



National e-Governance plan: Digital era, digital governance

Niraj Kumar Jha

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce and Business Administration, L. N. Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar, India

Abstract

In the last seven decades, after independence, it would seem that most of our development has been directed towards the top 300 million of the Indian population. This scenario can be changed with the help of good governance since until the balance 900 million people of India benefit, the country will not move ahead as a developed nation. Good governance does not occur by chance. It cannot be introduced overnight. It is a tool of development which helps a nation to become a developed one where everybody can get equal opportunities to prosper in his life. The present digital era demands digital governance and the National e-Governance Plan aims to achieve good governance in Indian context. Against this background, a modest attempt in this paper has been made to discuss different facets of the National e-Governance Plan.

Keywords: Digital era- digital governance, E-bharat, information and communication technology, mobile governance, national E-governance plan

Introduction

Governance is necessary in each sector of nation for smooth and efficient working. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evils within our societies. Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan once said, "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development." In ancient times the legendary administrator Kautilya emphasized that it is the duty of a government to act in a manner that realizes the material, mental, moral, and cultural well-being of the people. The four key areas of interrelationship between governance and development identified by the Asian Development Bank are

1. Accountability,
2. Participation,
3. Predictability and
4. Participation.

The term good governance was used for the first time by World Bank in 1992. Good governance is an essential component for overall economic development (World Bank, 1992). Focusing on the concept of good governance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasized on high quality of processes by which decisions effecting public affairs are reached at and implemented. It is widely recognized that good governance is a sine non qua for economic development of developing countries. Good governance helps create an environment in which substance economic growth becomes achievable. Good governance is the potential factor through which human development can be improved in the Indian economy.

Digital era, digital governance

Good governance assures that corruption is minimized, views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making. In order to make it a reality, a corruption free nation with sustainable development and progressive economic development without any criminalization of politics, steps must be taken towards good governance and effective administration. The system of governance should

be transparent and opportunity to scrutinize our leaders and the political structure must be provided to common man.

Few concepts in history have spread as rapidly as the concept of digital divide, and with it, the hope that modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), could be used to promote development in neglected areas.

As e-governance is capable of not only speeding up transactions but has also allowed transparent functioning. The new Information Communication Technology (ICT) revolution has connected the villages to networks that are accessible from any specified location. Villagers life style have totally changed when ICT-led services were given a concrete shape by the government in May 2006, when the Union Cabinet approved the National e-governance Plan (NeGP). This programme adopted the vision of making "all government services accessible to the common man in their locality, through common service delivery outlets which ensures efficiency, transparency, reliability etc. at affordable cost so that the basic needs of the common man could be realized."

With the spread of new Information and Communication Technology, certain demands have also emerged touching the vital areas of government functioning, such as transparency in functioning, right to information and speedier decisions.

The revolution in information technology has brought into focus its adoption for good governance. There is a talk of e-governance all over the world. E-governance implies a smoother interface between government and citizen. While, it cannot entirely replace manual governance, even its limited applications are good enough to affect day-to-day living. It can fulfil, roughly speaking, the four purposes for which citizens generally interest with the government: (i) paying bills, taxes, user fees and so on, (ii) registration formalities, whether of a child's birth or a house purchase or a driving license. (In the State of Tamil Nadu, for instance, one can download 72 application forms). (iii) Seeking information, and (iv) lodging complaints. E-governance can reduce distances to nothing, linking remote villages to government offices in the cities, can reduce staff, cut costs, check leaks in the governing system, and can make the

citizen-government interaction smooth, without queues and the tyranny of clerks. But it must be remembered that e-governance is only a tool for good governance. It cannot succeed independent or responsive officers and it has to be owned by the political leadership. Otherwise, it will only be a bureaucrat's game. How to rebuild the system of governance on these new premises without the majority of population even being literate is a real challenges for all concerned with new innovations in the performance of the government in India.

Administrative reforms and public grievances

Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) is the nodal agency of the Government for administrative reforms as well as redressal of public grievances relating to the State in general and grievances pertaining to Central Government agencies in particular. The Department is implementing e-office Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan. The Department documents and disseminates information on important activities of the Government relating to administrative reforms, best practices and public grievances redressal through publications and documentation. The Department also undertakes activities in the field of international exchange and cooperation to promote public service reforms.

The mission of the Department is to foster excellence in governance and pursuit of administrative reforms through improvements in government structures, promoting citizen centric governance with emphasis on grievance redressal, innovations in e-governance and documentation and dissemination of best practices.

E-office Mission Mode Project: Promoting reforms through e-Governance is one of the important objectives of the Department. As per Cabinet approval of 18th May, 2006, the DARPG has also been made the Nodal Department for implementation of e-Office Mission Mode Project. Under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) which has jointly been formulated by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) and DARPG. The NeGP has 31 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs). E-office is one of the MMPs.

The project is aimed at significantly improving the operational efficiency of central government ministries and departments through workflow automation, knowledge management systems and management information systems that enable quick access and sharing of information across various governance levels.

DARPG is facilitating e-office implementation in a phased manner. NIC is the technology partner. The project was launched in three pilot locations during 2010-11. Based on consent the process of implementation was started in 12 Ministries/Departments during 2011-12 namely (i) Ministry of Urban Development (ii) Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (iii) Ministry of Panchayati Raj (iv) Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (v) Department of Revenue (vi) Department of Financial Services (vii) Department of Land Resources (viii) Ministry of Mines (ix) Ministry of Home Affairs (Disaster Management Division) (x) Ministry of Labour and Employment. Training and handholding support was given to these Ministries/Departments during 2012-13.

Future, 6 new Ministries/Departments considered for implementation during the second phase. (i) Ministry of Water Resources (ii) Department of Official Language (iii) Department of Science and Technology (iv) Department of Personnel & Training (whole Department except Training Division-one of the pilot (v) Department of Heavy Industry (vi) Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (vii) Ministry of Home Affairs (entire Ministry excluding Disaster Management Division which was considered earlier in phase-I). Process for third Phase has been started.

The national e-governance plan

The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), the flagship plan scheme of the Department is a multi-stakeholder programme which primarily focuses on making critical public services available and promoting rural entrepreneurship. Out of the 31 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) under the NeGP that are being implemented by various Ministries and Departments, 27 have been approved by Government of India. 23 MMPs have gone live and are delivering services electronically. The objective of NeGP is to transform traditional processes and service delivery mechanisms and create an environment that is citizen-centric, while making interaction with the Government easier, effective and transparent. The progress of the projects being implemented by DeitY under NeGP is summarised as follows:

- **State Data Centers (SDCs):** Under this scheme, it is proposed to establish Data centres in all the state/UTs so that common and secure IT infrastructure is created to host state level e-Governance applications/data to enable seamless delivery of Government to Government (G2G), Government to Citizen (G2C) and Government to Business (G2B) services duly supported by State Wide Area Network (SWAN) and Common Services Centres (CSC) established at the village level. As on date, 22 SDCs have been made operational.
- **State-wide Area Network (SWANs):** SWAN is envisaged as the converged backbone network for data, voice and video communications throughout a State/UT and is expected to cater to the information communication requirements of all the departments. While SWAN proposals from 34 states/ UTs have been approved, they have been made operational in 31 states/ UTs.
- **Common Services Centres (CSCs):** The CSCs are ICT enabled kiosks with broadband connectivity to provide various Governments, private and social services at the doorstep of the citizen. As on date 1,29,266 CSCs have been made operational in 33 states/UTs.
- **E-District:** The implementation of the e-District project approved in 2011 for period of four years is currently underway. The Department has issued guidelines for National Rollout (2011), an integrated framework for implementation of the MMP (2013) and implementation guidelines (2012) to all states. e-District services have been launched in over 100 districts during 2012-13 and additional 200 districts are planned.

- **Mobile Governance:** DeitY and developed and notified the framework for Mobile governance in February, 2012. The Mobile Services Delivery Gateway (MSDG) was operationalised in July, 2011 and has now become the core infrastructure for enabling the availability of public services through mobile devices. A mobile Applications Store has also been created and made operational in January, 2012. 616 Government Departments across the country are using the MSDG for delivering their services through mobile phones and 215 live, and fully integrated mobile apps have been hosted on the mobile App store.
- **Rapid Replication Initiative:** DeitY has undertaken an initiative to replicate the successful e-Governance applications to other states. Under the initiative, so far, the online e-Pass (Scholarship Scheme) application has been successfully replicated the e-Hospital application of Tripura and Extended Licensing and Laboratory Node application of Gujarat has been approved for replication in 4 additional states. In addition to this, rapid Replication of HRMS application of Himachal Pradesh has also been approved for Replication in Jharkhand.
- **E-Bharat:** The Government of India received a loan from the World Bank towards programme management and financial support for the National- Governance Plan (NeGP) for an amount of US\$ 150 million (about Rs. 700 crore). The project is envisaged to support NeGP's countrywide plans of increasing the availability of online services for citizens in their locality to improve the quality to improve the quality of basic governance in areas of concern to the common man. Detailed guidelines for formation of project proposals under the e-Bharat Scheme have been issued to all the States /UTs. 23 proposals have been approved at a total cost of Rs. 317.35 crore during the last one year.
- **Megh Raj:** To harness the benefits of Cloud technology, DeitY has initiated a project named as 'Megh Raj' for creating a Government of India cloud (GI Cloud) computing environment at the national level. This will act as a common repository of cloud-based infrastructure resources and application available on demand. The GI Cloud is envisaged to provide the following outcome:
 1. Optimal utilization of ICT infrastructure
 2. Speedy development and deployment of e-Gov applications.
 3. Quick replication of successful applications.
 4. E-Gov App Store hosting certified applications.

Major component of GI Cloud include the following:

1. Cloud computing platform at National and State levels.
2. E-Gov App Store to host and run applications.
3. GI Cloud services Directory to act as the single window for services delivery.
4. Common set of protocols, guidelines and standards for GI Cloud.
5. An institutional mechanism to operate and manage the GI Cloud.
6. Centre of Excellence for cloud computing.

Current status of Cloud initiative is as follows:

1. Phase-I for implementing National Cloud has been approved at a cost of Rs. 99 crore.
2. An e- Gov App Store with 20 applications has been launched on May 31, 2013.
3. SFC approvals for application store augmentation has been approved at a cost of Rs 81 crore.

- **NOFN Pilot Project-Beyond the Fibre**

Government of India has approved setting up of the National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) to provide connectivity to all, 2,50,000 panchayats in the country. The vision of NOFN is:

1. To provide 100 Mbps broadband connectivity to all panchayats.
2. To provide B2B services in a non-discriminatory manner. To facilitate proliferation of G2C, B2C and
3. P2P Broadband services in rural areas.
4. To be a catalyst for increasing broadband penetration and usage.

DeitY is implementing a pilot project in 59 panchayats in three blocks in three States (Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Tripura) to design and develop a sustainable model for delivery of services to citizens and institutions through NOFN. The duration of the pilot is 12 months. The objectives of this pilot project are

1. Ensure 100 Mbps/1 Gbps vertical connectivity from block to district, block to panchayat and 10 Mbps horizontal connectivity from panchayat to up to 10 public institutions within the panchayat.
2. Delivery government services to citizens through various institutions.
3. Strengthen institutional capacity and pilot the use of NOFN for delivery of government services prior to national rollout by filling the existing hardware and infrastructure gaps at the panchayats as well as providing the requisite manpower at panchayat and block levels.

Further, during this pilot, 21 Common Service Centres (CSCs) are being upgraded as Digital Knowledge Centres (DKCs). The present status of scheme is as under:

1. All 59 gram panchayats have been provided 100 Mbps connectivity by BBNL and all institution have been provided horizontal connectivity of 10 Mbps by BSNL.
2. Telemedicine infrastructure has been setup in all concerned PHCs and referral hospitals.
3. 14 DKCs have been established

- **Dial Gov:** Dial. Gov has been implemented as a common man's interface for providing comprehensive information on eligibility of benefits under the various social sector schemes operational across the country. The information is being provided through web based portal, Call Centre and Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS). The dial. Gov. in portal was launched in December 2012. Presently comprehensive information on scholarships and pensions of Central and State Governments is available on the portal. Dial Gov. will eventually encompass all welfare schemes across the central and state departments and provide the related information in a convenient manner.

- **E-Taal:** Electronic transactions Aggregation and Analysis Layer (e-Taal) is a web portal developed by NIC for aggregation and analysis of e-Transaction statistics of central and state level e-governance projects including Mission Mode Projects. It receives transaction statistics from web based applications periodically on near real time basis and presents status on actual utilization of various applications running at various locations. It also presents quick analysis of transaction counts in tabular form as well as graphical form to give quick view of the category and number of transactions done through e-governance projects. E-Taal provides visibility for the national /state level e-Governance services. On an average, there are 10.25 crore transactions per month since 1st January, 2013.

E-Governance: Vital for Rural Development

E-governance is that form of governance which seek to realise processes and structures by harnessing the potentialities of Information and Communication Technologies at various levels of government and public sector and beyond for the purpose of enhancing services to be delivered to the people.

E-governance has two aspects:-

1. An easy interface among government departments, and
2. Openness in governance.

Several states in India have already attempted the former, but little has been done to use IT for ushering in openness in governance.

The most important promises and opportunities of E-Government are increased efficiency of government services and operations; increased quality and the number of services to be offered; increase integration of government services across different ministries, focusing on those being served; help achieve targeted outcomes and broader policy objectives; contribute to government reform, especially anti-corruption and waste; build democratic interactions between government and its citizens by increasing the case of communication and feedback.

E-governance

- Can improve and facilitate direct connections between citizens and government and encourage their participation in governance.
- It can help in alleviation of poverty.
- It can open up avenues for direct participation of women in various governmental schemes and decision-making processes
- It can enhance democratic process and citizen empowerment.
- It can reduce hardship and multiply productivity of employees.

The priorities for better result

Digital divide is thought to be the main cause of failure of e-governance in some areas. E-governance projects has been so devised and prioritized that there remains always a risk in its implementation and its benefits not reaching the desired sections of the society. As there is a wide gap in the areas due to the digital divide e-governance delivery mechanism may not account for the existing scenario until the gap is bridged. Due to the huge gap in the areas or wide digital divide and rampant illiteracy in rural areas even the most

well intended initiatives have failed to achieve their objectives. As education and information can greatly be improved through the use of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT), proper implementation of it should be made the primary goal of every village. Through the use ICT many of the people's problems like hunger, clean water, pollution, spreading of diseases and to some extent violence can be controlled effectively. With ICT e-governance will become a boon for the lives people in rural areas. If properly handled and implemented rural India will shine with confidence. Till now, rural India, which is supposed to be a liability, will become an assets for the country.

Scarcity of Web expertise and staff hours is a significant challenge to e-government. Multi-party collaborations and uses of web development tools and templates are possible solutions. In addition, the privacy and security issues are critical challenges that are universal (whether for rural or urban governments).

Master e-Governance training plan

To build the capacity of central government officials in managing and implementing e-Governance projects the Master e-Governance Training Plan (MeTP), under the NeGP, was finalised in consultation with DeitY and DoPT. The plan has been implemented in Ministries/Departments responsible for implementing one or more Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) under NeGP. Further, Ministries/Departments which are implementing e-office were also taken in the initial phase. A total of 450 officials of central government from the level of Assistant to joint Secretary have been given training under the MeTP, in different e-Governance modules (NeGP, Change Management, Basic ICT usage, Process reengineering etc.) through NIC and National Institute of Electronic and Information Technology (NIELIT).

Conclusion

All of us will agree on the fact that for democracy to be truly empowering, it should be fully alive at the grassroots level. For ensuring rural development as well as eradication of rural poverty in a sustainable manner at the grassroots level, establishing good governance in Panchayati Raj system should be a pre-requisite. If rural governance policy is not framed properly and rural government structures as well as people's institutions are not set up properly rural India will not be able to ensure a sustainable rural growth with equity and justice. The quest for effective governance particularly at the grassroots or village level, is one of the many challenges being faced by rural India; and at the same time, establishing effective governance in Panchayati Raj institutions is also one of the best opportunities for shaping a vibrant future for rural India. The present digital era demands digital governance and the National e-governance plan aims to achieve good governance in Indian context!

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