E-Governance: Issues, Trends and Stages

Dr. K. M. Chinnadorai., M.Com., M..B.A, M.FT., M.F.C., M.S., M.Phil., Ph.D., D.Litt
Principal, Kamban College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.
Email- maripondurai@gmail.com

Introduction

The State has substantially evolved over the past decades. Global phenomena, such as globalization, liberalization and cultural changes, challenge the State to face pertinent changes. More than ever, technology influences and will influence public participation and political mobilization in the future. This necessitated the implementation of E- governance. It is the use of information and communication technologies (ICTS) to improve the activities of government agencies. The main objective is to bring the citizens governance that is efficient, accountable, and inclusive and reach out to all in a convenient manner. It eradicates corruption, one of the biggest monsters in the country, by providing transparent governance.

E-Governance

E-Governance is the application of information technology and communication in the government processes to achieve secure and reliable information lifecycle management. Life cycle of the information involves various processes as capturing, preserving, manipulating and delivering information. One of the main objectives of E-Governance is to promote citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective. It is convenient and cost-effective for businesses, and the public benefits by getting easy access to the most current information available without having to spend time, energy and money to get it. It is an application of electronic means between the following:

1. Government (G) and citizens (C), both ways (G2C and C2G),
2. Government or businesses (B), both ways (G2B and B2G), and
3. Internal government operation (G2G).

   E-government has very significant role in the development of a nation. It has brought revolution in the governance of the government; according to Economist Intelligence Unit the e-readiness index of India is low. Therefore, the implementation of e- government is very challenging. It is because of the low level of literacy, low per capita income and insufficient infrastructure for the implementation of e-government.

Need for E-Governance

   The fundamental motivation for the campaign of e-governance in India is a slogan-to provide SMART government- being "Simple, Moral, Accountable and Responsive Government". It is the way of eliminating the middleman or tout between the government and the people. Its objective is to cut the cost of governance and minimize the complexities of procedures by possible business process reengineering. This on-line system based on Internet will reduce contact with mediating officials, thereby reducing the possibility of

malpractice. For example, by doing so property tax assessment and collection system can reduce the element of corruption in our country.

Issues in E-Governance applications and the digital divide

The e-governance activity starts with providing information services by the government departments to the public in terms of State websites. These websites provide information about the department concerned, its aims, objectives, citizens' charters, organizational details, facilities available and other services to the public along with the fees payable. The public can make use of it. Government departments provide transactions such as making utility payments, e-interaction of the public with the government and thereby it leads to the facilitation of participative democracy.

Components of E-government Program in India

Over the past decade there have been e-government initiatives in the country at national state and district level. Some of them are highly successful and are implemented across the country and some of them are not successful. Hence there is a need of taking a holistic view towards the entire e-government initiative across the country. The national e-government programme is conducted to effectively implement the e-government in India. The component of this programme is as follows:

➢ **Awareness and Communication**

The success of e-government plan highly depends on the awareness about the programme. Therefore the Government of India disseminates the information through various schools of management about the e-government plans.

➢ **Assessment**

The Government of India is to invest significant part of its scare resource in e- government projects. Therefore it is necessary that a robust assessment strategy is devised for the existing e-government projects.

➢ **Capacity Building**

The capacity building guidelines take into account of the fact that different states are at different levels of readiness for e-governance and have different levels of aspiration. The role of the capacity building team is at the programme level to provide leadership and vision including policy formulation, preparing roadmaps, prioritization, preparing frameworks and guidelines, monitoring progress & capacity management.

➢ **Common Services Centre**

Common Services Centre (CSC) scheme is the most prominent face of National e-Government Programme. Specific support is being provided for this scheme. The scope of support includes Identification of core components of CSC Scheme; Frame problem agendas related with application software, legal instruments, essential backend for CSC etc.

➢ **Infrastructural and Technical**

This cell provides support to the Department of Information Technology in implementing those projects and components of e-Government.

➢ **Monitoring and evaluation**

The Program Management, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the Programme Management Unit for National e-government programme develop a comprehensive MIS at programme level and track the physical and financial progress of various projects.

➢ **Project and Financial Appraisal**

The cell identifies resources to provide assistance in project conceptualization, development and implementation to various implementing agencies.

➢ **Research and Development**

The e-Governance R&D team provides consultancy and research inputs in the areas of e Governance Technical Standards including interoperability standards e-Government Enterprise architecture frameworks, Information Security etc.

➢ **E-readiness**

E-Readiness is the ability to use Information and Communicat ion Technologies (ICT) to develop one's economy and to foster one's welfare. Each year, the Economist Intelligence Unit produces a ranking of e-readiness across countries, based on six pillars of e- readiness: connectivity & technology infrastructure, business environment, social & cultural environment, legal environment, government policy & vision and consumer & business adoption. United States is at 1st position with e-readiness score followed by Australia and United Kingdom.

Trends and growth of E-Governance

In many ways, 2010 market the beginning of some trends that will have pervasive impact in the coming decades.

➢ **Enterprise social networking**

Social networks are spreading in the workplace, taking collaboration to a new level. As a result, future decision-making cycles will be accelerated, and this will have huge benefits for organizations and B2B marketers.

➢ **Cloud computing**

Cloud computing is enabling businesses to move to a new and more efficient IT model. It's about providing computing resources (network, server, storage) on demand and serving applications centrally. This will benefit businesses from lower costs in IT, energy and real estate. It will help in rapid business expansion.

➢ **360 security**

Security has become a key issue that needs to be addressed. Since government deals with sensitive information of national interest, securing data is of utmost importance. The key to securing information, however, does not lie in infrastructure security but the data and information security that are shared over various systems. That is why the need for securing such information has become a priority. 360 security has become important as business and government agencies apply security across the

cloud, the edges of their networks and for specific devices whether over the internet or via a private network.

- ➢ **Mobile workforce**

  The ability to collaborate wired and wireless technology embodies the modern workplace. Many organizations are deploying mobile applications in a structured, secure environment to help companies spur productivity and innovation.

- ➢ **Borderless business**

  Its' about having an IT architecture that enables organizations to deliver services and applications to anyone, anywhere and on any device, at any time. It enables the use of video, collaborative applications and other networked services and delivering those across the enterprise.

- ➢ **Green enterprises**

  Businesses and consumers have started to embrace energy efficiency in the workplace and at home.

Five governance issues are as follows:

Business process re-engineering (BPR) and the use of ICT (Information and communication technology) are the two most important aspects of e-governance, it can bring around the much needed changes and improvisation in the way government functions and delivers services to its citizens. The five issues are:

1. Putting the e-governance service delivery framework, to deliver services to citizens in a manner that is scalable, repeatable and inter-operable.
2. The focus of e-governance projects is not completion but to see that they are operationally sound.
3. Making CSC's self-sustainable, so that their objective of extending the reach of government services to the common man is not just a touch-and-go affair, but a permanent fixture.
4. Speeding up service delivery through faster execution and better monitoring and management of timelines, resources and escalation mechanisms and bringing in cloud technologies for offering services to other government departments
5. Ensuring inter-operability and adherence to the standards and guidelines being rolled out.

The essence of "e-Government"

The enhanced value for stakeholders through transformation" Conventional delivery systems will continue to be important given the restricted coverage though internet, limited spread of education, lack of infrastructure like power etc. There is widespread societal bureaucratic routine, paperwork, procedures and delays, over centralization, systematic rigidities and poor service quality. Change in institutional practices and institutional environment is necessary to maintain systemic viability in the face of global competition. Technology impacts the way work is organized and how employees work. ICT offers an opportunity for improvement in public service delivery in a speedy manner.

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 beingintegrated for citizen access through the National and State Portals which provide basic information on Government programmes and services.

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.

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. 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 partof this stage.

National e-governance plan

The NeGP Vision consists of making all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensures efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man. The Government has approved the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), comprising of 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 10 components. The various projects are:

> **Passport Seva-under Ne GP**
> The Passport Seva Project is intended to transform the delivery of all passport related services across the country, with accent on process efficiency, citizen focus, employeeproductivity and system transparency.

Central Mission Mode Projects (MMPS) of Ne GP

➢ **DARPG -E-Office**- This project is aimed at significantly improving the operational Efficiency of the Government, by transitioning to a Less Paper Office within next Five years. The design this MMP is to achieve work flow automationand knowledge management.

➢ **eBiz Project -** implemented by Department of Industry Policy & Promotion (DIPP) for provision of Government to Business (G2B) services to stakeholders. Pilot has been initiated in four states, namely, UP, Maharashtra , Haryana at 1 district in each state. 25 G2B services relating to 14 departments of central, state and local Governments would be provided online.

➢ **E-Transformation of Scholarship Programme**

Scholarship is a critical tool to facilitate further education for the eligible students, especially those who are from social and economic backward classes. Mastek Ltd a leading IT solution player designed and implemented e- scholarship solution for the state of Maharashtra. This process is more transparent and quick, both colleges and department will see an increase in operational efficiency due to reduction in their paper-work. Chances of errors and fraudulent scholarship will be lesser. Decision making will be faster due to timely information.

States key achievements in implementing e-governance in G2C, G2B, and G2G in 2010

The state government is making all its procurements transparently through electronic media, this scheme has been extended to 86 departments by the end of Nov 2010. The expenditure for the state exchequer got reduced by 4,700 crore. As it is web-based application, anybody can participate without any hindrance.

Benefits and Risks of E-Government

Benefits are as follows:

1. Democratization- E-democracy
2. Speedy, efficient and convenience
3. Public approval – E-participation.

Risks of E-Government

There are many considerations and potential implications of implementing and designing e-government, including disintermediation of the government and its citizens, impacts on economic, social, and political factors. The risks are as follows:

➢ **Hyper-surveillance**

Increased contact between government and its citizens goes both ways. Once e- government begins to develop and become more sophisticated, citizens will be forced to interact electronically with the government on a larger scale. This could potentially lead to a lack of privacy for civilians as their government obtains more and more information on them.

➢ **Cost**

Although "a prodigious amount of money has been spent" on the development and implementation of e-government, it has yielded only a mediocre product. The outcomes

and effects of trial Internet-based governments are often difficult to gauge or unsatisfactory.

➢ **Inaccessibility**

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

➢ **False sense of transparency and accountability**

Opponents of e-government argue that online governmental transparency is dubious because it is maintained by the governments themselves. Information can be added or removed from the public eye.

E-Governance challenges

➢ **Auditing and logging**

Traceability to any changes to information content in E-Governance services is required. Corruption in government organizations can be controlled by using Information Technology services, by keeping the providers of the services accountable. Process audits, security audits must be done periodically to ensure the security of the system.

➢ **Disaster Recovery**

Natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, wars and internal disturbances could cause the E-Governance applications not only loose data, but also make services unavailable. Multiple installations in geographically separated locations with complete backup and recovery solutions must exist.

➢ **Policy Management**

E-Governance applications have to adhere and implement policies of the governments in terms of dealing with citizens. Along with the infrastructure and data center policies has to be enforced for day to day operations.

➢ **Obsolete technologies and migration to new technologies**

Technology migration is the biggest challenge. Moving to different versions of software, applying application and security patches is the key to maintaining a secure data center or E-Governance. With cloud, E-Governance applications can manage the policies well by providing security and adoptability. Various E-Governance applications can be integrated easily.

➢ **Going Green**

More emphasis is laid out today in terms of data centers can create. The power usage, air electronic waste could create bio-hazard. This could be one of the reasons for moving to governance. Instead of duplicating these facilities, with cloud, one can offer centralized infrastructure that can be efficiently used to minimize pollution.

E-Governance Case study in China-Beijing Business E-Park

The Zhongguanccun Science Park (ZSP), the biggest National Science Park in China was established in 1988, in the North-Western part of Beijing City. The ZSP is the local government body that regulates, controls and administers all activities in the park , whichhas twelve departments.

The Old system of administration

The old system of administration was very inefficient and was distributed. All twelve departments acted independent of each other. Each had its private database and information systems on its own independent computer systems. There was no integrated workflow across the departments. For example, for obtaining a licence to open a company in the park, the company had to apply to eight different departments and make at least three visits to each department.

The New System

The administration of the park formed a strategic partnership with a local private application software company. Beijing Beauty Bearrl limited which started the system study and completed the software development.   This new system the central database and web site allow data sharing and workflow integration among all the departments. Thus the administration functions are a single integrated body showing only one face to the public.
The system includes five functions, they are as follows:

E-application   E-registration

E-reporting   E-administration and E-consulting.

Other features

'Red light-reminder system' – The new system keeps track of all applications and remind the offices of how much delay and pendency is there for a given application. The reminder light on the first day shows 'green light,' the second day 'yellow light' and the third day 'red light' indicating the official has not completed the work on time.

OCR, VCR, HWCR – Optical character recognition, voice character recognition, handwriting character recognition are available for data entry help in Chinese language.

Inference from the above case study

The case study of ZSP E-park in China shows how e-governance efforts in B2G sector can lead to total transformation from red tape and inefficient and painful transactions of the business with the local governments to an instantaneous, simple easy experience. The other benefits are transparency, speed, efficiency and interactive session which led to the greater economic growth of China. Similarly all other countries can be benefited in the same manner.

Conclusion

The electronic government has come a long way since its modest beginnings mere ten or so years ago. Government throughout the world and at all levels-National, sub-National, local, have adopted some form or other forms of e-governance which will help the economy in many ways of rendering services to the customers, especially to India- the world's largest working democratic country. Adoption of E-readiness is the need of the hour by the government, as they are the essential set of prerequisites that acts as a sound building block for implementing e-governance and making it a successful task to achieve the economic growth of a country.

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