

**A STUDY ON PROMOTE E-GOVERNANCE DURING PRECISE TO
INFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

The essence of good governance is based on the premise that the laws and procedures are transparent, clearly defined & understood by those governed and the implementation is both quick and smooth. To this effect, the governance in a developing country is a challenge, because a majority of the governed (citizens) are educationally & socio-economically challenged. More so, in developing countries, where the governments are formed through democratic means, the challenge of governance is much larger as the governors themselves are at times not very clear on various rules and procedures. Further, at times, the rules and procedures, though explicitly defined in the constitution or statutes, by themselves become hindrances in the path of governance due to lack of transparency and procedural clarities. Hence, the solution to the foresaid lies in providing a mechanism that is quick, interactive and provides a clear repository of rules and regulations, which extends help in decision making for both the governors and the governed. The Governors (policy & decision makers) need to be made aware on possibilities that are presented now with the advancement of Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) that can collect, collate and analyze data from various sources among different sectors to view the economy holistically and support decision making processes in a transparent way.

ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE: A BRIEF CONCEPT

The World Bank defines e-governance as the “use of information and communication technologies by government agencies to transform relations with citizens, business world and other arms of the government.” The term e-governance involves the computerisation and networking of all government departments and linking each district with the State headquarters. The objective of egovernance in India goes beyond mere computerisation of government offices. It fundamentally means changing the way the government operates and implies a new set of responsibilities for civil servants, business world and the public.

e-Governance 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, businesses, and various arms of government resulting in better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management

e-government aims to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive.

The goals of e-Governance are:

- a. Better service delivery to citizens
- b. Ushering in transparency and accountability
- c. Empowering people through information
- d. Improved efficiency within Governments

e. Improve interface with business and industry.

As a first step, information about services is published on a web site and citizens can interact with the site to download application forms for a variety of services. The next stage involves the use of ICT in the actual delivery of service such as filing a tax return, renewing a license, etc. More sophisticated applications include processing on-line payments.

In developing countries, on-line services counters may operate in a department offering services related only to that department. In more evolved models, citizen service centers have been created at convenient locations where citizens can access on-line services of several departments. These counters are operated by department/private operators, the citizens do not directly interact with computer screens. Collection of payment is often handled through conventional means. In addition to such service centers, citizens may also be able to access service delivery portals.

ICT-THE FOUNDATION FOR eGOVERNANCE

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a critical role to play in development efforts around the world:

- Benefits of applying ICT in fighting poverty and promoting economic growth are widely understood.
- High-tech communication can be used to alleviate such dire challenges as starvation, homelessness, and lack of basic education and health services.
- ICT is an essential component of broader efforts to harness the free flow of information to increase voice, accountability, and economic development.
- Many countries are preparing and implementing national e-strategies that emphasize the ubiquity of connectivity as well as new applications in areas such as e- government and e-business

WORLDWIDE BOOM IN e-GOVERNANCE

- e-Governance to e-Democracy:
Progress in Australia and New Zealand toward information-age democracy
- The emerging vision for e-Government in the EU is in developing a knowledge-based society and economy where governments are knowledge-based, usercentric, distributed and networked
- K-AGRINET launched Connect Now campaign in rural Philippines
- Microsoft is supporting Bahrain in furthering eGovernment
- Oman's digital society initiative 'e-Oman' takes shape
- E-Passport project initiatives are worldwide taken
- Bulgaria allocates EUR 5 mn for e-Government projects.
- Thai S/W developers invited for e-Government projects
- Brunei e-Health project to take off soon
- E-Village launched in Jordan.
- UNDESA report ranks e-Government readiness in the Gulf at 50%

RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT, 2005

Right to have access to information held by the government. This information could be in the form of records, files, registers, maps, data, drawings, etc.

Right to Information not only means the citizens right to ask for information that they want it but also includes more importantly so the duty of public bodies to disclose information suomoto (on its own). This means that the government has a positive duty to give certain types of information without waiting to be asked for it.

The passing of the Right to Information Act has been welcomed from all quarters of the society as it is a significant step towards establishing a regime that guarantees citizens' right to know. In addition to providing the right to information to the citizens, the Act also establishes that the state must be equipped with adequate apparatus so that easy and inexpensive access to information is provided.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND eGOVERNANCE

RTI Act of India is considered as one of the most advanced RTI legislations in the world. However, Right to Information makes little sense if access to that information is limited only to literate, resourceful and computer savvy people. In this context, the RTI can be understood as having two facets from the perspective of the grassroots:

- Access to general information such as the information that governments and others make available, for example concerning entitlements and benefits;
- Access to specific information such as individual files, services or decisions made by officers.

In this context the use of EGovernance for strengthening the RTI implementation is mutually beneficial. In fact the RTI act, is India's first law and perhaps the only law in the world that obligates governments to take up e-Governance as provided in Section 4 (1-a). Digitalisation of all government departments which is vital to strengthening e-Governance is quite important to address the information needs of the citizens.

The first phase of e-governance is marked by web presence of public institutions and dissemination of information. This will be 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.

AMALGAMATION OF eGOVERNANCE AND RTI

The right to impart and receive information is a species of the right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India. A citizen has a Fundamental Right to use the best means of imparting and receiving information. The State is not only under an obligation to respect the Fundamental Rights of the citizens, but also equally under an obligation to ensure conditions under which the Right can be meaningfully and effectively be enjoyed by one and all.

The following provisions of the IT Act, 2000 reflect India's concern to bring transparency in the functioning of governmental affairs through e-governance:

- Legal recognition of electronic records
- Legal recognition of digital signature
- Use of electronic records and digital signature in governmental dealings
- Retention of electronic record for certain period.
- Establishment of electronic gazette However, these provisions provide only a nonabsolute right to claim a sound e-governance base

The RTIA, if implemented properly, could prove a boon for the e-governance initiative because the required information can be asked for and provided by using the e-governance base. The Act has a

progressive approach and calls for implementation of ICT in order to efficiently store and disseminate information.

The Act says that "it shall be a constant endeavour of every public authority...to provide as much information suo motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information."

It is also recognising use of e-governance as a tool for efficient functioning of the Act and for giving strength to the benign drive of "whistleblowing".

5.3 ROLE OF ICT IN IMPLEMENTATION OF RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT - 2005

- Setting up of a specialized website (<http://rti.gov.in>) for centralized repository of proactive disclosure of documents of various Public Authorities under Central & State Governments.
- Development of Portal Service for uploading of the documents by the concerned Public Authorities.
- Directory Service of Public Authorities, Public Information Officers, Appellate Authorities, Chief Information Commissions etc.
- User friendly mechanism for search and access of information by citizens round the clock.
- Repository of the requests that have already been answered in a way that is searchable by the citizens.

INITIATIVES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF RTI THROUGH USE OF e-GOVERNANCE

The strategy for implementing the RTI can be through use of e-Governance. The ultimate objective of the initiatives would be to improve the information regime and information retrieval system and also to reorganise the information available for easier access to citizens.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION CENTRE

The RTI Act puts a number of obligations on the public authorities implementing this Act. In accordance with section 4 (1a), all records should be duly catalogued and indexed in a manner and form which facilitates RTI. Some efforts can be taken as open shelf system, modernisation of office infrastructure making it more citizens friendly. All records appropriate to be computerised should be computerised. All branches of offices should be interconnected.

It includes:

- Significant data relevant to that region: It will include brief data on the region, its administrative machinery, demography, land use, agriculture, forest, health, economic and other socio-economic infrastructure.
- Procedures for getting various kinds of licences: Documents required, officials concerned, conditionality and procedures, etc for making various kinds of licenses.
- Check list for registration and transfer of vehicles: Formalities in a check list format for registration, transfer, hypothecation, alteration, passing, etc. Of various kinds of vehicles should be displayed.
- Identity Cards: Important information pertaining to elections and electoral photos identity cards.

PUBLIC INFORMATION KIOSK

A Public Information kiosk or PIK should be set in conjunction with the Right to Information centre for enabling people to exercise their RTI in a meaningful and transparent manner. Application forms for seeking information or for inspecting any records as per Rule 3 of RTI rules, 2006 should be made available through this Kiosk.

Within this kiosk, a computer should be installed and staff should be deployed to facilitate user interface. The public can visit the kiosk for obtaining information about any task performed. E-Pramana or computerised certificates facility should also be introduced to digitise certificates of various kinds issued through the offices. Interested users can get the requisite details of these documents and can check the authenticity of documents and certificates.

VISION AND PROSPECTS

In a billion plus population even if one RTI application is filed per thousand households (a household being presumed to be consisting of five citizens) the number of applications comes to be more than 200,000. Imagine the wasteful-man-hours saved by tapping the wordprocessing/scanning/ photocopying done by so many applicants into the workflow of a practical regime of Right to Information thus envisioned:

- The status of an RTI application is only an SMS away.
- The voluntary as well as mandatory disclosure is comprehensive enough to make it possible for PCO-cum-RCC to cull out necessary information and supply without many needing to file an RTI application.
- The records of the public authorities are duly catalogued, indexed, computerised and connected through a network all over the country so that access to such records is facilitated.

E-GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The Government of India kick started the use of IT in the government in the right earnest by launching number of initiatives. First the Government approved the National E-Governance Action plan for implementation during the year 2003-2007.

The following measures have also been introduced:

- Adoption of “Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 by the Government of India to provide legal framework to facilitate electronic transactions. The major aims of this act are to: recognize electronic contracts, prevent computer crimes, and make electronic filing possible.
- Establishment of the National Taskforce of Information Technology and Software Development in May 1998;
- Designating a Joint Secretary level officer as IT manager in every Ministry/ Department; and
- Instituting websites by almost all Ministries and Departments and providing information on aspects such as their objectives, policies and decisions, contact persons, etc. Some of them have started their electronic newsletter for giving publicity to their activities on wider scale; and identifying departments, which have frequent inter-face with the citizens, and computerizing them on priority basis.

PROJECT SUSTAINABLE ACCESS IN RURAL INDIA (SARI) IN THE STATE OF TAMIL NADU

People in a tiny village called pathinettangudi, 35km from Madurai, Tamil Nadu, a state in South India, are enjoying the fruits of IT revolution. They are using e-mails, voice mail and web cams courtesy the Sustainable Access in Rural Internet (SARI) project. Around 30 other villages around pathinettangudi are also covered under this project and are being provided with similar facilities through ‘Public Access Internet Kiosks.

CONCLUSION

A number of e-government challenges are emerging today which show that the future of e-government may be sober and not hype. E-government hype is not e-government reality. The central lesson which emerges out of e-government practice for last more than a decade is that public service delivery continues to be unsatisfactory and the vast, almost revolutionary potential, of e-government continues to be unrealized. To redress the situation it is necessary to define e-government afresh and propose a citizen-centric criteria-based definition of e-government as a lodestar to guide the efforts of e-government policy makers and implementers

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