National E-Governance in India
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• Abstract The rise of e-government has been one of the most striking developments of the web. As the Internet supported digital communities evolve, and assuming that they do indeed grow to incorporate individuals around the country, they present the national governments with a number of challenges and opportunities. This paper an attempt is made to define e-governance followed by a brief discussion on evolution of e-governance technologies and present scenario of e-governance efforts in India alongwith strategies/action plan for designing e-government projects for addressing immediate objectives with a vision for future in mind.

Key words National E-governance, NeGP, E-governance, ICT, National Database, e-seva

India is a democratic republic and the philosophy of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity are enshrined its constitution. The democratic principles of the country flow from the Preamble of the Constitution itself. Democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Effectively this means that the Government is elected by the people, it is responsible and accountable to the people. One of the ways of ensuring responsibility and accountability is by actively engaging with the public while making policies that impact them directly. However, since independence public participation in policy making has been minimal. Governance was process and procedure centric and generally a top down approach was used for policy making. In addition, given the vast size of the country, federal structure of governance with over 240,000+ local governance institutions and large population coupled with its other complexities viz multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society, did not make itself amenable to large scale public participation in policy making. Efforts were however made at several levels including by creation of Panchayati Raj institutions, seeking civil society inputs in implementation of large projects, legislation of RTI Act etc. but it was very difficult to consult all stakeholders in any given project.

In the early 1990s, two changes swept across the world –the focus on good governance with increasing private sector participation in delivery of public services and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and internet—technologies that potentially could connect any and everyone in real time. The concept of e-Government or e-Governance was born through the amalgamation of these two. E-Governance marked a paradigm shift in the philosophy of governance—citizen centricity instead of process centricity and large scale public participation through ICTs enablement.

As more and more projects are getting implemented, an increasing need has been felt for wider and deeper participation of and engagement with all stakeholders especially public at large to ensure that citizen centricity is
maintained in all projects. To enable and support this goal, a Citizen Engagement Framework for e-Governance Projects has been developed for ministries and departments.

**Definition of e-Governance**

*E-governance is the application of information & communication technologies to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of informational & transactional exchanges with in government, between govt. & govt. agencies of National, State, Municipal & Local levels, citizen & businesses, and to empower citizens through access & use of information.*

**e-governance in India – Challenges before Stakeholders**

The diffusion of technologies in moving towards e-governance have been rather slow. This may primarily be attributed to the following reasons:

- **Lack of IT Literacy and awareness regarding benefits of e-governance**

  There is general lack of awareness regarding benefits of e-governance as well as the process involved in implementing successful G-C, G-G and G-B projects. The administrative structure is not geared for maintaining, storing and retrieving the governance information electronically. The general tendency is to obtain the data from the files (print) as and when required rather than using Document Management and workflow technologies. Lately the use of DMS and workflow technologies has been able to find its use only in those departments where there is perceptible lightening of workload of the subordinate staff.

- **Underutilization of existing ICT infrastructure**

  To a larger extent, the computers in the department are used for the purpose of word processing only, resulting in the underutilization of the computers in terms of their use in data mining for supporting management decisions. The time gap between the procurement of the hardware and development of the custom applications is so large that by the time application is ready for use, the hardware becomes obsolete.

- **Attitude of Government Departments**

  The psychology of government servants is quite different from that of private sectors. Traditionally the government servants have derived their sustenance from the fact that they are important repositories of govt. data. Thus any effort to implement DMS and workflow technologies or bringing out the change in the system is met with resistance from the govt. servants.

- **Lack of coordination between Govt. Department and Solution developers**
Designing of any application requires a very close interaction between the govt. department and the agency developing the solutions. At present the users in govt. departments do not contribute enough to design the solution architecture. Consequently the solution developed and implemented does not address the requirements of an e-governance project and hence does not get implemented.

- **Resistance to re-engineering of departmental processes**

Successful implementation of e-governance projects requires lots of restructuring in administrative processes, redefining of administrative procedures and formats which finds the resistance in almost all the departments at all the levels. Additionally there is lack of expertise of departmental MIS executives in exploiting data mining techniques, updation and collection of real time content onto website etc. Therefore the content as is collected or maintained by various e-governance portals is unreliable or full of gaps. In such a scenario, its difficult for any e-governance solution to achieve its intended results.

- **Lack of Infrastructure for sustaining e-governance projects on national level**

Infrastructure to support e-governance initiatives does not exist within government departments. The agony is that the government departments are not equipped to be in a position to project the clear requirements nor are there any guidelines for involving private sector. Whatever efforts have been made by various govt. organizations may be defined as islands of computerization. The infrastructure creation is not guided by a uniform national policy, but is dependent on the needs of individual officers championing a few projects. Therefore, the required networking and communication equipment is either non-existent in govt. departments, or if it exists at all, it does not serve any tangible purpose as far as the requirement of e-governance project is concerned. The use of connectivity options provided by govt. agencies like NICNET etc. are used in a very limited manner for data transmission purpose between various locations viz. Distt., State, Center etc. and is mainly utilized for e-mail and Internet purpose only.

Most state govt. have formed the IT task force and have their IT policies in place. Although policies may have lofty goals, much seems to have happened only in automation and computerization The drawback is that these IT policy documents are not made based upon the requirements and inherent capabilities of the state but are based on the surveys and strategies used by other nations or other states. Though its very wise to take examples from the successful e-governance strategies of other states and countries, its equally essential that we customize our state policies after a careful study of the parameters applicable to the particular state in question. A tentative action plan is presented to help implement the e-governance initiatives as below:
The National E-governance plan

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) has been formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEITY) and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG). The Union Government approved the 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 businesses with the following vision:
"Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man."

Implementation Strategy, Approach and Methodology of NeGP

Implementation of e-Governance is a highly complex process requiring provisioning of hardware & software, networking, process re-engineering and change management. Based on lessons learnt from the past and the experience from successful e-Governance applications, the approach and methodology adopted for NeGP contains the following elements:

i. **Common Support Infrastructure**: NeGP implementation involves setting up of common and support IT infrastructure such as: State Wide Area Networks (SWANs), State Data Centres (SDCs), Common Services Centres (CSCs) and Electronic Service Delivery Gateways.

ii. **Governance**: Suitable arrangements for monitoring and coordinating the implementation of NeGP under the direction of the competent authorities have also been substantially put in place. The programmer also involves evolving/ laying down standards and policy guidelines, providing technical support, undertaking capacity building, R&D, etc. DEITY is required to adequately strengthen itself and various institutions like NIC, STQC, CDAC, NISG, etc. to play these roles effectively.

iii. **Centralized Initiative, Decentralized Implementation**: e-Governance is being promoted through a centralized initiative to the extent necessary to ensure citizen-centric orientation, to realize the objective of interoperability of various e-Governance applications and to ensure optimal utilization of ICT infrastructure and resources while allowing for a decentralized implementation model. It also aims at identifying successful projects and replicating them with required customization wherever needed.

iv. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)**: PPP model is to be adopted wherever feasible to enlarge the resource pool without compromising on the security aspects.
v. Integrative Elements: Adoption of unique identification codes for citizens, businesses and property is to be promoted to facilitate integration and avoid ambiguity.

vi. Programme Approach at the National and State levels: For implementation of the NeGP, various Union Ministries/Departments and State Governments are involved. Considering the multiplicity of agencies involved and the need for overall aggregation and integration at the national level, NeGP is being implemented as a programme, with well-defined roles and responsibilities of each agency involved. For facilitating this, appropriate programme management structures have also been put in place.

vii. Facilitator role of DEITY: DEITY is the facilitator and catalyst for the implementation of NeGP by various Ministries and State Governments and also provides technical assistance. It serves as a secretariat to the Apex Committee and assists it in managing the programme. In addition, DEITY is also implementing pilot/infrastructure/technical/special projects and support components. DARPG’s responsibility is towards Government Process Re-engineering and Change Management, which are desired to be realised across all government departments. Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance allocate funds for NeGP through Plan and Non-plan budgetary provisions and lay down appropriate procedures in this regard.

viii. Ownership of Ministries: Under the NeGP, various MMPs are owned and spearheaded by the concerned line Ministries. In case there are any ongoing projects which fall in the MMP category, they would be suitably enhanced to align them with the objectives of NeGP. For major projects like Bharat Nirman, Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes, etc. the line ministries concerned are advised to make use of e-Governance as also automation techniques from the inception stage. States have been given the flexibility to identify a few additional state-specific projects, which are relevant for the economic development of the State.

Conclusion

It is evident from above discussion that objectives of achieving e-governance and transforming India goes far beyond mere computerization of stand alone back office operations. It means, to fundamentally change as to how the government operates, and this implies a new set of responsibilities for the executive and politicians. It will require basic change in work culture and goal orientation, and simultaneous change in the existing processes. Foremost of them is to create a culture of maintaining, processing and retrieving the information through an electronic system and use that information for decision making. It will require skilled navigation to ensure a smooth transition from old processes and manual operations to new automated services without hampering the existing services. This can be achieved by initially moving ahead in smaller informed initiatives in a time bound manner and avoiding large and expensive steps without understanding the full social implications.
The author Vidya Varidhi Upadhyay is working as a Deputy Director in Computer Division at Indira Gandhi National Open University since 2007. Presently he is leader of Data Centre administration and operations with all the other high end mission critical servers and networking components (both wired and wireless) at the Head Quarters. Prior to joining to IGNOU he served at Banaras Hindu University as an Information Scientist for more than nine years. He has more than 30 publications in International/National conference proceedings. His qualification include M.Tech. (CSE), M.C.A., M.Sc. (Statistics), MLISc, PGDDE (PG Diploma in Distance Education), PGCCL(PG Diploma in Cyber (Law)). He is pursuing Ph.D. from Indira Gandhi National Open University