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E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: ITS IMPACTS ON RELATIONS AMONG CITIZENS, POLITICIANS AND PUBLIC SERVANTS

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of developing countries have launched e-government programs and several development agencies and government have identified e-government implementation a key policy priority. Driven by the success of a few projects in improving delivery of services to citizens and businesses, an increasing number of government are making ICT investments in the public sector. The outlined mission of the ICT is the new technologies that are changed our world. They create jobs, they are transforming education, health care, commerce, politics and more. They can help in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and even contribute to peace and security. One of the most pressing challenges in the new century is the harness this extraordinary force, spread it throughout the world, and make its benefits accessible and meaningful for all humanity, in particular the poor. The principal mission of this is to tell us how we might accomplish this ambitious goal. The theoretical underpinning of e-governance come from United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, and swept across other countries since. It seeks to reinvent government through metamorphosis into an entrepreneurial, business-like, mission and vision-driven state, which changes its role from rowing to steering.

The application of Information Technology (IT) to government processes, e-government in short, has a profound impact on the efficiency, responsiveness and accountability of the government; thereby, on the quality of life and productivity of citizen and businesses. It ultimately affects the economic output and the growth of the country as a whole. Starting from Karnataka's Bhoomi project and Andaman and Nicobar following the suite recently are example of how the use of IT in the land records and citizen service delivery. Government of Delhi is poised to use three dimensional mapping of the city which wick enable better G2G interaction, efficient planning and resource utilization. Litigants can now track the progress of

their cases in the Supreme Court, and have access to all judgments since 1952 on compact disc. Pondicherry has computerized its ration card system. Jharkhand has introduced the e-Nagrik services. North eastern states being the latest entrant in the journey of E-Governance. These few examples are just the tip of the iceberg; still a lot has to be travelled on the journey which has just begun.

Initially, information about services is published on a web site and citizen can interact with the site to download application forms for a variety of services. The next stage involves the use of ICT(Information and Communication Technology) in the actual delivery of service such as filling a tax return, renewing a license, etc. More sophisticated application include processing on-line payments. Many developed (USA, Uketc) and developing (Malaysia etc) countries are moving towards e-governance. India is also adopting the e-governance agenda. The Government approved the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), comprising of 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 10 components, on May 18, 2006 (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Government of India). The National Action Plan on e-governance has an ambitious outlay of over Rs.23,000Crores involving public and private investment over the next four years (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology,2006). Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 2012): over the next five year , domestic spending on outsourced IT services is projected in more than double, from Rs. 103 billion in 2004 to over Rs. 238 billion in 2009 (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2007).

There is a lot of hope on ICT application in government. A realistic assessment, however, while accepting the potential of ICT, takes cognizance of its pitfalls. For instance, the experience of UK with e-government are replete with example of high profile ICT projects that went incurably wrong. For example the introduction of computers in the UK Passport Agency ran over budget and resulted in obsolete, inadequate and inflexible systems. In 1998, the inability of the UK Passport Agency to meet customer demand resulted in near collapse of the agency. The departments of social security and taxation in the US also faced similar crises (Margetts, 2003). In tune with NPM type of reforms, the ICT function in government in the UK and USA in recent years is increasingly being outsourced to large global ICT service providers.

E-GOVERNANCE AS CITIZEN CENTRIC GOVERNANCE

E-Governance involves the following functions for citizens(Malick and Murthy, 2001):

- Providing information to the citizen through a single source of information, optimizing the resources of multiple organizations, creating economies of scale for information processing and distribution, inter-government participation and establishment of public utility networks.
- Providing representation to the citizen by making elected representatives more accessible and enhancing their function in e-government.
- Improving citizen's voice by stimulating debate, exchange of ideas and the resultant feedback for qualitative improvement in the delivery system.
- Improving citizen participation by promoting two way communication, participatory decision-making, improving availability of services, and developing a system for public information and feedback.
- Engaging the citizen by providing a vision for partnership, community engagement and development of skills to participate in e-government, and creating conditions for information and knowledge relevant to citizens, service users, business and voluntary organizations.

E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

Successive government have committed to addressing the inequalities that exist in India. The government of India sees E-governance as an important vehicle for introducing administrative reforms to improve the quality of life for underserved sections of society and provide more equitable access to economic opportunities across the nation.

In recent years most government in India have undertaken a variety of e-governance projects. India's experience in e-governance and ICT initiative, in what can be described as a 'phase of experimentation' has shown that significant benefits can be derived from improving accessibility, tackling corruption and giving assistance to deserving groups.

Different e-governance projects have demonstrated that improved access to information and services can yield economic and social development opportunities, facilitate participation and communication in policy and decision-making processes, and helped empower the weakest

groups. A number of states and territories in India have pioneered this approach, most notably Andhra Pradesh, Chandigarh and Tamil Nadu. However, the efforts so far have been somewhat fragmented and note extended across multiple jurisdictions.

Several project, vendor and ICT-related challenges in India must also be addressed, with the key aspects being as follows:

- Project approval and funding through multiple departmental budgets will yield wide variations in the approach to project objective setting, without a clear focus on outcomes or on building sustainable services. The service needs of citizens/business and those of other departments tend to be either overlooked or given lower priority in relation to internal needs.
- Project objectives tend to be couched in ICT terms that are specified in great detail, while government business process outcomes either are absent or are vaguely defined and don't lend themselves to post-implementation measurement.
- The current system of project formulation (Based on budgetary allocation or grant) places little or no pressure on departments to develop arrangements that can attract private capital resources, a necessity that has been identified for the NEGP. To achieve this, greater focus and rigor will be needed at the formulation and development stages of projects.
- The GOI tendering process is complex and a major hurdle for vendors to navigate. There have been significant issues with this in the past, especially with high-visibility projects. On the positive sites for vendors, the drive for the so-called 'bottom of the pyramid ' service improvement in India, mainly relating to constituents in rural areas, is of prime important . Vendors willing and able to leverage this opportunity will find strong favor with government.
- A further specific challenge relates to localization of ICT solution that have mostly been developed with an English-language interface. In India, most people will want to use their local language, but this consideration does not yet appear to figure strongly in the NEGP's implementation strategy.

Although e-governance programs in other countries have own peculiarities that depend on political priorities and current achievements, several areas emerged as critical for sustainable success :

- Having a deeper understanding of citizens' desires and behaviors with different channels
- Establishing and effective governance structure for whole-of-government initiative
- Using and enterprise architecture approach
- Focusing on results and performance management

India's e-governance planners, IT leaders and project managers need to strongly convey these lessons to their colleagues with business responsibilities for e-governance initiative. We believe that, while good progress will be made in area where there is definite political support, adequate resourcing and sound project ownership and management, progress will be very uneven for the range of NEGP projects across India. Success is most likely to occur with infrastructure-oriented projects, but failure will mostly be associated with process change-oriented projects.

E-governance Initiative by State Government

Though all states have taken e-governance initiatives in some measure, the noteworthy ones include Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, New Delhi and Tamil Nadu.

A case in point is Andhra Pradesh that has a rich experience of e-governance and ICT for development projects. Each ministry in the state initiative several pilot projects because the then chief minister took active interest in harnessing the power of ICT for governance and development. Single window Integrated Citizen Services Centres (ICSCs) were created through which citizen could access information from government, pay utility bills and property taxes, get certificates and licenses, and receive information regarding building permits, property registration and transport procedures (Schware, 2000). However, each project was designed around information needs of the particular ministry rather than that of the citizens (inside out perspective). The experience suggests that there is a need to first

determine citizens needs and then resign the system in a citizen-centric manner (outside in perspective). Further, a backbone architecture connecting various ministries and districts could lead seamless integration and enable service delivery finance would not be a constraint to put necessary infrastructure in place, the emergent digital divide through a single window.

The difficulty in dealing with a public sector environment being able to measure outcomes in a meaningful ways, resulting in a reduced scope in applying concepts derived from the private sector. If e-governance have to move from more than hype than it must solve the problem of citizens and respond to diversity by providing localization to accommodate the linguistic, social, cultural, environmental, political, historical issues.

E-Governance Initiatives by private/voluntary sectors

Besides the initiatives taken by the union government and various state government, several e-governance initiatives taken at local level started by private/voluntary sector entities in partnership with district government. One such project, Gyandoot, provide e-government as well as e-commerce services to people living in rural area of Madhya Pradesh (Mihra et al.,2001). Initially there was a lot of hype on the potential of Gyandoot to use ICT for development of rural masses. The critical factors responsible for the success of Gyandoot include leadership, champion for change, cost sharing between government and kiosk owner, and focus on citizen needs. Another grass roots ICT initiative, n-Logue, promoted by Indian institute of Technology Madras, has developed viable and scaleable business model based on three-tier franchise model and cost effective core DECT technology. N-Logue has identified the resources, skills and motivation of kiosk operator as the most determinant of business success. External; factor such as village size and power supply are critical to sealing up (Paul, 2004).

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

The introduction and implementation of ICT in government is fraught with several challenges, namely, technical , organizational institutional. These challengers arise from the growing inter-dependencies between government organizations due to e-governance , and the emergence of inter-organization networks (Snellen ,2005).

Technical challenges

Technical challenges could be overcome by implementing measures at three levels , namely , intra organizational, intra-sectoral and inter-sectoral, as shown in fig 1. Intra-organization and intrasectoral issues are concerned with information sharing ,Intrasectoral issues are concerned with service delivery and client registration, and intersectoral issues are concerned with overall information architecture. At the intra-organization and intra-sectoral level, issues related to electronic sharing of data are to be resolved. These include, among others, definition of shared data, operational work processes, technical standards and protocols, quality of data, security of data, control of data sharing, cost of shared facilities and object identification and numbering. The second deal with transforming e-government to make it customer oriented and citizen centric. The third level is related to the exchange and useful of information between different sectors of government, for eg. Health, education, employment and civil supplies. While each would have sector specific information requirement, they would also be required to store, information, such as retaining to demographics. The challenge then is how to integrate the disparate database and achieve consistency between then by overarching information architecture (Snellen, 2005).

Organizational Challenges

The introduction of e-government entails reorganization in government to some extent. One such organization change in standardization, which helps eliminate redundancies in processes, data, and organization (Fountain, 2001). Reorganization poses challenge such as loss of control, lack of feeling of ownership, myopic view of technical expert and inability to understand societal problems, and inertia (Homburg, 1999). The bureaucratic structure of government with clearly demarcated roles and responsibility, vertical and horizontal separation of powers, and hierarchical structure, is less amenable to ICT applications and interconnectedness because of its immobility and inflexibility.

Institutional Challenges

Institutional Challenges to e-government arise from mental, legal and socio-culture factors. Mental barriers arise from the loss of discretion and power of officials, particularly at the street level, and the perceived takeover of their jobs by ICT. Legal barriers to ICT application in government may arise from sharing of information, resulting in blurring of boundaries, inability to authenticate information, weakening of accountability. In traditional public

administration, jurisdictions have remained the exclusive authority of an actor to determine rights and obligations of citizens in a task domain for which this actor is legally and politically accountable. However, ICT has the tendency to blur this boundary, which may have negative consequences for public administration in terms of reliability, authenticity and integrity. Moreover, the legal system of the country would have to be amended to incorporate the requirement of e-government. Culture barriers, such as risk-avoidance and lack of innovatives, may discourage the adoption of ICT in government.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is lot of hope and hype on the potential of e-governance to transform the internal efficiency of government and the relationship of government with stakeholders. E-governance provides an all-encompassing framework comprising e-administration, e-citizens, e-services and e-society. There is need to :

1. Collects and analyzes available government agency architecture information with an eye toward identifying new e-government initiative;
2. Assess the state of enterprise architecture management maturity across the government, more specifically the agencies promote the role with implementation of the NeGP initiatives;
3. Promote the role of enterprise architecture in the successful implementation of e-government initiatives;
4. Develop a national e-governance enterprise architecture framework in line with the NeGP mission of service orientation and cross government collaboration;
5. Develop strong leadership in helping the maturity of enterprise architecture management for both individual agencies and e-government initiatives. Strong leadership is especially pivotal to ensuring that both government agency specific investment and government wide investment in IT and e-government are made within the context of enterprise architectures. To do less jeopardizes realizing the full potential and benefits of these investments.

However, the case for e-governance is more rhetorical and realistic. Like any other innovation, ICT applications in government can also go wrong .There have been failure in

developed countries such as the UK and the USA. In developed countries, the use of internet by government is more for dissemination of information or two way communications. The key lessons to be learnt from the governance initiatives in India at national, State and local levels are summarized here under:

- Between euphoria and cynicism, practitioners need to adopt a balanced approach for implementation of e-governance initiatives.
- There is need to gradually move from information dissemination and emailing to advanced applications of ICT in government.
- A core common ICT infrastructure needs to be created. This infrastructure should be scalable, interoperable, secure, replicable, support multiple languages, technology neutral, open and standards based, provide multi-vendor support, and provide multiple service delivery channels.

For success of local grassroots initiatives, it is important to design and implement projects based on killer application in a bottom-up manner with the involvement of local communities. The projects need to be based on viable business models so that they can be scaled up while maintaining financial sustainability. For e-governance to actually lead to empowerment of citizens, such as education and health that cater to long term needs of citizens and bring about change in their position and not situation alone.

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