E-Governance in India: Problems, Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

E-governance has become the key to good-governance in a developing country like India. To be at par with developed countries, the Government of India had made out a plan to use Information Technology extensively in its operation to make more efficient and effective and also to bring transparency and accountability. However, for successful implementation of E-Governance, government officials have to realize that E-Governance is no longer a matter of choice, but an absolute need of the day. Cooperation from government officials and staff will be crucial in realizing the goals of modernizing this nation through E-Governance. While the developed countries have been able to benefit greatly from the wide use of Information Technology, many developing countries are still grasping to make sense of how IT fits into their problems. The trend is true in the case of E-Governance also. In every developing country, E-Governance has been talked about a lot; some government offices have even taken innovative steps towards certain E-Government projects. Since this is a new concept for government officials who are used to familiar methods of work, the growth of E-Governance is met with resistance and fear, among other infrastructural problems. This paper deals with the problems and challenges of E-Governance, reasons of E-Government Project Failures, current status of E-Governance related initiatives in India and future prospects of E-Governance in India.

Key Words: Accountability, E-Governance, Implementation, Information Technology, Resistance, Transparency.

1. Introduction

E-Governance is nothing but use of internet technology as a platform for exchanging information, providing services and transacting with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. E-Governance provides a sound strategy to strengthen overall governance. It can not only improve accountability, transparency and efficiency of government processes, but also facilitate sustainable and inclusive growth. E-Governance also provides a mechanism of direct delivery of public services to the marginal segments of the society in the remotest corners, without having to deal with intermediaries. This paper deals with the problems and challenges of E-Governance, reasons of E-Government Project Failures, current status of E-Governance related initiatives in India and future prospects of E-Governance in India. This paper is based on Secondary Data collected from various sources like Books, Journals, Reports, News Papers and websites.

2. E-Governance: Major Problems in India

Countries like India people are poor and infrastructures are not up to the mark. Under such condition it becomes very difficult to provide government services to the people. There are number of reasons for that:

2.1 Poverty: Internet access is too expensive for the poor in developing countries like India. Installing the necessary telephone lines needed for internet or email access is equally unaffordable in most poor countries.

2.2. Technical illiteracy: There is general lack of technical literacy as well as literacy in India.

2.3 Language Dominance: The dominance of English on the internet constrains the access of non-English-speaking population. In the case of India, 95 percent of the population does not speak English. Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over these communication channels, computers and the internet are quite useless in Indian villages.

2.4 Unawareness: 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.

2.5 Inequality: Inequality in gaining access to public sector services between various sections of citizens, especially between urban and rural communities, between the educated and illiterate, and between the rich and poor.

2.6 Infrastructure: Lack of necessary infrastructure like electricity, internet, technology and ways of communications will affect the speed which delays the implementation.

2.7 Impediments for the Re-Engineering process: 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.

3. Reasons of Success or Failure of E-Government Projects in India

It is a common knowledge that majority of e-Government projects have failed to yield the potential benefits that are otherwise possible with deployment of ICT in public sector. There are enough surveys carried out on e-Government projects which tend to conclude that many e-Government
projects fail to achieve the intended objectives / benefits. Failure rate is high amongst developing countries.

Governments are increasingly under pressure to ‘showcase’ successful projects! The failure of a vast majority of e-Government projects in developing countries including in India raises important and serious questions about the justifiability of the huge investments in financial and human resources being made in these projects.

3.1 E-Governance Project Failure - Facts and Reasons (Shown in Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of e-Government Projects</th>
<th>Reasons for Failure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35% of e-Government projects are total failures</td>
<td>- Initiatives not implemented&lt;br&gt;- Initiatives abandoned immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% of e-Government projects are partial failures</td>
<td>- Main stated goals not achieved&lt;br&gt;- Initial success but failure after an year&lt;br&gt;- Success for one group but failure for others</td>
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<tr>
<td>15% of e-Government projects are successes</td>
<td>- All stakeholders benefited&lt;br&gt;- No adverse results</td>
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Table 1 (Source: www.nisg.org/docs/539_Report.pdf)

3.2 Reasons & Causes of project failures (Shown in Table 2)

There are a number of reasons for e-Government projects not doing well or falling short of expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Definition</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a solid project plan, Undefined objectives and goals</td>
<td>- Inadequate planning and poor containment of the project scope&lt;br&gt;- Meeting end user expectations / business benefits&lt;br&gt;- No Change Control System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor project estimations and overruns of schedule and cost</td>
<td>- Unrealistic timeframes and tasks and lack of prioritization&lt;br&gt;- Lack of management commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate communication between project units and other stakeholders</td>
<td>- Infrequent communication between project units and other stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of skills, inadequate testing processes and not meeting expectations</td>
<td>- Lack of skills, inadequate testing processes and not meeting expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>No authority to overcome impediments and ignoring project warning signs</td>
<td>- No authority to overcome impediments and ignoring project warning signs&lt;br&gt;- Poor control of outsourcing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vagueness in specifying requirements leading to undesirable procurement</td>
<td>- Vagueness in specifying requirements leading to undesirable procurement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor management of expectations, roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>- Poor management of expectations, roles and responsibilities&lt;br&gt;- Ineffective resource management&lt;br&gt;- Lack of organizational support&lt;br&gt;- Lack of User Involvement&lt;br&gt;- Stakeholder conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 (Source: www.nisg.org/docs/539_Report.pdf)

4. E-Government Project Management: Issues and Challenges

E-Government is recognized internationally as an enabler toward achieving good governance, reducing cost of operations for the government, and increasing the ability of citizens and businesses to access public services in an effective and cost efficient manner. The successful implementation of e-Government project is a challenging task

4.1 Some current challenges for managing E-Government Projects in India

a. Lack of effective project management tools and methods.
b. Absence of proper planning, various ad hoc tasks are taken up by the project team due to which the focus on critical activities is lost.
c. The knowledge of project management concepts is very low in Government officials forming part of the e-Government Project team.
d. E-Government projects do not follow any standardized project management implementation frameworks.
e. Resources are over loaded with work due to inadequate staffing. Sometimes tasks not assigned to the team appropriately.
f. No control of central IT agencies during project execution. The decision making process is generally left to individual line ministries and departments since funding comes from them.
g. No provisioning of Project Management dashboard for collaborative project monitoring by all stakeholders in large e-Government projects.
h. Inadequate tracking of how the project is being implemented, tasks causing delays.
i. No monitoring of Cost and Schedule at project checkpoints.
j. During the project initiation, the baseline data is not captured which is useful for bench marking of activities.

4.2 Some Suggestion / Solutions to the above Challenges

a. Government needs to have their own project management tools.
b. Project tracking tool should be integrated to the tasks/ activities of the project and these should be monitored instead of status reports with only long text paragraphs being generated for monitoring the project status.
c. Complete transparency/ work break down/ what are the issues blocking the project progress should be provided in the PM tools. Projects should be tracked through milestone based approach and evaluation done at various critical checkpoints.
d. Cost, schedule, quality milestones checkpoints should get included as part of the project deliverables.
e. Proper baseline study should be performed for proper monitoring of the project.
5. Current Status of E-Governance in India (Eleventh Five Year Plan Achievements)

5.1 National E-Governance Plan (NeGP)

National E-Governance Plan (NeGP), comprising of 27 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and 8 core and support components was formulated by the Government, for implementation across the country with 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 realize the basic needs of the common man.”

5.2 Current Status of E-Governance related initiatives in India

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the core and support components under NeGP. Major achievements are highlighted below:

5.2.1 State Wide Area Networks (SWANs)

The Government has approved the Scheme for establishing State Wide Area Networks (SWANs) across the country. Under this Scheme, technical and financial assistance are being provided to the States/UTs for establishing SWANs to connect all State/UT Headquarters up to the Block level via District/ sub-Divisional Headquarters. As of 31st July, 2011, the SWANs in 27 States have been operational. It is expected that all State SWANs would be operational by March 2012. To monitor the performance of SWANs, the Department has mandated positioning Third Party Auditor (TPA) agencies by the States/UTs.

5.2.2 State Data Centres (SDCs)

The State Data Center (SDC) is being implemented across the country to provide common IT infrastructure to host Government applications. SDC is one of the three infrastructure pillars structured under NeGP to facilitate web enabled Anytime, Anywhere access. SDC is conceptualized with the objective of providing a common enabling infrastructure to the States / UTs to consolidate services, applications and infrastructure to provide efficient electronic delivery of G2G, G2C and G2B services. Substantial progress has been made in the SDC project. As of 31st July, 2011, 13 State Data Centres have been declared operational and more than 3 State Data Centres are expected to be Operational by 31st August 2011. It is expected that all the SDCs shall be operational by August, 2012.

5.2.3 Common Service Centres (CSCs)

The CSC Scheme as approved by Government of India in September 2006 for setting up of 100,000+ (one lakh) internet enabled centres in rural areas under the National E-Governance plan (NeGP) is being implemented in a Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. The Common Services Centres (CSC) are proposed to be the delivery points for Government, Private and Social Sector services to rural citizens of India at their doorstep. The State Governments like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have issued Government Orders / Notifications to the various departmental heads / District Level authorities/ Stakeholders for use of CSC to deliver various G2C Services. The various G2C Services offered are: Agricultural services, RTI Services, NREGA MIS Data Entry service, Postal Products, Land Records, Issuance of Birth and Death Certificates, Utility Services, Electoral Services, Transport Services, Grievances, e-District Services etc.

5.2.4 Electronic Form Application through State Portal, State Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG)

This project entails delivery of the services through Common Service Centres (CSCs) by leveraging the common infrastructure (SWAN, SDC etc.). The project also envisages the development of the applications and infrastructure required for deployment of State Portal and State Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG) for the State. This will enable citizens to download forms and submit their applications electronically with help of “electronic forms” hosted on the State Portal (SP) and routed through a common services gateway (SSDG/NSDG).

Objective of the e-Form, State Portal & SSDG scheme is to ensure the following:

a. Providing easy, anywhere and anytime access to Government Services.
b. Reducing number of visits of citizens to a Government office / department for availing the services
c. Reducing administrative burden and service fulfillment time & costs for the Government, Citizens & Businesses
d. Reducing direct interaction of citizen with the Government and encourage ‘e’-interaction and more efficient communication through portal
e. Delivery of services through Common Service Centres (CSCs) by leveraging the common infrastructure (SWAN, SDC etc.) and development of the applications and infrastructure required for deployment of State Portal and State Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG) for the State.

5.2.5 Capacity Building

The Capacity Building Scheme aims to build adequate capacities in the Government at all levels right from the decision makers to Panchayat levels in order to successfully roll out the National E-Governance Plan.
5.2.6 E-District

This project aims at providing support to the basic administrative unit i.e. “District Administration” by undertaking backend computerization to enable electronic delivery of high volume citizen centric government services which would optimally leverage and utilize the three infrastructure pillars of SWAN, SDC and CSCs to deliver services to the citizen at his doorstep. Initially certain high volume citizen centric services are taken up and thereafter new services can be added as the demand for more e-enabled services increase. Under this project, a set of 5 service categories are being implemented in all e-District Projects. These include (1) Issue of Certificates including birth, death, domicile, etc., (2) Social Welfare Schemes – including social welfare pensions (3) Services related to Revenue Court (4) Ration Card related services (5) RTI (Right to Information) services including redressal of grievances.

5.2.7 Citizen Engagement

As more and more projects are getting implemented under NeGP, an increasing need has been felt for wider and deeper participation of and engagement with all stakeholders specially 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 to facilitate the voice and space for citizen participation in e-Governance, especially for the weakest and the most marginalized sections of society for whom the e-Governance projects are created to serve the most.

6. Future Prospects of E-Governance in India

6.1 Vision and Objectives of the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17)

a. To deliver all Government services in electronic mode so as to make the Government process transparent, citizen centric, efficient and easily accessible.
b. To break information silos and create shareable resources for all Government entities
c. To deliver both informational and transactional government services over mobiles and promote innovation in mobile governance
d. To build Shared Service Platforms to accelerate the adoption of E-Governance and reduce the “cycle time” of E-Governance project implementation
e. To strengthen and improve sustainability of the existing projects through innovative business models and through continuous infusion of advanced technology
f. To promote ethical use of technology and data and to create a safe and secure E-Governance cyber world
g. To create an ecosystem that promotes innovation in ICT for Governance and for applications that can benefit the citizens
h. To better target the delivery of welfare schemes of the Central and State Governments
i. To reduce asymmetry in information availability, accessibility and ability to utilize the information
j. To increase the all round awareness and create mechanisms that promotes and encourages citizen engagement
k. To make available as much data as possible in the public domain for productive use by the citizens

6.2 Major Recommendations for the Twelfth Five Year Plan

The brick and mortar models of development have limitations with respect to reaching the last mile of our population. Information Communication Technology offers an efficient and speedier solution to deliver public services in a transparent and reliable manner to every citizen through ICT needs to be leveraged in every aspect of governance. DIT has been able to build the core E-Governance infrastructure (Data Centers, State Wide Area Networks, Common Services Centres (CSCs), Mobile Service Delivery Platform) across the country during the 11th Plan which will continue in the XII Plan so as to bring it to its logical conclusion. Also, the focus of the XII Plan will be on leveraging to catapult India in the top quartile of HDI ranking through quantum improvements in the delivery of Public Services. This will also bring in process efficiency, accountability and transparency.

6.3 Targets of the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17)

a. A National Institute for E-Governance (NIG) would be setup as an autonomous State of the Art National Institute. NIG will also train at least 50 employees from Central Government per year on Project Management Certification.
b. An E-Governance Innovation and R&D Fund will be created to give adequate impetus to innovation in E-Governance and M-Governance
c. Electronic Delivery of Services (EDS) Bill will be implemented. Assistance will be given to every Central Government Department in delivering at least one Service in electronic mode and every State Government in delivering at least three Services in electronic mode apart from the services which are already identified in the MMPs under NeGP.
d. Shared Services Platforms for e-Payment, GIS, call centre, etc. will be created.
e. An apps store will be created to promote development of large scale E-Governance and M-Governance applications
f. M-Governance platforms and frameworks will be created to enable delivery of public services through mobile devices
g. At least one person per family in 50% of the families will be targeted to provide basic IT training in the XII Plan period.
h. Cyber Security will be a major focus area during the Twelfth Five Year Plan Period.
i. Existing SWAN, SDC, NSDG/SSDG, India Portal, CSC Schemes will be rolled out and maintained in all States/UTs. These schemes would be further augmented and technologically upgraded.

j. The e-District MMP will be implemented in all districts.

k. Training on Basic IT Skills will be introduced systematically for the existing and all new entrants into Government service.

7. Conclusion

E-Governance enhances the relationships between G2G, G2C, G2B, C2G and B2G using ICT. Thus, E-Governance not merely provides information about various activities of a Government but also involves citizens to participate in government’s decision making process. During the last few years, many initiatives have been taken by different state governments in India for using IT as a tool in the functioning of Government so as to provide better services to citizens. In this paper we have made an attempt to summarise key areas which should be focused upon when a country wishes to position itself to be seriously moving towards E-Governance in a comprehensive way. This is a change, a transition that cannot be stopped since it is part of a global movement. Cooperation from government officials and staff will contribute to a smoother transition. Given the current high level of political commitment and largely adequate sources of funding, India is likely to soon emerge as a leader in E-Governance.

References:


