

# E-Governance in India: How Citizens Benefit?

Himadri Barman

*(Manuscript for talk broadcasted on 07.10.2009 over All India Radio, Dibrugarh on the topic as mentioned above)*

E-Governance is slowly becoming a buzzword in the corridors of power. What actually then is e-governance? Simply stated, the use of Information and Communication Technology in governance may be termed as E-Governance. It has radically defined the way a government provides service to citizens, businesses and other arms of the government using the following delivery models:

- Government-to-Citizen (G2C)
- Government-to-Business (G2B)
- Government-to-Government (G2G)
- Government-to-Employees (G2E)

The term E-Governance has different connotations:

- **E-Administration**—The use of ICT to modernize the state; the creation of data repositories for MIS, computerisation of records.
- **E-Services**—The emphasis here is to bring the state closer to the citizens. Examples include provision of online services. E-administration and e-services together constitute what is generally termed e-government.
- **E-Governance**—The use of IT to improve the ability of government to address the needs of society. It includes the publishing of policy and programme related information to transact with citizens. It extends beyond provision of on-line services and covers the use of IT for strategic planning and reaching development goals of the government.
- **E-Democracy**—The use of IT to facilitate the ability of all sections of society to participate in the governance of the state. The remit is much broader here with a stated emphasis on transparency, accountability and participation. Examples could include online disclosure policies, online grievance redress forums and e-referendums.

For the past few years, a great deal of focus has shifted to this concept of e-governance which has varying meaning and significance, as already stated. Initially, the term was a little more than a general recognition of a confluence of information technology developments and application and use of these technologies by government entities. With the passage of time however, the term is being used as a reference to both current applications of Information Technology to government operations and a goal of realizing more efficient and transparent performance of government functions. E-Governance involves access to government information and services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in a way that is focused on the needs of the citizens. E-Governance relies heavily on the effective use of Internet and other emerging technologies to receive and deliver information and services easily, quickly, efficiently and inexpensively.

E-Governance helps simplify processes and makes access to government information easier. The other anticipated benefits of e-governance include efficiency in services, improvement in services delivery, standardization of services, better accessibility of services, and more transparency and accountability. It is convenient and cost-effective for the Government also in terms of data storage and access to the stored data. The government benefits from reduced duplication of work. In addition, the processes of data collection, analysis and audit are simplified, and become less tedious. Another cherished goal of e-governance is greater citizen participation in the governance of the country. In the context of the statement, a government may theoretically move more towards a true democracy with the proper application of e-governance. With increasing concern about the environment, e-governance has an important benefit. Online government services would lessen the need for hard copy forms and thus produce significant

savings in paper, contributing to a greener planet! E-governance holds advantages for the business community too, playing the role of a catalyst and a channel for e-business, a fact evidenced by developments in the US and Singapore. But perhaps the single-largest benefit of e-governance is its potential to give birth to an entire web-based economy.

How is e-governance important in the context of India? The answer may be found in the following lines quoted from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, the former President of India, "Delivery of services to citizens is considered a primary function of the government. In a democratic nation of over one billion people like India, e-Governance should enable seamless access to information and seamless flow of information across the state and central government in the federal set up. No country has so far implemented an e-Governance system for one billion people. It is a big challenge for us".

India has since the last decade made rapid strides in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The Government of India too has over the years acknowledged the pivotal role that ICT has played in bringing government services to the doorstep of the people. It is apparent that the last decade has seen e-governance drop roots in India. ICT has enabled the delivery of government services as it caters to a large base of people across different segments and geographical locations. The effective use of ICT services in government administration has greatly enhanced existing efficiencies, drive down communication costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments. It has also given citizens easy access to tangible benefits, be it through simple applications such as online form filling, bill sourcing and payments, or complex applications like distance education and tele-medicine.

E-Governance originated in India during the seventies with a focus on in-house government applications in the areas of defence, economic monitoring, planning and the deployment of ICT to manage data intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration, etc. The efforts of the National Informatics Center (NIC) to connect all the district headquarters during the eighties was a watershed. From the early nineties, e-governance has seen the use of IT for wider sectoral applications with policy emphasis on reaching out to rural areas and taking in greater inputs from NGOs and private sector as well. While the emphasis was initially on automation and computerization, later on forays began to be made into connectivity, networking, setting up systems for processing information and delivering services. At a micro level, this ranged from IT automation in individual departments, electronic file handling, access to entitlements, public grievance systems, service delivery for high volume routine transactions such as payment of bills, tax dues to meeting poverty alleviation goals through the promotion of entrepreneurial models and provision of market information. The thrust has varied across initiatives, with some focusing on enabling the citizen-state interface for various government services, and others focusing on bettering livelihoods.

Keeping in mind the various positive impacts of e-governance; in May 2006, the Government of India approved the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) with the vision: "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, throughout common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency & reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man". The NeGP currently consists of a series of Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) and Support Components which are being implemented at the Central, State and Local Government levels. These include Projects such as Income Tax, Customs & Excise and Passports at the Central Level, Land Records, Agriculture and e-District at the State Level and Panchayats and Municipalities at the Local Level. There are also a number of integrated MMPs like e-Procurement, Service Delivery Gateway, etc. where delivery of services envisaged in the project entail coordinated implementation across multiple Departments of the Government.

The mission Mode Projects are envisioned to enable the backend computerization of various departments, thereby e-enabling them for any time anywhere service delivery, to achieve the vision of providing government services at the doorstep of the citizen. For this, a common service delivery platform is being created. The three important elements that form the basis of this effective service delivery framework are State Wide Area Networks (SWANs), the front-end outlets for the service delivery i.e. Common Service Centres (CSCs) and the State Data Centres (SDCs).

The SWAN scheme envisages establishment of an intra-government network with a minimum of 2 Mbps connectivity from the State Headquarters to Block Headquarters through District Headquarters. The SWAN project provides the connectivity to facilitate the rolling out of citizen centric services under various Mission Mode Projects (MMPs) under NeGP. Government of India has approved the scheme of establishing Common Service Centres (CSCs) across the country. The CSC scheme envisages the establishment of 100,000 broadband Internet - enabled kiosks in rural areas, which would deliver government and private services at the doorstep of the citizens. An additional 10,000 CSCs would be set up in the semi-urban/urban areas. The CSCs are being made operational in most states.

State Data Centres (SDCs) along with Disaster Recovery (DR) are being established in order to provide shared, secured and managed infrastructure for consolidating and securely hosting State level data and applications. SDC would provide better operations and management control and minimize overall cost of Data Management, IT management, deployment etc. SDCs would ordinarily be located at the State Headquarters and help the State Government, State Line Ministries and Departments in providing central repository (database consolidation), application consolidation, State Intranet / Internet portal.

Return on investment is not the primary objective when e-government projects are conceived as they are mostly driven to achieve operational efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. But with Governments running on tight budgets, especially in case of developing countries like India, there is an increasing demand to re-examine their spending priorities. Further, e-government programmes are subjected to scrutiny to find out whether they are delivering the payoff as has been promised or not. There are three kinds of situation that require evaluation in e-governance. One is the e-environment; second is about evaluating the performance of an e-governance programme or a project; and the third is the overall impact of e-governance on general government functioning, economic development and citizen servicing. Accordingly, we need three kinds of approaches of evaluation as under:

- E-readiness assessment of states or regions
- Hierarchy of measures taken by the e-governance programme or project
- Overall impact of e-governance

On the backdrop of our discussion on evaluation of e-governance initiatives, let us look at some success stories in India and their impact on governance. Some of the successful e-governance projects include VAT Information Computerization to Optimize Revenue Yields (VICTORY) under the G2B delivery model in the state of Bihar, Stamps and Registration Automation with Technology and Information (SARTHI) under the G2C model in the state of Rajasthan, Service and Payroll Administrative Repository for Kerala (SPARK) under the G2E model and Integrated Information System for Foodgrains Management (IISFM) under the G2G model.

The VICTORY system has facilitated unearthing crores of tax evasion by micro and macro analysis of tax data. It has also helped in scrutinizing of returns and validation of Input Tax Credit (ITC) from seller and purchaser data in a centralized way thus speeding up the refund process. The satisfaction index for VICTORY effectiveness is extremely high at around 90% despite of all the

odd circumstances in Bihar. This creativity in reforms in tax administration fetched it the Oracle Excellence Award in the category of 'IT against odds' in the World Summit, 2006.

The successful implementation of Project SARTHI in the year 2003 was instrumental in reinforcing citizen's confidence in Government to serve citizens. The simple, effective time bound and innovative project has proved to be the role model for similar e-governance projects in the state of Rajasthan.

SPARK is a web based Personnel Administration and Accounts Software for Government of Kerala covering more than 3.25 lakhs employees. The centralized integrated computerized personnel and payroll information system has helped the government to get details of any employee immediately, achieve highest level of transparency in dealing with the employees, more consistent application of rules, etc. On the payroll side, accurate and automatic payroll processing is facilitated. It also ensures that the rules and regulations are uniformly applied to all employees there by avoiding complaints and achieve better employee relations.

IISFM is an MIS solution developed and implemented by National Informatics Centre (NIC) for the Food Corporation of India (FCI). This system aimed at improving the ITC and better online stock inventory management system. The system is being used to bring in more transparency and curb mismanagement of food stocks. The project was a joint winner under the G2G/G2E category of the Computer Society of India e-Governance awards 2006 – 07.

It has been seen that most often e-government initiatives suffer delays and encounter failures as the implementation agencies lack guidance in the areas of planning and implementation of e-governance projects. The investment in e-governance tends to produce below par results in the absence of standards also. It is therefore critical to have suitable policies, guidelines and specifications well laid out to overcome the problems associated with planning and implementation of e-governance projects. Further, it is essential that there is a mechanism in place to ensure compliance of the laid down policies, guidelines and specifications.

In spite of some reservations and potential negative implications of implementing and designing e-governance, including disintermediation of the government and its citizens, impacts on economic, social, and political factors, vulnerability to cyber attacks, and disturbances to the status quo in these areas, e-governance can radically change the face of governance, especially in a big country like India and provide its citizens, an interface to get better and more efficient government services.

---

**References:**

1. Compendium of e-Governance Initiatives in India (ed. Piyush Gupta, R K Bagga), Universities Press, Hyderabad
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-Government> accessed on 06.09.2009 at 2030 hrs
3. <http://india.gov.in/sectors/communication/e-governance.php> accessed on 06.09.2009 at 2051 hrs
4. <http://www.expresscomputeronline.com/20050131/egovernance01.shtml> accessed on 14.09.2009 at 2210 Hrs
5. [http://dqindia.ciol.com/content/top\\_stories/1031011501.asp](http://dqindia.ciol.com/content/top_stories/1031011501.asp) accessed on 14.09.2009 at 2216 Hrs
6. [http://informatics.nic.in/archive/inf2001jul/web\\_watch.htm](http://informatics.nic.in/archive/inf2001jul/web_watch.htm) accessed on 20.09.2009 at 2115 Hrs