SMART government by E-Governance and its contribution to better society: An analysis

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Abstract: E-governance refers the application of information and communication technologies in the government business and transactions to deliver better government services, to provide free information to the citizens and to make government most efficient in its functioning by using electronic means. People are able to get better services and access to government information which would lead to a better interaction between the government and citizens. Therefore, e-governance facilitates better interface between government and citizens. Information Technology (IT) is the lifeline of e-governance. There is an interconnection between e-governance, good governance, economic development and democracy. E-governance can improve the governance· and the improved governance in tum, can facilitate economic development by providing better services, better evaluation, monitoring, better implementation and easy access to information and democracy which includes accountability transparency, efficiency, responsiveness etc.

Key Words: accountability transparency, efficiency, responsiveness

Introduction

E-governance is an instrument of good governance because it facilitates efficiency, accountability, transparency, reliability and responsiveness in governance through interface. It would be useful to define clearly governance and good governance to have a better understanding of e-governance. Generally governance includes the management of public affairs like resolving conflicts, providing services, maintaining law and order etc. according to established rules and procedures by exercising power.

General Objectives of e-Governance

a) Improvements in delivery of essential services to the citizens;
b) Empowerment of people through the dissemination of information;
c) Ensuring transparency in government business and transactions and right to information in governmental activities;

d) Elimination of undesirable practices such as touts, speed money, deliberate delays, harassment, bogus document and corruption;
e) Encouraging broad based public awareness and participation in key areas of developmental efforts;
f) Maintaining due control over assets, revenues and expenditures;
g) Establishing better information base for decision making process including forecasting critical phenomenon;
h) Enhancing productivity and efficiency of the administrative functions through the promotion of knowledge network;
i) Making administration responsive, citizen friendly and ensuring accountability;
j) Establishing legitimacy and credibility of institutions;
k). Interests of citizens in general and specific beneficiaries in particular should be safe guarded;

L). Improvement in critical, contemporary measures of performance such as cost, quality, service, and speed of an institution.

SMART

The object of E-Governance is to provide a SMART Government. The Acronym SMART refers to Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, Responsible and Transparent Government[1].

S - The use of ICT brings *simplicity* in governance through electronic documentation, online submission, online service delivery, etc.

M - It brings *Morality* to governance as immoralities like bribing; red-tapism, etc. are eliminated

A - It makes the Government *accountable* as all the data and information of Government is available online for consideration of every citizen, the NGOs and the media.

R - Due to reduced paperwork and increased communication speeds and decreased communication time, the Government agencies become *responsive*. Technology can help convert an irresponsible Government Responsible. Increased access to information makes more informed citizens. And these empowered citizens make a responsible Government.

T - With increased morality, online availability of information and reduced red-tapism the process of governance becomes *transparent* leaving no room for the Government to conceal any information from the citizens.
These objects of E-Governance are achievable with the use of ICT and therefore the concept is very alluring and desirable

1.3. Role of e-governance

E-Governance and its relation to e-Government[2]

The term E-government and E-governance are often loosely used, but they are different in finer sense. E-government is a technology driven administration, where the citizen can avail government services like getting copies of land records, filing of tax returns etc. It basically involves the formulation of laws and regulations such as domain names etc. to govern cyber space (Gupta M.P, 2004)[3]. Moon, M.J. (2002)[4] distinguished between public sector usage of information technology and E-government initiatives. He opined that although there is a distinction between public sector information technology and E-government, often inters dependent and difficult to quantifiably separate, but E-government is that subset of public information technology that involves the delivery of govt. services and information to citizens. This delivery of services and information also involves the integration of networks and data basis to allow for cross-agency communication and interaction, which is an internal technology application. Governance is an issue not only for cities, nations, federations and other political entities, but also for private organizations. In the political context, the interests to be promoted by "good governance" are the public interests of the society as a whole, including future generations with respect to the interests of future generations; governance is entwined with another current topic, sustainability.

Governance in the public context is closely related to government and

The major elements of good governance are rule of law, accountability, transparency, participation and people's control. By harnessing Information and

Communication Technology (ICT) for internal as well as external operations, by better managing its resources and developing an appropriate organizational culture, the objective of good governance can be attained much more effectively.

Figure: 1. 1: Issues in Good Governance

The success of decentralized planning rests its objectives such as efficiency, transparency, accountability, responsibility and participation, social equity and gender equality. The aim of E-governance is to enhance these objectives by not only helping service delivery of the local government but it has an influence over all the spheres of activities of the local governments. Hence the effect of e-governance could be seen on the basis of supporting of e-governance for attaining the above said objective on a time bound manner.

Efficiency and Productivity

The implementation of e-governance projects improves the efficiency of service delivery in the following ways. The changes made possible by E-government, such as the improved information supply and service levels, help to increase efficiency of public service delivery. Tasks and costs can be more efficiently distributed, both within and between public sector bodies and processes can be streamlined to make better use of available resources and increase delivery capabilities. E-government allows the public sector to automate many routine interactions with citizens and businesses and back-office processes, eliminating paperwork and reducing processing costs, such as sorting, mailing, and printing.

Cost reduction: E-governance enables public sector bodies to increase their service processing and delivery capabilities by requiring less time and fewer personnel. Leaner process design, the automation of parts of the service delivery process and the use of electronic communication with customers can lead to significant reduction in cost.

Improved quality of information and information flow:
The provision of online and electronic information and the direct input of data in electronic format by public services improve information flows externally and internally. Furthermore, the shared use of information and databases made possible by electronic networks improve the speed and quality of data supply. Government agencies can communicate and exchange information easily through electronic means and a number of new communication channels have opened up between governments and its citizens like email, online information etc.

Reduction of process time: The digitization of public services can significantly reduce the time it takes to process and deliver a service, therefore saving precious time for both public administrations and their customers. Because data can be submitted electronically by customers and shared between different organizations, service information can be reviewed online in real time. Furthermore, the availability of electronic data from customers and other organizations make it possible to automate key steps of the decision-making and service delivery process, and in some case to fully enable them.

Reduction of administrative burdens: The use of ICTs in the provision of public services makes it possible to significantly reduce the administrative burden of the citizens and businesses that use these services, as well as for the organizations that deliver them. The availability, sharing and re-use of electronic data, the digitization of key processes and the elimination of unnecessary steps, accompanied by adequate organizational change, can provide a major contribution to the reduction of unnecessary administrative burden.

Increase flexibility: A major benefit of e-government is the improved service level in terms of increased flexibility (24/7 availability, multi-channel delivery, etc.) and transparency (availability of more detailed and complete information about the service). It also increased the capabilities for custom-made services. This includes easier and faster processing of standard cases or tasks, and the possibility to customize electronic service delivery. Letting customers serve themselves through self-service electronic counters allow governments to increase service quality by reducing waiting times, and offering round the clock access and more specialized services. In addition, it significantly reduces customer service costs.

Increase customer satisfaction: Through raising service levels, reducing processing and delivery time, and making public services more responsive and customer-focused, e-government makes it possible to increase customer satisfaction. Although this increase is difficult to quantify, it can be measured through high usage figures, a decreasing number of enquiries or complaints, and through user surveys.

Speedy and Cost Effective Service Delivery: Many studies have found that the services provided by governments are inadequate, unreliable and expensive. Citizens have to put much effort and time to obtain such services. Service delivery processes have problems such as inadequate and irregular access to and supply of public services, lack of responsibility, neglect of consumers and their needs, delayed response and

prevalence of bribery (Public Affairs Centre, 2001)[5].

Information and services: Governance can improve interactions with citizens and provide services at lesser cost and time, and greater convenience. Many government departments provide information about activities and schemes to the public through their websites. They also provide facilities to download information and forms to obtain various services without visiting the concerned offices. Online facilities are also provided to obtain licenses, certificates, reservations, admissions, and allotments, which saves time and cost. For instance, after computerization, land registration requirements in Andhra Pradesh (AP) has been completing within an hour instead of several days needed earlier and the time for registration of land sales has been reduced from a week to less than an hour.

Multiple services: Governments are also providing multiple services at single point to facilitate speedy delivery of services to citizens to help save their money, effort and time, where earlier they had to visit several offices for obtaining different services. Lokmitra Project in Rajasthan provides multiple services from different government departments through e-counters connected to a central server in the Panchmahal District of Gujarat; the district administration publishes information about developmental projects/ programmes and performance of key departments. Its portal even provides the facility to download various forms and accepts a few of these on online. Citizens can seek advice, opinions and solutions to their problems from agricultural, animal husbandry, health and legal experts[6]. They can obtain income, domicile, and caste certificates. Students can obtain examination result and question banks from the internet.

Administrative efficiency for effective communication:
E-governance can improve the efficiency of government by streamlining administrative procedures (simplification and transparent) for effective communication within and outside government departments. Rationalization and simplification of the vast number of regulations and procedures through computerization, cut-short delays and enhance the quality of service-delivery. E-governance not only reduces paper work, but also facilitates speedy communication and effective coordination. This ultimately reduces red tape and corruption and helps in providing more and better service at lesser cost (NASSCOM, 2003)[7].

Transparency and Corruption
Dissemination of information provides transparency and empowers citizens to ensure accountability and prevent the administration from indulging in corrupt practices. In many developing countries, including India, regulations are often complex and at times inconsistent. They tend to be numerous and difficult to comprehend not only to the public but also to the employees responsible for implementing them. Weak implementation of laws and regulations result in the flouting of rules and corrupt practices (Sangita, 1995)[8]. Lack of openness in transactions is largely responsible for corruption in official dealings. Information on income and expenditure enables people to hold civil servants accountable, reducing inefficiency and corruption.

Responsiveness and Accountability:

Accessibility to information regarding land records, land registration, government policies, schemes and procedures, and so on empowers citizens to ensure accountability of administrators. The online complaint registration process, which has been innovatively introduced by an NGO in Mumbai, gives us a good example of how officials are made accountable to the people. If a complaint that is filed is not responded to within the stipulated time, it is automatically passed on to the next higher officer and this goes on till it is addressed. This process, therefore, makes officials accountable and as a result they do not dare to neglect their responsibility[9].

Participation

Participation of the stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation is very important for achieving good governance. ICT has significantly changed the nature and extent of citizen participation, which fundamentally differs from the traditional kind of participation. E-governance enhances citizen participation in shaping the policies and improving service delivery (Budhiraj 2003)[10]. E-governance can facilitate better participatory process in governance. People can debate and discuss public policies before enacting any Acts or Rules. It can expand policy debates beyond the confines of dominant individuals and groups. Greater transparency can be ensured in actions and decisions through people's participation in such debates. Citizens' opinions, needs, and preferences can be communicated to the concerned authorities to provide relevant services and goods. This feedback helps in making service delivery more qualitative and cost effective.

Accessibility and Equity

Accessibility means that the process is the same for all the stakeholders with multiple and reciprocal pathways for information flow. This may require actively soliciting inputs from significant stakeholders, not from lobby groups and institutions, but through creating structures to foster communication (Kakabadse et.al. 2004)[11]. Discussing the digital divide issue, some scholars have expressed their view that information-age direct democracy poses a new social segregation challenge for those who are information-rich and information-poor on an individual and societal basis (Kakabadse et al 2004)[12]. It is held that fewer people have accessibility to ICT. Therefore, promotion of E-governance would benefit the "technology-haves". The practical application of E-governance, however, has disproved this idea. In many situations, the poor have less voice on account of their inferior social position. This has been revealed by many studies on the Panchayati Raj system and peoples' participation. In grama sabha meetings, these people cannot express independent views either due to lack of awareness or due to fear of influential leadership in the area. In this regard, E-governance promises to be of great help to them. It is easier for people to lodge complaints, against erring local political and administrative officials by these means.

Empowerment:

Empowerment refers to the expansion of the capability and freedom to choose and act to shape one's life as well as that of the community to which one belongs. In Maharashtra, the "Wired Village"

project in Warana, a rural area, gives information in the local language to the people of 70 villages, about crop prices, farmers' payment dates, employment and educational opportunities, through 54 kiosks. It has helped farmers who supply sugarcane to the Warren Group of Cooperatives (WGCs) to achieve productivity. Before the project implementation, there was wide communication gap between the farmers and the WGCs, leading to inefficiency and lower productivity[13].

E-governance makes public institutions more responsive and accountable. ICT has the capacity to challenge the monopoly of the existing political class over the means of communication and to revitalize citizen-based democracy. In addition, these measures empower grass-root groups to collect information, organize citizens' initiatives, change public opinion and influence national and local policies.

Equity:

Attempts are on to find solutions to common problems faced by citizens. Much effort has been made to provide access to information through the internet. Efforts are on using ICT to provide medical facilities (telemedicine) and distance education to rural and backward regions. Equity means taking explicit care to balance the potential costs and the benefits among all stakeholders and presupposes openness with regard to differing or conflicting perspectives and

assumptions (Kakabadse et al. 2004)[14]. By delivering services at the doorstep of citizens, both poor and rich, and providing equal opportunity to all, most of the E-governance projects bring equity. Therefore, it can be said that E-governance can address equity concerns by providing services at the doorsteps of the poor, who are otherwise unable to access either ICT technology or information, or do not have the capacity to raise their voice against injustice due to their low socio-economic status. The poor can pay or collect whatever is required in their nearest kiosk instead of going to distant places expending time and money, which they would have to do in case of government-departmental dealing.

1.7: Effects of E-governance on Economic Development

The links between E-governance and development have increasingly been articulated by international agencies in terms of the digital divide raising alarm bells with the concern that developing countries are being deprived of the opportunities for economic growth and social development enjoyed by advanced economies because of scarcity of E-governance programmes. Another key assumption from the modernisation literature is that deficiency in knowledge is partly responsible for underdevelopment.

Figure 1.2.: Importance of e-governance
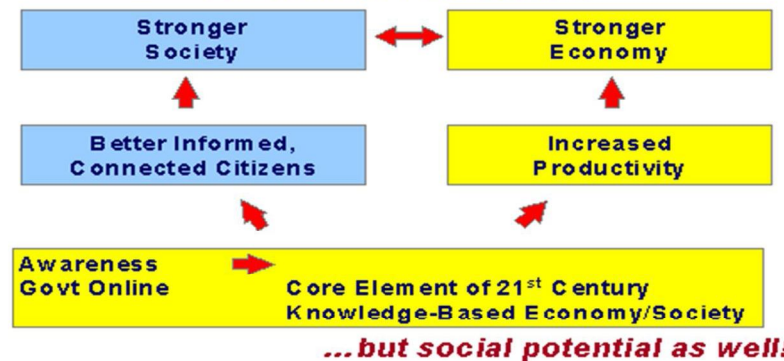
E-governance in Rural India can be utilized for poverty reduction strategies by enhancing pro-poor access to markets, health, and education. E-governance applications in this concern has proven successful in delivering desirable social, economic and government services to rural population by increasing their efficiency and productivity; improving their livelihood and also helping them voice their concerns, demand their rights and participate in decision-making processes. If properly implemented benefits of e-governance are enormous. Some of its obvious benefits are:

Quality Service: ICT would make available timely and reliable information on various aspects of governance. In the initial phase, information would be made available with respect to simple aspects of governance such as forms, laws, rules, procedures etc. later extending to detailed information including performance reports, public database, decision making processes etc. As regards services, there would be an immediate impact in terms of saving time, effort and money, resulting from online and one-point accessibility of public services backed by automation of back end processes. An ultimate objective of e-governance is to reach out to citizens by adopting a life-cycle approach i.e. providing public services to citizens which would be required right from birth to death.

Integrated Information and Services: e-governance targets the use of a government wide electronic information infrastructure to simplify service delivery, reduce duplication and improve the level and speed of service to clients at a lower cost. It recommends creating, managing and prudently sharing information electronically among the various government departments and the different services offered by them. The integrated information approach automatically lends itself to offering integrated services. Different types of services offered by different government departments like collecting taxes, granting licenses, administering regulations, paying grants and benefits can be availed of at one place. This greatly facilitates the citizens by allowing them to perceive the government as a single body to interact with rather than

as a number of unrelated entities, operating at different locations in different government buildings.

Anytime and Anywhere Services: Delivery of services may require interaction between government officials and citizens, but delivery of public-domain information to citizens can be done without any such interaction. Provision of fully interactive on-line services by e-governance gives public access to government services with the quickest responses at convenient times. This on-line accessibility of stored information from remote locations allows government officials to serve any citizen from a government office located in any part of the state or country. Citizens can obtain information related to government processes and procedures through an on-line system without interacting with any government official. In fact, e-governance can give an average citizen quick, interactive access to a vast array of information, through computers at home or work or through kiosks in convenient public locations. Since this access to information is available at many different locations and at all hours, there is no pressure on individuals to physically visit the government office.

Increase Speed: Technology makes communication faster and easier. Various delivery channels like Internet, Landline Phones and Cell Phones have reduced the time taken in normal communication.

Cost Reduction: Most government expenditure goes towards the cost of stationery.
Paper-based communication needs lots of stationery, printers, computers etc. which calls for continuous heavy expenditure. The internet, DTV and phones make communication cheaper saving valuable money for the Government.

Transparency: Use of ICT makes governance transparent. All the information would be available on the internet. Citizens can see this information anytime whenever. But this is only possible when every piece of information of the Government is uploaded on the internet and is available for the public to peruse. The current governing process allows many ways to conceal the information from the people. ICT helps make the information available online by eliminating all the possibilities of concealment. Implementation of e-governance maintains transparency between government and citizens. It helps to reduce corruption and maintain a corruption free society. Corruption free utilities management in all development areas identifies the possible areas where corruption might take place and closes all the loopholes.

Simplicity, Efficiency and Accountability in the government[15]: Application of ICT to governance combined with detailed business process re-engineering would lead to simplification of complicated processes, weeding out of redundant processes, simplification in structures and changes in statutes and regulations. The end result would be simplification of the functioning of the government, enhanced decision making abilities and increased efficiency across government - all contributing to an overall environment of a more accountable government machinery. This, in turn, would result in enhanced productivity and efficiency in all sectors. Once the governing process is made transparent the government is automatically made accountable.

Accountability is the answerability of the government to the people. It is the answerability for the deeds of the government.

Improved Productivity: e-governance will significantly contribute to improved overall productivity of both government officials and citizens, as it ensures faster interaction among them by electronic mail instead of slow moving paper files and letters. It will also streamline the workflow of internal government administrative processes such as procurement, recruitment, evaluation, budgeting and planning. On the other hand, improved productivity of citizens results because of the facility of anytime, anywhere services and information.

Better Decision Making and Planning: The integrated information base of e-governance helps planners and decision makers to perform extensive analysis of stored data to provide answers to the queries of the administrative cadre. This facilitates taking well informed policy decisions for citizen facilitation and assessing their impact over the intended section of the population. This in turn, helps them to formulate effective strategies and policies for citizen facilitation.

Expanded reach of governance: The rapid growth of communication technology and its adoption in governance would help in bringing government machinery to the doorsteps of the citizens. Expansion of telephone network, rapid strides in mobile telephony, spread of internet and strengthening of other communication infrastructure would facilitate delivery of a large number of services provided by the government

Control: Documentation, monitoring and control of various projects in social and economic sectors. Projects which influence multiple departments/ministries and are implemented in multi-locations can easily be monitored and control measures can be taken based on a detailed analysis level.

Crime Control and Management: The trouble spots can easily be identified with the help of crime related data and GIS-Geographic Information System for better understanding. Based on the input security forces can be deputed to the vulnerable locations.

Better Security and Protection of Information: e-governance uses an integrated information approach for keeping all information in one place in an electronic form, so as to keep information secure against theft or leakage. Proper backup mechanisms help in protecting the valuable information from getting lost due to natural calamities such as fires, earthquakes and floods.

However, there are a large number of obstacles in implementation of e-Governance in India. These can be categorized under the following titles: Environmental and Social Challenges, Economical Challenges and Technical Challenges.

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