INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE

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Understanding E-governance with special reference to Bhoomi project

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the understanding e-governance with special reference to Bhoomi Project consists of an Introduction, Understanding the concept of e-governance-Its components, benefits followed by the initiation taken by the Indian government. It also deals with the major objectives and significance; Input-Output, Modules, Key Players involved in the implementation of the Bhoomi Project, its new development and the conclusion.

Keywords: E-governance, implementation, development

Introduction

In the last five decades, freedom of information has been recognized as an internationally protected human right. A modern democratic state being answerable to the people, the people are entitled to know what policies and programmes, how and why, are being followed by the government. It is essential for the people to have as much information about governmental operations as possible. Right to Information Act has been implemented with the basic aim of providing transparent, responsible and open governance. This right taken us away from the olden times of government confidentiality and towards open governance. Moving towards open government is moving towards a transparent system. Open government broadly consists of three pillars or 3 goals: accessibility, participation, and transparency. The role of technology is important for an effective open government Information and communication Technology (ICT) forms the backbone and it helps people connect and interconnect with each other communities, states and the government thereby improving participation and accessibility.

The last decade of the twentieth century saw a very rapid development and spread of Information and communication Technology (ICTO along with the advent of user-friendly computing systems and networking. These new technologies have placed a powerful tool in the hands of the society that could be used to make life easier and better for all in several dimensions of human activities.

In the global scenario the extent of use of IT in government and governance varies considerably from country to country and even in different parts of countries but there is a continuing process of innovations and trials. There is no agreed or settled definition of 'governance' but it is understood as a process. The concept of 'governance' goes beyond that of government' which may not involve the citizens at all and yet do all that is necessary for the orderly existence of a society According to Goram Hyden-governance is a rational concept, emphasizing state and social actors and among social actors themselves.

The concept of governance in a broad sense, is that of a mechanism or institution to enforce order and control through the core functions of legislation, execution and adjudication. As against this, the evolving concept of 'governance' encompasses markets, hierarchies and networks. In some country's governments have progressively taken upon themselves larger and larger responsibilities in the name of welfare and common good. According to Kofi A Anan, former Secretary General of the United Nations "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development." E-government can be a powerful tool in improving a nation's quality of life by promoting the larger goals of society and making government more responsive to its citizens by creating a citizen centric, "user-friendly" government.

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Understanding e-governance
E-Governance is a journey and not a destination
E-Governance represents a paradigm shift in the field of governance reforms. According to the World Bank "E-government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (Such as Wide Area Networks, the internet and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, business and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen's empowerment through access to information or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth and cost reduction".

Basically e-Governance is generally understood as the use of Information and Communication Technology at all levels of the government in order to provide services to the citizens interaction with business enterprises and communication of information between different agencies of the government in a speedy, convenient, efficient and transparent manners. E-Governance facilitates interaction between different stake holders in governance. There are four types of interaction in e-governance viz, government to citizen (G2C), government to business (G2B), government to government, i.e., inter-agency relationship (G2G) and government to employment (G2E). Here the 'e' in e-governance stands for 'electronic. Thus e-governance or electronic governance implies the application of ICT to government functioning. E-Governance is basically a move towards SMART governance implying: simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent governance. The objectives of achieving such e-governance go for beyond mere simple computerization of office operations in government offices. It should mean a drastic change in the way the government operates and this means a new and redefined set of responsibilities for the executive, legislative and the judiciary. It is a reform process of transferring governance to be more citizen-centered. Technology is a tool in this effort. E-Governance is not about technology alone. It basically leads to re-engineering of the process behind the screen that actually delivers the service. While finalizing an e-governance project: one has to keep in mind as what kind of good governance will be achieved through it.

Historically, it was in Chile that a real e-governance initiative was taken up early as in 1972, when the IT application were unheard of in government and were limited even in business. Prof Stafford Beer implemented for President Allende of Chile, the first e-governance software that would help the government survive a severe crisis. Chile thus became the first country to have successfully implemented e-governance.

Components of e-governance
The following components can be identified:
1. Technical component with electronic dimension.
2. Social component with egalitarian dimension.
3. Cultural component with ethical dimension.
4. Political component with enactment dimension.
5. Psychological component with extensional dimension.
6. Service component with empowerment dimension.

Benefits of E-Governance
The of e-governance are follows

1. Better delivery of government services to citizens.
2. Improved interaction with business and industry.
3. Citizen empowerment through access to information.
4. More efficient government management.
5. Less corruption and increased transparency in administration.
6. Cost reduction and revenue growth.
7. Increased legitimacy of government.
8. Reduced paper work and red tapism in the administrative process.
9. Better planning and coordination between different levels of government.
10. Greater citizen participation in the governance process.
11. Improved relations between the public authorities and civil society.
12. Re-structuring of administrative process.

Thus, through e-governance the distance between government and citizen will be reduced in terms of interaction, feedback and redressal, which will lead to avoidance of intermediaries thus encouraging transparency. The greatest advantage for citizens will be availability of governance at any time at any place.

Indian initiatives
The process of open governance in India began with the passing of the landmark judgement of Justice PN. Bhagawati of the supreme court of India in 1981, where, he stressed the need for increased disclosure in matters relating to public affairs.

National e-governance plan (NeGP) was formulated jointly by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances and Department of Electronics and Information Technology in 2006, with a vision to make the government service accessible to the common man while ensuring efficiency, transparency, reliability and effective delivery of services at affordable costs. The objective of the NeGP is to bring public services closer to citizen, as articulated in its vision statement.

NeGP has introduced Common Service Centres (CSCs) which are regarded as the strategic cornerstone CSCs are broadband enabled computer facilities and are aimed at providing high quality and cost-effective video, voice, data content and services in the area of education, health telemedicine, entertainment and other private services: CSCs also offer web enabled e-governance services in rural areas; including application forms certificates and utility payments such as electricity, telephone and water bills. As on 31st December 2012, a total of 99,247 CSCs were operational in India.

The application of internet technologies has helped improve the quality of service, made the system efficient transparent and cost effective across diverse areas including health care, education and transportation. This is evident from e-Governance led initiatives that are operating successfully across the country. In 1990s after the global IT explosion India became a major it hub and active exporter of IT services India began to apply several communication technology initiatives such as Telecommunication, commerce and e-governance. The Information Technology Act, enacted in 2000 provided legal recognition to electronic communication. ICT has made positive impact on the overall life style of the citizens providing them faster access to services. The core idea in any e-governance project is more effective governance.

E-governance initiatives

The various steps taken to promote e-governance in India are as follows:

1. A National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development was set-up in 1998.
2. The Ministry of Information Technology was created at the Centre in 1999.
3. The information Technology Act (2000) was enacted. This Act was amended in 2008.
4. The first National Conference of States IT Ministers was organized in the year 2000, for arriving at a Common Action Plan to promote IT in India.
5. The state governments launched e-governance projects like e-seva (Andhra Pradesh), Bhoomi (Karnataka), Gyandoot (Madhya Pradesh), Lokavani (Uttar Pradesh), FRIENDS (Keral), e-mitra (Rajasthan) and so on.
6. The National e-governance Plan (NeGP) was approved in the year 2006. It consists of 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 8 support components to be implemented at the Central, state and local government's levels.
7. A National Policy on Open Standards for e-Governance was notified in November 2010, it provides a set of guidelines for the consistent, standardized and reliable implementation of e-Governance solutions.

We can say that E-Governance is not a short cut to economic development, budget savings or clean, efficient government. It is not the "Big Bang" a single event that immediately and forever alters the universe of government. The key mantra of e-governance is 'Citizen first'. It was therefore vital that the existing projects are assessed with a focus on the nature and quantum of impact on users. E-Governance is a process that requires a sustained commitment of political will, resources and engagement among the government, private and public sectors.

Bhoomi: Online delivery of land records

Earlier e-Governance was considered as mere application of ICT tolls to the governance process. A successful e-Governance intervention requires a holistic approach as it encompasses domain knowledge, process reform management and change management.

The Karnataka State Government is committed to establish e-Governance across the state. The aim is not just to provide the government services and information to the citizens but government services and information to the citizens but also to ensure that the government itself reaches the citizens through e-Governance.

BHOOMI system of Karnataka is an excellent example of sustainable and successful e-governance project. Bhoomi is the first successful rural area-based e-Governance project in India which has sustained for more than 10 years now. Bhoomi is a G2C project.

Maintenance of land records is one of the key issues facing governance today. In Karnataka land records were earlier maintained through a manual system. The Ministry of Rural Department has been providing funds to state governments for computerization of land records since 1988-89. In Karnataka, data entry work started in 1995, but up to 1999 there were few concrete benefits. In 1999-2000 modifications were made in the software and all the databases were updated when the Bhoomi Project was launched.

The major objectives of Bhoomi project to

1. Facilitate easy maintenance and prompt updating of land records.
2. Make land records tamper-proof.
3. Allow farmers easy access to their records. Create and to construct databases regarding land revenue, cropping pattern, land use etc.
4. Utilize data for planning and formulating development programmes.

Karnataka Government's Department of Revenue set up computerized land record kiosks (Bhoomi centres) across 177 taluk offices. These kiosks provided farmers with the Record of Rights, Tenancy and Cultivation (RTC)-a document needed for obtaining bank loans as a proof of ownership. The Bhoomi Project was expected to speed up the delivery of RTC and reduce harassment and bribery.

In addition to this the farmer can see his land records documents and status of the antation-in-process without the intervention of the offices on the touch screen kiosk, set up at the entrance of taluk office. This brings in total transparency in the maintenance em of land records. Bio-metrics authentication a fingerprint scanning device has been introduced by the state government to check manipulation of land records. This has replaced the traditional method of using passwords. With the fingerprint authentication device, only an authorised person will be able to edit records. Of course, the current implementation requires a villager to go the taluk office in order to get the copy of land records. The state government legally abolished all hand written records after the implementation of this project when a change of ownership takes place through a sale or inheritance, farmers can file their request for mutation of the land records at the taluks headquarters. The process of mutation is online in Karnataka. A number is assigned by the computer for each request. The number can be used to check the status of the request on a touch screen kiosk. The computer automatically generates notices. This type of facilitation process can be seen only in Karnataka. As far as security and threat of hacking are concern, the Bhoomi software incorporates the bio-logon metrics system, which authentication all users of the software using their fingerprint. These are the best examples of how information technology can change lives at the grassroots apart from bringing in efficiency and transparency in government in government administration known for delays. Only in Karnataka, the 'mutation process was made online as a result of which the database of land records was updated as soon as a mutation was approved. This has been the crucial factor behind the success of the CoLR project in Karnataka in Bhoomi, a "first-in-first-out" [FIFO] system has been implemented. Now people need not pay bribes because they know their work will anyway be done.

Bhoomi project: Its significance

a) On line mutation.
b) Integration with survey system.
c) Integration with registration.
d) Integration with Banks.
e) Integration with land acquisition system.
f) Digitally signed RTC.
g) ROR and mutation status on WEB.
h) SMS intimation service.

Input and Output Documents
Input documents to Bhoomi
1. Mutation transactions.
2. Crop details.
3. Mutation order of revenue inspector.
4. Objection details.

Output documents of Bhoomi
1. Current RTC.
2. Old RTC.
3. Mutation Order Extract.
4. Khatha Extract of an owner in a village.
5. Status of ongoing mutation.
6. Notice copy of the transaction.

Modules of Bhoomi
It has two modules for public interface:
1. One module is used by revenue officials at Land Record Centre to issue the land records documents on demand from the public and accept the request application for mutation from the public.
2. The other module runs on a Touch screen kiosk, set up at taluk/block office. This module is easily operable by even the person/farmer having little knowledge of computer.

Key players
Three organizations have helped in bringing up the project to this stage.
1. Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, sponsored and funded the scheme.
2. The ranks of Revenue Department of Karnataka from Village Accountant to Secretary level have played important role in successful implementation of this project.
3. National Informatics Centre, Karnataka State Unit and the District centres have provided the full technical and implementation support.

Online integration of Bhoomi and Kaveri Software
The online integration of BHOOMI and KAVERI software helps the farmers of the state in reducing their hardship and land related litigations. Objectives of integration of BHOOM and KAVERI:
1. Facilitates in bringing synchronization between KAVERI and BHOOMI by reducing time lag between registration and initiation of mutation process.
2. Facilitates in avoiding duplication of data entry work that is being done at KAVERI and SHOOMI reducing workload.
3. Facilitates in reducing or removing the data entry mistakes resulting in rejection of J- Slips.
4. Facilitates in reducing rejection of mutations in BHOOMI due to wrong data entry. Alerts on mutation status through SMS service

The information of all the stages of mutation process will be alerted to the farmers through SMS service. From the day the process starts, till the disposal of mutation, SMS service will be available for the farmers. Another value-added service is registration of mobile numbers against a survey number. An SMS alert will be sent to the owner when- ever there is a transactions initiated on that survey number. These services are providing the transparency in the system.

New developments in Bhoomi
In the existing Bhoomi implementation, citizens had to go taluk offices to get their land records. Under the Nemmadi programme (rural digital service), the government has finalised setting up of 800 telecentres. The objective of the Nemmadi project is to empower rural citizens, provide direct access of government services to the citizens and bring government services to the doorstep of the citizen. With the establishment of Nemmadi Telecentres, service delivery has become efficient, transparent and accountable.

Mojini: Pre-Mutation sketch
It is Karnataka's gift to land records system in India. Karnataka Land Revenue Act was amended and it was mandated that a pre-mutation sketch is prerequisite for any sale transaction to happen. Pre-mutation sketch which is mandatory for transfer of properties would be used during mutation process; new concept called Integrated Mutation Podi has been introduced to achieve this objective. Along with transfer of ownership, new RTC is also created with new land parcel details bringing synchronization of spatial and textual data of land records.

Conclusion
E-governance is a desirable new public management system in the 21st century. Therefore, the government has to adopt a comprehensive e-governance policy and programme. Ultimately, the success of an e-governance initiative lies in how efficiently it has enhanced people's participation in government functioning through wide ICT access. Indeed, successful e-government is at most 20% technology and at least 80% about people process and organizations. Bhoomi is a farmer friendly mechanism to access and update land records using state of art technology. The success of Bhoomi has helped citizens feel contented about the changed systems.

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