clarity of purpose, Pre-defined deliverables, measurable milestones and periodic monitoring in order to implement the national e-Governance programmed within three to five years[3].

Scope of E-Governance

E-Governance is the use of information and communication technologies to support good governance. It has the following main dimensions[4] as shown in figure 1.

GOVERNMENT TO CITIZEN

G2C will intend at linking citizens to government by talking to citizens and supporting answerability, by listening to citizens and supporting democracy, and by improving public services and providing quality services. It will involve better services to the citizens through single point delivery mechanism and will involve areas like E-Citizen, E-Transport, E-Medicine, E-Education and E-Registration.
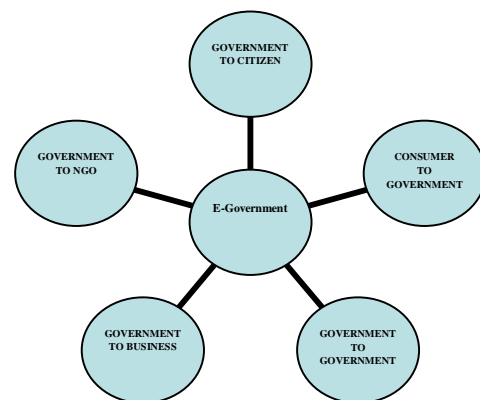

Figure 1

CONSUMER TO GOVERNMENT

C2G will mainly comprise the areas where the citizen interacts with the Government. It will embrace areas like election when citizens vote for the Government; Census where he provides information about himself to the Government; taxation where he is paying taxes to the Government, this model includes E-Democracy which calls for In an e-democracy the Government will be informing the citizen, representing the citizen, encouraging the citizen to vote, consulting the citizen and engaging the citizen in the Governance. Taking the citizens input about the various government policies by organizing an e debate will further strengthen the e-democracy.

GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT

This can also be referred as e-Administration. It involves humanizing government processes by cutting costs, by managing performance, by making planned connections within government, and by creating empowerment. It will involve networking all Government offices so as to produce synergy among

IJCSMS International Journal of Computer Science and Management Studies, Vol. 12, Issue 01, January 2012   **3**
ISSN (Online): 2231-5268
www.ijcsms.com

them. The major segments include E-Secretariat, E-Police, E-Court, State wide network.

GOVERNMENT TO BUSINESS

This will comprise the various services a business house needs to get from the Government, which includes getting licenses etc. In a similar state of affairs, it can also flow from a business house to the Government as in the case of procurements, from such business houses by the Government.

GOVERNMENT TO NGO

Building connections beyond the boundaries of government, by developing communities, by building government partnerships and by building civil society will involve building various associations or interest groups that will ensure the betterment of the society. Such proposals deal particularly with the relationship between government and citizens: either as voters/stakeholders from whom the public sector derives its legitimacy, or as customers who consume public services.

E-Governance Initiatives/Projects:

An Overview

Project Bhoomi: The project 'Bhoomi' made possible computerizations of entire 20 million records of land ownership of 6.7 million farmers in the state of Karnataka. At present, computerized land record kiosk popularly called "Bhoomi Center" is functional in all the 177 talukas in the state. These kiosks are used to provide RTC on line to farmers at a fee of Rs. 15. This system works with the software called "BHOOMI" designed fully in-house by National Informatics Center, Bangalore. The beneficiaries of these projects are rural people[4].

E-Seva (electronic Seva): Launched on the 25th of August 2001, electronic seva (e-Seva) is the improved version of the TWINS project launched in 1999, in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh. There are currently 36 e-Seva centres spread across the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad and Ranga Reddy district, operating from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm every day and between 9:30 am and 3:30 pm on holidays. 70 centers are in operation at different municipalities covering thirteen districts. eSeva centres offer 118 different services like payment of utility bills/taxes, registration of births/deaths, registration of applications for passports issue of births/deaths

certificates, filing of Sales Tax returns, Trade licenses of MCH, B2C services like payments of Tata Teleservices, Reliance, sale of Airtel Magic cards. These services can be availed at any counter in the centre and at any place in the city. 21 more services like railway reservations, TTD services, bill payments of Airtel, Hutch etc. are in the pipe line[5].

CARD (Computer-aided Administration of Registration Department):
The Computer-aided Administration of Registration Department - CARD in Andhra Pradesh is designed to get rid of the problems affecting the conventional registration system by introducing electronic delivery of all registration services. CARD was initiated to meet objectives to demystify the registration process, bring speed, efficiency, consistency and reliability, substantially improve the citizen interface etc. Six months following the launch of the CARD project, about 80% of all land registration transactions in AP were carried out electronically[6].

FRIENDS: Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services is part of the Kerala State IT Mission. FRIENDS counters handle 1,000 types of payment bills originating out of various PSUs. The payments that citizens can make include utility payments for electricity and water, revenue taxes, license fees, motor vehicle taxes, university fees, etc[6].

GYANDOOT: The Gyandoot project was initiated in January 2000 by a committed group of civil servants in consultation with various gram panchayats in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. Gyandoot is a low cost, self-sustainable, and community-owned rural Intranet system (Soochnalaya) that caters to the specific needs of village communities in the district. Thirty-five such centers have been established since January 2000 and are managed by rural youth selected and trained from amongst the unemployed educated youth of the village. They run the Soochanalayas (organised as Kiosks) as entrepreneurs (Soochaks); user charges are levied for a wide range of services that include agricultural information, market information, health, education, women's issues, and applications for services delivered by the district administration related to land ownership, affirmative action, and poverty alleviation[7].

VidyaVahini: This portal provides the opportunity for schools, teachers and students all across the nation, to express and share their creative and academic potential via the internet. The portal aims at creating such an environment by providing facilities for Content Development, Content Development and collaboration. Shiksha India is a non- profit organization launched in December 2001 to equip schools with the five Cs:

Computers, Connectivity, Coaching (teacher Training), Content and models of Commercial sustainability. Its mission is to spread better education, uniform quality of education across India to develop their creativity and problem solving skills. By providing computer literacy, Shiksha strives to increase the earning capacity, reduce information arbitrage in rural India and promote entrepreneurship[8].

LOK MITRA: Lok Mitra is the first of its own kind of Electronic service in the state of Rajasthan. It aims to deploy Information Technology for the benefit of the masses. It is a onestop, citizen friendly computerized centre located in the heart of the city at Government Hostel, Jaipur. This has provided relief to a common man as he gets efficient services through IT driven interfaces at a single window. It is an e-governance project in which the computer server is linked to different Departmental servers through Dedicated Leased Line & Dial-up Network with multiple e-counters, which can handle all services with facility of making services through credit cards[9].

SETU - A bridge for facilitation between citizen & government: Harnessing the benefits of Information Technology for effective and transparent functioning of the administration is one of the core focus areas of the IT policy of the Government of Maharashtra. IT offers the possibility of making routine interactions faster, smoother and transparent. The Integrated Citizen Facilitation Centres (SETU) is an approach in this direction. At present there are multiple points of interaction between the citizen and individual departments spread over so many different Government offices. A one-stop service center for all such routine matters must be made available. The Integrated Citizen Facilitation Centres (SETU) is to work on these very basic needs of the citizens and reorienting our administrative processes accordingly. The aim is to lay the foundation for e-governance, create visible impact of the intention of the Government in this direction, and facilitate the interaction of the citizens with the Government to make it more transparent, pleasant and satisfying[10].

JAN MITRA: This project has been successfully implemented on pilot basis in Jhalawar, Rajasthan. Jhalawar is the first district among five project location districts in India, where the project has been implemented before schedule[11].

E-Governance Services

➢ Public Grievance Redressal System, Online Submission of Application forms and Land & Revenue Records.
➢ Public Information Services
➢ Ongoing Development Works, Public Distribution System, BPL List, Electricity Priority Connection List, Drinking Water Resources, Village Schemes, Citizen Charters and Immovable Property rates.
➢ Public Awareness Services
➢ Health Information, Agriculture information, Education information and Animal Husbandry Information
➢ Agriculture Mandi Rates Daily Mandi rates and Weekly / Monthly Mandi rates.
➢ Village to Village Services Gram Haat and Event Information
➢ Messaging Services e-mail Facility across Departments / Kiosks and Broadcasting of Bulletin.
➢ MIS for District Collectorate and District level officers for effective monitoring of information flow.

DRISHTEE-Connecting India Village by Village: Drishtee's software platform enables e-governance and provides information about and access to education and health services, market-related information, and private information exchanges and transactions. Drishtee offers its network platform to any service provider who wishes to market its range of services to rural India by plugging their application in with Drishtee's s/w offered directly at the village level. Thus, the Drishtee offering is wide in scope and highly scalable. It aims to be the 'window to the world' for Indian villagers. Drishtee services not only provide financial benefits in terms of reduced costs and increased incomes, but also other social benefits like access to education and health information. Drishtee kiosks provide viable employment opportunities for unemployed rural youths and help stem rural-urban migration[12].

Project Sampark in Chandigarh: Chandigarh Administration in an effort to provide a responsive and effective administration has effectively relied on the Information Technology mode to ensure better quality services to its citizens. A Project called 'Sampark' has been kicked off. With this project electronic service centers known as 'Sampark Centers' have been established at different locations in the city. These centers provide different government services such as Payment of Taxes, Payment of Water, Sewerage, and Electricity Bills, Payment of Sticker/Postal Challan, Issue of Bus Passes, Issue of Senior Citizen Cards, Issue of Births and Death Certificates, Space Bookings, Tenant Registrations, Domestic Servants Registrations,

Passport Applications, and selected Telephone Bills under a single roof thereby reducing costs and saving time of the customers there being no jurisdiction limitations. Thus, these centers ushers into the anytime, anywhere, and non-stop governance concept[14].

Challenges for E-Government:

Despite these initiations E-Governance is facing severe challenges which are proving hindrances in way of successful implementation of knowledge. These challenges can be studied under following heads.

Funding: Funding is the foremost issue in e-Governance initiatives. The projects that are part of the e-governance initiatives need to be funded either through the Government sector or through the private sector. For the private sector to step into the funding activity their commercial interests needs to be ensured. The projects can be built either on BOO (Built Own Operate) or BOOT (Built Own Operate Transfer) basis. Also the Government interest of Value Addition in services also needs to be taken care of while transferring the services to private sector. Advertising, sharing of Government information etc could be a few revenue generators for the Government.

Resistance to Change: The delivery of Government services through the electronic media including EDI, Internet and other IT based technologies would necessitate procedural and legal changes in the decision and delivery making processes. It demands fundamental changes in Government decision management. The employees need to be delegated more authority. De layering of the decision-making levels leads to re-engineering and appropriate sizing of the decision-making machinery. These changes need not only be accepted by the Government and citizens but also be accepted by various interests groups like Employees unions. Under such circumstances bringing in a change will involve changing the mindsets of the people, and a complete Reengineering process needs to be carried out for the same. This will involve training of the personnel at all levels, more so, at the lower rung of Government management organizations. There will also be a loss of vested interests and power amongst the legislature and the executive, which may lead, to resistance to change.

Secrecy: The privacy of the citizen also needs to be ensured while addressing the issues. Whenever a citizen gets into any transaction with a Government agency, he shells out lot of personal information, which can be misused by the private sector. Thus, the citizen should be ensured that the information flow would pass through reliable channels and seamless network.

Validation: Secured ways of transactions for the Government services are another issue of concern. The identity of citizens requesting services needs to be verified before they access or use the services. Here digital signature will play an important role in delivery of such services. But the infrastructure needed to support them is very expensive and requires constant maintenance. Hence a pertinent need still survives, compelling the authorities to ensure the authenticity in their transactions there by gaining absolute trust and confidence of the citizen.

Interoperability: A major design issue for integrated service delivery sites is how to capture data in a Web-based form and transfer it to an agency's systems for processing and sharing that information in a common format. In fact the interoperation of various state Governments, the various ministries within a state Government is a critical issue. Further how the various islands of automation will be brought together and built into one is another key issue of e-Governance.

Delivery of services:

The ability of citizens to access these services is another major issue. Since the knowledge of computers and Internet is very low in the country, some framework needs to be worked out for delivery of the e-Services that would be accessible to the poorest of the poor. What will be the Government's network to deliver those services? Could we have something like a single stop shop of the Government? A proposed mechanism is delivery of the same through the Government Post Offices, for they already have the brick and mortar support and the most extensive network in the nation.

Standardization:

Defining the standards for the various Government services is another issue that needs to be addressed. The standards need to be worked out not only for the technologies involved but also for issues like naming of websites to creating E-Mail addresses.

Technological Challenges:

A number of organizations, both in the Centre and the States, have taken commendable initiatives to develop hardware and software platforms to address the challenges offered by e-Governance. The e-Governance initiative would have to address these Technology Issues/Objectives by identifying the appropriate hardware platforms and software application packages for cost-effective delivery of public services. This knowledge repository should be widely available through appropriate Demo- Mechanisms. Offering a

basket of these models to the State departments, both in the Center and the State, could be suitably customized as per location and work specific requirements.

Suggestions:

Computerization friendly policies should be made to overcome the issues pertaining to e governance. Serious efforts would be required to mobilize resources for this arduous job. One way to deal with the situation could be that governments enter into arrangements for leasing of computers. This would reduce initial heavy capital investments. Establishing complete connectivity between various ministries and departments so that transfer of files and papers could be done through Internet thereby choosing efficacious speed as an alternative to manual labour to make this really effective, there is a need to make databases of various departments compatible with one another. Thus, interoperability of e- governance projects is of vital importance if the citizens are to feel the benefit of IT in day to day life; Capacity building of staff should be done on regular basis and changing the attitude of the obsolete employees. Workshops, seminars, and training programmers are vital to be organized to equip them with technological advances. Effective implementation of cyber laws to keep a check on offenders. Building infrastructures of power and all weather surface transport system to link the division divide between the rural and urban areas and most importantly marketing and publicity are integral parts of successful electronic government initiatives.

Conclusion:

To conclude present e-government initiatives in developing countries is project-specific and not government-wide with the consequence that e-government impact often bubbles out at the level of a project and is not felt at the government level where decision-makers usually function. A comprehensive government wide approach to e government is need of an hour. For steering in e -government in developing economies it is crucial to prepare a comprehensive plan, for improving internal government processes and providing improved public service delivery for all.

References

[1] http://www.joaag.com/uploads/5_Monga2EGov3_2_.pdf

[2] Mahalik, D.K. (2010). Outsourcing in e-Governance: A Multi Criteria Decision Making Approach. *JOAAG*, Vol. 5. No. 1

[3] http://indiaegov.org/knowledgeexchg/egov_strategy.pdf

[4] http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/focus /egovernance.asp

[5] http://indiaegov.org/knowledgeexchg/egov_strategy.pdf

[6] www.revedept-01.kar.nic.in/Bhoomi/Importance.htm

[7] www.esevaonline.com

[8] http://www.ap-it.com/cards.html

[9] http://www.friendscentre.net/

[10] www.gyandoot.nic.in

[11] http://www.vidyavahini.ernet.in/content/shiksha.htm

[12] http://www.rajasthan.gov.in/it/eg/lokmitra.shtm

[13] http://setu.maharashtra.gov.in

[14] http://www.rajasthan.gov.in/it/eg/Janmitra.shtm

[15] http://www.drishtee.com

[16] http://www.joaag.com/uploads/5_Monga2EGov3_2_.pdf

[17] http://indiaegov.org/knowledgeexchg/egov_strategy.pdf

[18] www.revedept-01.kar.nic.in/Bhoomi/Importance.htm

[19] www.esevaonline.com

[20] http://www.ap-it.com/cards.html

[21] http://www.friendscentre.net/

[22] www.gyandoot.nic.in

[23] http://www.vidyavahini.ernet.in/content/shiksha.htm

[24] http://www.rajasthan.gov.in/it/eg/lokmitra.shtm;

[25] http://setu.maharashtra.gov.in

[26] http://www.rajasthan.gov.in/it/eg/Janmitra.shtm

[27]http://www.drishtee.com