



TOWARDS GOOD GOVERNANCE THROUGH e-GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT :

For the success of democracy, Good Governance is an essential prerequisite. Good Governance is considered for equity, inclusiveness and enhancement of quality of life of all citizens. Further it also provides a framework of democratic principles for just and honest business practices which leads to the success of democracy. Since the dawn of times to the present scenario, the need for good governance assumed utmost significance for efficient and effective administration.

In recent years, the concept of governance has become very popular in India. Governance primarily involves the interaction between the formal institutions and those in civil society. It is universally accepted that Governance should be good'. The objective of Good governance is to facilitate the development of people and society at large. It implies the presence of rule of law, safe guarding the basic human rights, participation, accountability, openness and transparency.

E-Governance is a tool to achieve the avowed goals of Good Governance. E-Governance opens up avenues for flow of information, provides greatest scope of direct participation, ensures transparency and provides better service delivery. The paper also analyses various issues and challenges confronted in the implementation of E-Governance with special emphasis on people, process and technology.



KEYWORDS : Good Governance, Democracy, e- Governance .

INTRODUCTION:

"The state came into existence for life, but continues to exist for the sake of good life"

Aristotle

The concept of good governance is there since times immemorial and ensuring goodness in governance and raising its level has always been considered the goal of the people and persistent demand of the articulate sections in any society. Good Governance is a dynamic concept. It encompasses fast changing political, social and economic milieu along with the international environment and conditions of operational governance.

Governance is defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources. The World Bank had identified three distinct aspects of governance

- i) the form of political regime
- ii) The process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development; and
- iii) the capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions.

1. Elements of Good Governance :

The essential elements of good governance are :

1.1. Participation :

It means people are the key to good governance. They are not only beneficiaries of good governance but also are the agents of it. They act not only through formal bodies like the executive, the legislature and the judiciary and formal means, such as the right to vote, but also through various groups and associations like trade unions, political parties, NGOs, business groups, caste or religious groups and even in their individual capacities, such as , writing letter to the editor, expressing views in radio or television. Participation can become meaningful only if governmental structures are flexible enough to facilitate easy and unhindered participation.

1.2. Accountability :

It means those who rule are answerable to those from whom they derive their authority. This means establishing standards or "criteria for judging the performance of public officials.

1.3. Transparency :

It refers to the availability of information to the general public and clarity about government rules, regulations, and decisions. This can be done by enforcing the citizen's right to information. Transparency helps in curbing corruption.

1.4. Consensus-oriented:

It means that in a society where there are as many opinions as there are actors it is mediation of different interests to find the best interest of the community.

1.5. Responsiveness:

Means that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time. Effectiveness and efficiency imply that institutions and processes produce results that meet the needs of the society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.

1.6. Equity and inclusiveness

Call for a society whose well-being depends upon ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and nobody feels excluded from the mainstream of the society.

1.7. Rule of law

Stands for fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. This also included protection of human rights.

2. E-GOVERNANCE:

To realize the goals of good governance, e-governance is one of the prime tools. Good governance is fundamental and e-governance is instrumental. E-governance is a use of information and communication technology with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective.

UNESCO defines e-Governance as: "Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including citizens' articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. E-Governance may be understood as the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities.

2.1. Citizen-Centric E-Governance Initiatives

Some of the early e-Governance Initiatives taken in different states of India are discussed in the following lines:

2.1.1. Bhoomi-Karnataka

Bhoomi Launched In 2000, is a self sustainable e-governance project for the computerized delivery of 2 crore acres rural land records of 67 lakh farmers through 177 government owned kiosks in the State of Karnataka. These records were earlier maintained manually by 9,000 village officials.

2.1.2. Gyandoot - Madhya Pradesh

Gyandoot is an Intranet-based Government to Citizen (G2C) service delivery initiated in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh in January 2000. It has twin objective of providing relevant information to the rural population and acting as an interface between the district administration and the people. The initiative is important as it takes e-governance to rural areas.

2.1.3. Lokvani Project-Uttar Pradesh

Lokvani is a public-private partnership project in Sitapur District of Uttar Pradesh which was initiated in November, 2004. Its objective is to provide a single window, self sustainable e-governance solution with regard to handling of grievances, land record maintenance and providing mixture of essential service. The programme format uses the local language Hindi as 88 percent of the District population resides in villages and the literacy rate is only 38 percent, the programme had to be designed in a way which was user-friendly and within the reach of the people both geographically as well as socially.

2.1.4. Revenue Administration through Computerized Energy (RACE) Billing Project-Bihar

Patna Electric Supply Undertaking (PESU), which is one of the seven area boards of Bihar State Electricity Board (BSEB) caters to the energy requirements of Patna Urban Area. To address the problems related to manual billing, it was decided by the BSEB to bank upon ICT in providing value added and consumer-friendly service to the clients. A separate department of IT was created in BSEB to implement the project and the software was designed by NIC named as RACE-Revenue Administration through Computerized Energy. Payment of bills of any division at any of the 31 collection counters as per convenience was facilitated. Bills are generated with a barcode and consumers can download the bills using the internet and also see the details of payments made by them." Initiated in the year 2001 the project was extended to the entire State in 2007.

2.1.5. e-Procurement-Gujarat

The system of e-procurement was introduced in the State of Gujarat from October, 2004 onwards. It aims to establish transparency in procurement process, shortening of procurement cycle, availing of competitive price, enhancing confidence of suppliers and establishing flexible and economical bidding process for suppliers.

2.1.6. MCA 21

This Project of Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) of union front aims to meet the aspirations and the needs of the 21st Century, hence the name MCA 21. The Project aims at providing easy and secure online access to all registry related services provided by the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs to business, to public, to professionals, to financial institutions to employees" and to the government itself. As such it reflects the relationships of Government 2 Citizens, Government 2 Business, Government 2 Government and Government 2 Employees.

2.1.7. National e-Governance Plan

During the 1980s and early 1990s, initial attempts towards e-Governance were made with a focus on networking government departments and developing in-house government applications in the areas of defence, economic monitoring, planning and the deployment of IT to manage data-intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration etc." These applications focused on automation of internal government functions rather than on improving service delivery to citizens.

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) has been formulated by the Department of Information Technology (DIT) and Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DAR & PG). The Union Government approved the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), comprising of 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 10 components on May 18, 2006. The NeGP aims at improving delivery of Government services to citizens and business with the following vision.

Make all Government services accessible so the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man.

3.0. E-Governance initiatives in A.P.

MeeSeva, e-District Mission Mode Project, Webland (Land Records Management Information System), e-PASS (e-payment and application system of scholarships), e-Procurement, e-Suvidha (Complete Application for Municipalities), Computer Aided Registration Department (CARD), e-Parishkaram. HRMS (Human Resource Management System)

4.0. E-Governance initiatives in Telangana

MeeSeva, e-Procurement, Online Recruitment Processing System, T.S.I PASS (Single Window Clearance to Entrepreneurs), HRMS (Human Resource Management System), Online Scholarship Project.

5.0. Access to information and quality services for citizen:

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 reports, public data base and decision making processes. Information about local resources, guidelines of schemes, funds, on going projects will be made available to the citizens and it is the first step towards citizen's participation in development process.

Another important area is the potential to improve the quality range and accessibility of services.

4.1. Simplicity, efficiency and accountability in the government:

Bureaucratic structures have been plagued by characteristics aptly described by Victor Thompson as 'bureau pathology'. The dysfunctional aspect of bureaucratic behaviour includes slowness, ponderousness, routine and complications of procedure. E-Governance weeds out redundant process, brings simplification in structure and procedures. The end result would be enhanced decision making and increased efficiency across government all contributing to an overall environment of accountable govt machinery.

4.2. Expanded reach of governance:

Rapid growth of communication technology and its adoption in governance would help in bringing govt machinery to the door steps of the citizen. Expansion of telephone network, rapid strides in mobile telephony, spread of internet and strengthening of other communications infrastructure would facilitate delivery of a large number of services provided by the government. This enhancement of the reach of the government-both spatial and demographic would also enable better participation of citizens in the process of governance.

5.0. Emerging challenges:

In developing countries such as India, the IT influence has to be handled with caution and restraint. Unless the benefits achieving from IT are supported by adequate infrastructure, capital and access, the fruits will elude the poor and deprived masses. The process of e-governance must try to balance the goals of development, asset creation, Social justice and equity.

5.1. Capacity building:

e-governance is a fairly complex process of creating and harnessing the right environment that consist of people who are committed to the cause and who have the right skill sets. Human resource management is yet to develop the capacity to build, manage operate and service the technologies involved. Training the workforce to develop maintain and provide the value added products and services required by the knowledge based society are yet to be concretised. Though computer training has been imparted to all the public functionaries, barring a few cases an effective use of the basic IT services, is yet to be seen.

5.2. Changing the mindset of government functionaries:

Technological solutions to societal problems is being increasingly sought by public functionaries forgetting conveniently that technology can only facilitate the solutions. It is not a solution in itself. The agent or the functionaries of changes need to be made aware that they are there to serve the clients as per policy programme.

5.3. Business Process Re-engineering (BPR):

In India the way government institutions conduct their business has evolved over time and is codified in different statues and is codified in different manuals enacted or formulated over a wide span of time. On the other hand, the scope and complexities of governance along with the government machinery have expanded over time. The advent of ICT has led to the recognition that these technologies provide a unique opportunity to redesign the government process not only to provide better services and reliable information to citizen but also to improve efficiency and effectiveness within government institutions.

BPR will get rid of unintended consequences of rigid, repeated process. The application of technology solutions to existing paper based processes almost always will result in a far from optimum solution and will likely deliver such a poor user experience. The Re-Engineering of a government department can be carried out from within the organisation or the consultants can be brought from outside. It requires innovative management and a willingness to change.

5.4. Digital Divide:

While the e-governance initiatives may benefit certain privileged sections of the society, the underprivileged, those who do not have access to internet or not well qualified or equipped to use internet will be all the more distanced from the government. There is also linguistic dimension to the problem. Information is available on the websites mostly in English and in some cases Hindi and still in few cases other Indian languages.

5.4.0. Bridging the Digital Divide :

5.4.1. Provide Access :

One of the foremost things to be done is to provide universal access to all. Physical access, financial access and content access must be provided to all.

5.4.2. Provide Telecom Infrastructure :

Enforce the requirement of an open telephone network with hassle free interconnection of different networks and free up more of the radio spectrum for "Fourth Generation" broadband wireless.

5.4.3. Develop Applications :

Applications for the common man to facilitate his well being covering social welfare and other daily necessities from any place.

5.4.4..New Hardware :

The present hardware is already undergoing number of changes and a converged net enable product likely to emerge with all the interfaces and necessary embedded software suitable for open platform and customized for a single or group of individuals.

5.4.5. OpenSoftware and Networking :

Current software development platforms will have to seamlessly accept any software developed on any type of platform to work with any device. There has to be number of data banks serviced through directory servers specific to the larger group of people or translated information required in the language understood. Information required for them will have to be made available in the format desired and information generated from them will have to be used for updating the databanks. Such network will have a specific server to a group of people.

5.4.6. System and Network Management :

This requires continuous monitoring of the system and the network to provide efficient service to the customer so that the usage is encouraged and the benefits are experienced.

5.4.7. Internet Access and Community Demand :

Maintain or expand Government or local programmes that provide funds for community technology. Help from public-private partnerships to bring advocates of low-income people into contact with people from the technology and business sectors for community development.

5.4.8. Education :

Education departments and agencies should set up specific projects to demonstrate the practices they wish the nations's educators to accept. The use of technology should be a part of the standards that we are asking teachers to teach and test. Schools should work with informal learning places (museums, science centers, television stations, newspapers, etc.) that have demonstrated an ability to use technology in learning.

5.4.9. ICT Infusion Pilot Project Basis:

Pilot projects will have to be taken up to understand the needs and comfort levels of target groups belonging to different ethnic, race and language. Current concept of top down approach of enforcing digital technology will have to be given up and adopt bottom up approach to develop ICT enabled services and systems. The user interface with the network will determine the success or failure of the system.

6. CONCLUSION:

The speed and transparency associated with e- governance have the potential to make public administration responsive and effect good governance.

However, the initial euphoria notwithstanding, for the growth and relevance of the discipline, the research areas that can be enumerated are in future role of e governance, cost benefit analysis of providing e-governance in core services, ways of re orienting public functionaries, citizens role and choice, extent of consumer consultation and participation and reengineering of govt processes to make them simple and effective.

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