Prospects of E-Governance: A Special Reference of E - Panchayat

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Abstract

E-Governance is not just about government web site and e-mail. It is not just about service delivery over the Internet. It is not just about digital access to government information or electronic payments. It will change how citizens relate to governments as much as it changes how citizens relate to each other. It will bring forth, new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of needs and responsibilities. This paper deals with the prospects of e-Governance-e-panchayat in India. For successful implementation of e-Governance, government officials have to realize that e-Governance is no longer a matter of choice, but an absolute need of the day. Cooperation from government officials and staff will be crucial in realizing the goals of modernizing this nation through e-Governance. The paper begins by clarifying the concepts related to e-Governance and by responding to some popular misconceptions that are often causes of misdirected conclusions. The paper intends to underline the features of e-governance at local self government level in rural India and examines the viability of the e-panchayats in making the local-self governance citizen-centric for efficient, responsive, cost effective, result-oriented mechanism for faster pace of rural development. The e-panchayats also become the effective instrument of vibrant grassroots democracy by empowering people with knowledge. The focuses have also on the theoretical aspects of e-governance, followed by practical aspects, and the role of ICT in the areas of good governance and facilitating people's enhanced access to the governance, and finally on the prospects of e-governance at local level in India.

Keywords: E-Governance, Knowledge Management, Local Bodies Empowerment, Result Oriented Governance, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

Panchayat Raj- A self governing system in India which was built for the empowerment of rural people. "Gram Panchayat" is the unit of this government system which governs at village level administration in India. Most of the population of India lives in villages so the development of these Gram Panchayats is nothing but the development of the India! E-Governance is nothing but use of internet technology as a platform for exchanging information, providing services and transacting with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. Since the foundation of Panchayat Raj there are so many changes adopted for the better governance and administration but still there is need to re-engineer the existing system. On studying it was found that web applications are more adoptive to existing governance than the other architectures. Benefits of E-Governance are mainly transparency, speed, reliability etc. in village level government. In some remote parts it is hard to carry and forward documents to respective authorities due to non availability of transport facilities, even in some parts of country, the information doesn't reach up to the

common man whom the advantage is to be given. The proposed system overcomes such limitations. There are many E-Governance applications on different levels such as states and districts but very rarely implemented on villages. This proposed system supports all the activities and governance modules of Gram Panchayat. The Governments all over the world are interested in enhancing the quality and quantity of services to the citizens in a cost effective manner. The total cost of ownership for all the stakeholders should be minimum during the entire period of services/ownership of the system. Another major problem the Governments facing today is to create more employment opportunities for its citizens at least cost. The system proposed shall address these issues also very effectively with a well defined strategy.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

- 1) To study the concept of E-Governance and find out the leading misconception about it.
- 2) To underline the conceptual as well as the functional aspects of E- Panchayats.
- 3) To study the role of ICT in the areas of good

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- governance.
- 4) To examine the tenets and intricacies of the concept of E-Panchayat vis-à-vis E-Governance.
- 5) To study the future prospects of E-Governance.

METHODOLOGY

As such the present paper intends to underline the features of E-Governance at local self-government level in rural India and examine the viability of the E-Panchayats in making the local-self governance cost-effective, result-oriented and citizen-centric. In other words, the theory and practice of citizen-centric E-Governance at grassroots level in India have been examined in this paper. The paper is based on secondary sources of data collection. The first part of the paper examines the theoretical aspects of E-Governance, followed by practical aspects and finally, the role of ICT in the areas of better governance and greater people's access to governance process has been examined.

MISCONCEPTION ABOUT E-GOVERNANCE

Before moving on to defining what e-Governance comprises of, it is important to realize what E-Governance is not. Misconceptions lead to baseless fear and unfounded resistance. That is why it is important to first realize what E-Governance is not.

What E-Governance is not?

- A) It is not about changing government processes and inter-agency or inter-personal relationships
- B) It is not limited to computerization of government offices
- C) It is not just about being able to type documents using computers
- D) It does not put government security and confidentiality at risk

E-GOVERNMENT

E-Government is the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective and accountable.

E-government includes:

- Providing greater access to government information,
- Promoting civic engagement by enabling the public to interact with government officials,
- Making government more accountable by making its operations more transparent and thus reducing the opportunities for corruption and

- Providing development opportunities, especially benefiting rural and traditionally underserved communities.

E-Government is about automation of existing every-day government activities.

E-PANCHAYATS

Technically speaking, E-Panchayat system is web-based and n-tiered; and functions like an Application Service Provider enabling Panchayat level digital services for all stakeholders. The stakeholders are citizens, elected representatives, Gram Panchayat officials, the governments and the knowledge workers. But it should not be merely perceived as an ICT enabled system of governance that provides public services on demand. It promotes virtues of good governance and deepens democratic values in society. It creates an environment in which people feel empowered, establishes a system that ensures people can easily avail themselves of their fundamental rights to information, and broadens the scope of local government. Several state governments have also taken initiatives to set up the E-Panchayats to facilitate the development process and provide easy access to information to citizens. People remained ignorant and corruption prevailed. As the Indian Government policy went for not only strengthening the intra-organizational functioning of the institutions but also making them transparent in order to empower people to apply social audit. E-Panchayats are nothing but the Panchayat Raj institutions equipped with ICT for all its functions. Some features of the E-Panchayats in India are given below:

Intra-Organisation Coordination

The internal management of resources within the organization should be appropriate. E-Panchayat does also require the information network for accruing, storage, analysis and dissemination of the information within the organization. The elected executives and appointed executives are equally accessible to whatever information they require. This minimizes the point of difference. In the conventional governance, people have been getting 'supply-oriented' benefits of the governance whereas in the E-Panchayat they can aspire for 'demand-oriented' benefits. E-Panchayat can manage its organization for meeting the people's demand.

Information and Democracy

Democratic governance requires wider people's participation

which is possible only if they (people) are properly equipped with information. As such the governmental organization has to be, by nature, an information intensive organization. Thus democratic governance is an 'information centric' process. The governing institutions like elected Panchayat bodies are representative democratic structure which requires wider participation of all or most of the citizens which can only be assured if they are accessible to relevant information.

Citizen's R.T.I

Another conceptual dimension of E-Panchayat relates to function as a vehicle of ensuring citizens' right to information. The right to information empowers citizens with the right to 'demand' information and governments with the duty to 'Supply'. E-Panchayat can enable the government to meet its obligation under the right to information by simplifying the delivery process.

People as stakeholders

The concept of governance has changed a lot and citizens are now not considered as simply beneficiaries rather 'stakeholders or shareholders' of the entire development process who *seeks* several information on the functioning of the government as well as *provide* several inputs that help policy-making process on one hand and as customers of the government *demand* better services.

FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF E-PANCHAYATS

One major approach to view the use of ICT at governance level is of organizational approach that believes that any given organization requires the adequate, ordered and useful information for both the effective internal functioning and the efficient delivery services to the people. As such the functions of E-Panchayats can be categorized into two folds

- A) Internal management
- B) Service delivery.

COMPONENTS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ICT

Administration, government and governance are interchangeably used by people. But in the wake of changes taking place at global level, people are particular about using governance instead of administration or government. Governance has certain specific connotations which have recently acquired significance in the literature of political science and public administration with varied meanings. Generally, it has been meant as the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. In other words, management of natural, material and human resources for the public is good governance. Now the question is how governance becomes good. Again people have perceived it in distinct ways in accordance with their respective experiences and needs, e.g. some view it as e-governance (using information technology in governance), some as maintenance of law and order, and some as downsizing the bureaucracy, some as people's participation and so on. What has been the most important issue in this context is the aspect of the role of good governance (GG) in accelerating the process of the rural development in a developing society like India. Thus the goodness of governance needs to be crystallized. Thus good governance is also responsive to the present and future needs of the society. Further, it is guided by human rights and by the principles of the rule of law and democracy, such as equal political participation for all. Particular attention is devoted to the needs of the weaker members of society. It is against the authoritarian rules and bureaucracy with the ruling attitude. Good governance and democratic development are perceived as responsive to the interest of the poor that make the majority within the Indian context. It is ICT that could strengthen civic education, guarantee equal access to information and tie individuals and institutions to make real participatory discussion and debate across great distances. Mutual recognition and a workable relationship between the state and civil society promote socially accountable, participatory, inclusive and just development for the most marginalized communities.

Table 1: MODULES OF E-GOVERNANCE AND E-PANCHAYAT

4.Phases of E-Governance

Early 90's	----->	Information	----->	Presence
Mid 90's	----->	Interaction	----->	Intake process
Present	----->	Transaction	----->	Complete transaction
Future	----->	Transformation	----->	Integration & organizational behavior

Table 2.

2-Phases of E-Panchayat

Citizen Services Modules in Phase-I	Additional Modules in Phase-II will be:
A) Birth and Death Registration and Certificate B) House Tax C) Old age and other Pensions D) Works Monitoring E) Financial Accounting & Book Keeping F) MIS	A) Water connection and Water Tax B) Assets C) Accounting Grievance Redressal D) Building & Layout Permissions E) Land Records Access

In the phase One

E-Governance means being present on the web, providing the public(G2C andG2B) with relevant information. Internally (G2G) the government can also disseminate static information with electronic means, such as the internet.

In the second phase

The interaction between government and public (G2C and G2B) is simulated with various applications. People can ask questions via mail, use search engines, and download forms and documents. These save time. Internally the government organizations use LANS, internets and email to communicate and exchange data.

In the phase three

The complexity of the technology is increasing but customer value is also higher. Complete transactions can be done without going to an office. Examples of online services are filing income tax, filing property tax, extending/renewal of licenses, visa and passports and online voting. Phase three is made complex because of security and personalization issues. In this phase, internal (G2G) processes have to be redesigned to provide good service.

In the fourth phase

In this phase cost savings efficiency and customer satisfaction are reaching highest possible levels.

PROSPECTS OF E - GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The concept of e-governance is now a reality for Indian citizens. We are graduating from pilot e-governance projects to bigger Mission Mode projects. In this, the core strategy is to move ahead in a systematic manner, and the approach is to achieve success step by step.

The National E-Governance Plan

This plan of Indian Government seeks to lay the foundation and provide the impetus for long-term growth of E-Governance within the country. The plan seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms, set up the core infrastructure and policies and implements a number of Mission Mode Projects at the center, state and integrated service levels to create a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance. In 2005, the World Bank signaled its willingness to increase funding further (if required) for a range of E-Governance initiatives in India as part of the first phase of the country's National e-Governance Plan (NeGP).

NeGP Vision:- "All Government services accessible to the common man in his locality through a One-stop-shop (integrated service delivery) ensuring convenience, efficiency, transparency & reliability".

Mission Mode Project:

At the State level, the Mission Mode Projects (MMP) would include services like road transport, land records, commercial taxes, employment exchanges, agriculture, civil supplies, treasuries, land registration, policy and education, while at Central level, it will cover areas such as insurance, central excise, National ID, pensions, e-Posts, banking, passport, visa and income tax.

State Wide Area Network:

The Government has approved a Scheme for establishing State Wide Area Networks (SWANs) across the country in 29 States/ 6 UTs with a total outlay of Rs.3,334 crore over a period of five years. State Data Centre has been identified as one of the important elements of the core infrastructure for supporting E-Governance initiatives under NEGP. It is proposed to create data repositories/ data centers in various

States/UTs so that common secured data storage could be maintained to serve host of E-Governance applications. A Scheme to facilitate establishment of 1,00,000 broadband internet enabled Common Service Centers (CSCs) in rural areas of the country has been approved by the Government.

Government Electronic Business (E-Business)

The benefits of E-Governance will continue to depend on the realization of technical advances in Electronic Business (E-Business) in the broadest sense. Electronic Business (E-Business) refers to the broader concept of not just buying and selling but also servicing customers and collaborating with business partners, and conducting electronic transactions within an organizational entity through the deployment of the new information and communications technologies.

Within the context of Government transaction and collaboration with partners, businesses and the markets, Government e-Business, or simply Electronic Business (e-Business) will comprise the following categories:

- Government to Government (G2G) exchange of information and commodities;
- Government to Business/Private (G2B) exchange of information and commodities;
- Business/Private to Government (B2G) sale of goods and services.

Telecom Links in all Villages by 2014:

State-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has undertaken an ambitious Rs.20,000 crore project to establish telecom links in all villages across India and to take E-Governance to rural and far-flung areas in the next two years. The Rs.20,000 crore project for the creation of a 'National Optical Fibre Network' (NOFN) for providing internet and other telecommunications connectivity to villages has been launched recently.

Glodyne Technoserve

The stock of E-Governance solutions and systems integration provider Glodyne Technoserve has gained 62% in the last one month following its December 2011 quarter results announcement. A sustained momentum in its domestic E-Governance business and expected improvement in profitability of its North American unit are likely to drive Glodyne's growth in FY13. The company has reported strong growth, in double digits and at times in triple digits in the last six quarters, in revenue.

IT & ITeS Industries seek focus on E-Governance

The IT/ITeS industries have added 7.96 lakh jobs in the Indian economy during the one year period ending September 2011, according to the Economic Survey 2011-12. However, FY 2011-2012 witnessed a drop in hiring in the IT industry while ITeS remained robust with a rise in the number of jobs.

Completion of ESIC project

Wipro InfoTech has successfully completed digitization of Employees' State Insurance Corporation's (ESIC) operations, one of the biggest E-Governance projects in the country. Wipro InfoTech had bagged the Rs 1,182-crore six-and-a-half-year project 'Panchdeep' in March 2009.

For successful implementation of E-Governance, government officials have to realize that e-Governance is no longer a matter of choice, but an absolute need of the day. Cooperation from government officials and staff will be crucial in realizing the goals of modernizing this nation through e-Governance.

CONCLUSION

Creating simply the software and modules cannot work. It is people, not the goods that make things go. Thus it is imperative to ensure the successful implementation of the network in the shortest period with optimum efficiency and cost-effectiveness. It is generally alleged that the hurdles come in the way to deliver good for the people by a government organisation. The first and foremost among them is lack of infrastructure, IT infrastructure and e-readiness of the people to use the ICT at Panchayat level. Other challenges are- non-availability of centralised database, lack of connectivity among officers of various departments, lack of departmental coordination, lack of skilled hands and the non-standard procedure and practices. The cost-effectiveness can only be assured if it is maintained and operated by the people themselves. The government at the state level requires providing the server in the beginning. At the ground level, the Panchayat bodies particularly, the Gram Panchayats and local people should go for a system of 'Build Own and Operate(BOO)' through a self-employment generation scheme. So that in each village one or two families would be able to get their livelihood by rendering services to the citizens and the GP officials by operating and implementing e-panchayat. For rendering the services, the service charges can be fixed. It will be the entrepreneurs'

responsibility to collect and feed data, and generate reports. The amount of data fed and the number of reports generated are monitored through software and accounted for making payment. The system maintenance, procurement, internet connectivity and associated logistics shall be cared by the entrepreneurs. As such the government or panchayat bodies need not bother about the recurring expenditure or associated expenditure. In case of need of initial investments, government can play role of catalyst by recommending banks to issue soft loans to such entrepreneurs or voluntary bodies formed for the purpose. They would take better care as they will be dependent on it for sustenance. Non-serious users will be eliminated. The revenue accrued of it will be recorded, and people may demand a receipt from these powerless entrepreneurs rather than from a powerful government servant who would seek rent. To cap it all, on the basis of the above discussions on experiments in India, E-Panchayats are the need of the hour as people in rural areas in India. In the emerging knowledge society and information revolution, panchayats should not be left in isolation. They should be provided with adequate technological resources in order to be able to play a meaningful role in the course of development in these countries.

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