



E-Governance – Reforming Government through Technology : A Digital India Initiative

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ABSTRACT: *Digital India is a programme to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Digital India is a Programme to prepare India for a knowledge future. The focus is on making technology central to enabling change. It is an Umbrella Programme – covering many departments. It weaves together a large number of ideas and thoughts into a single, comprehensive vision so that each of them is seen as part of a larger goal. E-governance, one of the pillars of Digital India initiatives, means 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. The objective of this paper is to highlight the Digital India Initiative of Central Government and the experience of government of Andhra Pradesh in revolutionizing governance through digital revolution.*

KEY WORDS: *Digital, E Governance, Information Technology, Democracy, Citizen Centric.*

INTRODUCTION

There is an interconnection between e-governance, good governance, economic development and democracy. E-governance can improve the governance and the improved governance in turn, can facilitate economic development (due to better services, better evaluation, monitoring, better implementation and easy access to information) and democracy (due to accountability transparency, efficiency, responsiveness etc.). 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 (resolving conflicts, providing services, maintaining law and order etc.) according to established rules and procedures by exercising power. The World Bank by keeping in mind economic liberalisation has defined governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of country's economic and social resources for development. Good governance should ideally have following features: government should be democratic to have legitimacy; political executives should be accountable for their actions; bureaucracy should be efficient and capable of adjusting to changing social needs; policy making should be open and transparent; rule of law should be maintained, protection of basic rights and property rights should be upheld, there should be special protection for women, minorities and deprived sections of society, etc.

The year 2001 had been declared by the Government of India as the year of e-governance. Information Technology (IT) has revolutionised human life across the globe. The telecommunication network has provided the base for the IT revolution. The explosive entry of technology into every aspect of life has changed how people live, how they work, how companies do business, how the entire economy functions and the means through which governments serve their people. IT is changing the way people communicate and interact with each other. IT is based on the concept of digitisation of information. Digitisation converts information of any form and nature into digital form.



IT is very useful to the government simply because throughout the world, government remains the single largest repository of information. At present, availability of the information stored by the government to the general populace as well as the use of this information in government business and transactions is very limited. IT has the potential of improving the access of the people to information stored and reserved by the government and use of the information in administrative processes and development and welfare activities. IT provides the cheapest, quickest and easiest way of accessing government information. Moreover, IT helps in using the information maintained by the government again and again in different application settings without any substantial additional cost.

Therefore, e-governance is the name given to information technology driven public development administration system, which essentially means delivery of government services and information to the people using electronic means. E-government also implies the ability of the people at large to obtain government services through non-traditional, electronic means, enabling access to government information and for the completion of government transactions on an anywhere and anytime basis and in conformance with equal access requirements. Information Technology has been found to be very useful tool for reinvigorating the government by enhancing its administrative capacity and organisational efficiency.

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.*

ADVANTAGES OF E-GOVERNANCE

- a) The democratic system functions better because e-governance facilitates direct means of interface between citizens and government;
- b) Government routinely collects and stores a huge amount of information related to the people it serves as well as related to the services it provides to the people. In addition, government also sponsors a number of dependent studies and evaluations about the performance of the government and the efficiency of public services, which generate a good deal of information. Government maintains records of its functioning, public policies, programmes etc. Generally access to such information had been limited. Now, e-governance provides the cheapest, quickest and the easiest means of accessing government information. Government can use this information for itself in administrative processes and development and welfare activities. Moreover, Information Technology helps in using the information maintained by the government again and again in different application settings without any substantial additional cost.
- c) Information Technology provides some unique opportunities and scope for the innovative use of information stored by the government in planning and implementation of welfare activities and programmes. It offers government opportunities to enhance educational systems,
- d) E-governance has been found to facilitate informed decision-making in the public and development administration system thereby improving its efficiency and effectiveness in delivering services to the people. It enhances the analytical capacity of the public and development administration system thereby promoting comprehensive monitoring and assessment of the performance of development and welfare activities. It also facilitates innovative use of information collected and maintained by the government in the form of innovative and imaginative information linkages and information sharing at all levels of the government.
- e) E-governance straight away offers a package of efficiency, time bound and cost-effectiveness; much more, transparency, demolition of discretion and arbitrariness, and above all, clientele orientation, and citizen saveness
- f) It helps development and maintenance of transparent and stable economic and regulatory environment, conducive to efficient private sector initiatives (for example; price system, exchange and trade regimes and banking systems and their related regulations). It also helps in institutional reforms of treasury, budget preparation and approval procedures, tax administration, accounting and audit mechanisms, central banking operations and official statistical function;



- g) It improves the management of public resources, provides different services at one window often called single window clearance, flattens organisational structure, reduces paper-work, improves team performance, and responds more efficiently to the needs of people.
- h) Office automation is possible through Information Technology. Office automation is the use of information processing technology in an office environment to create process, store, retrieve, use and communicate information to improve the performance of managerial professional, technical, administrative and clerical tasks.
- i) A high degree of alienation between the citizens and administrators can be considerably reduced. Needless harassment of citizens can be substantially eliminated;
- j) E-governance provides low cost, high quality and speedy services to the citizens;
- k) Government's business and transactions are transparent, accountable, efficient, responsive and result-oriented;
- l) E-governance establishes legitimacy and credibility of institutions, improves the quality of life of citizens, empowers citizens by allowing the right to information, improves the productivity of employees and assists in reducing corruption.
- m) Citizen-centric governance is good governance. Every government is supposed to provide good governance to its citizens who are entitled to it. It is possible to deliver through effective e-governance.

E-GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME IN AP,

One of the major objectives of IT policy of Government of Andhra Pradesh is using IT applications in the governance that is e-governance. So, e-governance is a significant part of the IT policy of the Andhra Pradesh Government. Moreover, e-governance forms the backbone of the ongoing administrative reforms process in Andhra Pradesh to achieve good governance. Now, the aim of e-governance is to establish SMART government in Andhra Pradesh. Therefore, to achieve good governance, Andhra Pradesh government is committed to leverage modern information and communication technologies for providing more convenient, accessible, transparent, accountable services to citizens, for giving easy, reliable information to citizens and for improving efficiency quality and accountability in the government.

The state aims at good governance through e-governance (IT application) as a part of administrative reform process because good governance facilitates economic reforms and economic development, and helps democratic process. In fact, Andhra Pradesh is the first state in India to design a state-wide computerization programme covering all levels of the administrative spectrum. Moreover, government has defined an overall IT architecture for the state that will ensure consistency and interoperability of the databases of different government agencies and departments. Procedures are mystifying and obscure, giving the bureaucracy immense discretion and, therefore, power. As a result, most transactions with the government are time-consuming and frustrating. The AP governments committed to correcting this situation by introducing thee-governance because e-governance brings transparency, accountability, efficiency and removal of discretion. Corruption will be eliminated. Quick and easy transactions would be made possible.

IT APPLICATIONS IN AP -DIMENSIONS

The Andhra Pradesh government is using IT applications in four or five dimensions for its practical and governance purposes to establish SMART Government. They are:

- (1) IT applications for the CM to supervise and to control entire development in AP;
- (2) Providing services to citizens;
- (3) Using IT within the government to improve efficiency and quality in government;
- (4) Using IT for planning, creating a citizen data base and monitoring land use in conjunction with remote sensing; and
- (5) Providing information to citizens.

For this purpose, the state has been taking initiatives like defining IT architecture, creating infrastructure, reviewing regulation, etc. to establish electronic government. Moreover, it has been implementing IT projects like CARD, TWINS,APSWAN etc. Some are pilot projects and some other fully operational projects.

CONCLUSION

E-governance means the application of information and communication technologies in the government business and transactions to deliver better government services, to provide information to the citizens and to make government more efficient in its functioning by using electronic means. Governance facilitates better interface between the citizens and government. Governance can improve the governance and the improved governance (good governance), in turn, can facilitate development and democracy. E-governance is one of the major objectives of the IT policy of Government of Andhra Pradesh and is a part of the ongoing administrative reform process to achieve good governance. The government has aimed at establishing SMART (Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent) government through e-governance.



In order to establish SMART Government of Andhra Pradesh, has been using IT applications in the governance of state in different dimensions for its practical purposes to deliver efficient, transparent and accountable services to the people, to provide easy and credible information to the people, to make government more efficient, transparent and accountable in its functioning, to help the CM for governing the state more efficiently and for getting feedback from the people, and to provide an opportunity to the people for practising e-democracy. The main limitation of e-governance is that it has not yet reached villages, Mandals and even sub-divisional areas also. It is just confined only to Capital City of the state, district headquarters and other big towns like Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam etc. Moreover, only urban educated middle class, upper middle class and some rural educated upper class have been able to utilize e-governance facilities but not poor and rural masses due to poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and unavailability of these facilities. Therefore, e-governance may increase the disparities between rich and poor, and rural and urban areas. This phenomenon is commonly known as digital divide. The e-governance is successful only if government's effort is matched by people's involvement. Therefore, people's participation in e-governance is necessary for its success. It is found that people's participation has been very less in e-governance because government has not taken any concrete steps to involve the people in e-governance. The government's efforts have been confined to using IT applications in the governance, providing infrastructure, and providing training to the officials. That is why government has not been able to get proper feedback from the people. Moreover, people are not playing any democratic role by properly using e-governance facilities. People are able to get services provided by government. But they are not using information provided by government to play democratic role in the state by responding to government policies because on the one hand people are not publicly conscious and on the other hand people are not prepared for this role by the government.

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