E-GOVERNANCE AS A MEASURE TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATION

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The basic objective of governance is all round welfare of the citizens. While one aspect of governance relates to safeguarding the legal rights of all citizens, an equally important aspect is concerned with ensuring equitable access to public services and the benefits of economic growth to all. E-governance can enable the government to discharge its functions more effectively. However, this requires the government to change itself, its process, its outlook, laws, rules and regulations and also its way of interacting with the citizens. It also requires capacity building within the government and creation of general awareness about e-governance among the citizens. Thus, e-Governance is basically associated with carrying out the functions and achieving the results of governance through the utilization of what has today come to be known as ICT (Information and communications Technology). The reason why the nations around the world are increasingly adopting for e-governance is that governance has become more complex and varied in the last few decades and more importantly, citizens' expectations from government have increased manifold. ICT facilitates efficient storing and data retrieval of data, instantaneous transmission of information, processing information and data faster than the earlier manual systems, speeding up governmental processes, taking decisions expeditiously and judiciously, increasing transparency and enforcing accountability.[1] It also helps in increasing the reach of government both geographically and demographically.

E-governance can transform the existing government system and consolidate the establishment of an inclusive governance system through digital means that is capable of experiencing its powers and functions more efficiently and effectively. It can pave the way for a governance system that is committed to working with civil society in a transparent and accountable way to reduce poverty, safeguard the environment, redress inequality, foster security and fulfill social, economic, cultural, civic and political rights. E-government supports broad public sector reforms and good governance through the introduction of innovative and sustainable applications ICT both within government administrations as well as in their interaction with citizens and the private sector.[2]

1.0 E-Governance :

It is the use of a range of modern Information and Communication Technologies such as Internet, Local Area Networks, mobiles etc. by Government to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, service delivery and to promote democracy. E-Governance or 'electronic governance' is basically the application of Information and communications Technology to the processes of Government functioning in order to bring about Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) governance. This would generally involve the use of ICTs by government agencies for any or all of the following reasons: Exchange of information with citizens, businesses or other government departments; Speedier and more efficient delivery of public services; Improving internal efficiency; Reducing costs/increasing revenue; Re-structuring of administrative processes; and Improving quality of services.(3)

According to the World Bank [4] **:** "E-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/ or cost reductions."

UNESCO defines e-Governance as[5] : "Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including citizens' articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. E-Governance may be understood as the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities."

Second ARC defines the e-governance stands for 'electronic administration. Thus, e-Governance is basically associated with carrying out the functions and achieving the results of governance through the utilization of what has today come to be known as ICT (Information and communications Technology). The reason why countries around the world are increasingly opting for 'e-Governance' is that governance per se has become more complex and varied in the few decades and more importantly, citizens' expectations have increased manifold. ICT facilities efficient storing and retrieval of data, instantaneous transmission of information, processing information and data faster than the earlier manual systems, speeding up governmental processes, taking decisions expeditiously and judiciously, increasing transparency and enforcing accountability. (6) It also helps in increasing the reach of government both geographically and demographically.

The term e-governance has different connotations :
(1) E-administration
(2) E-services
(3) E-governance
(4) E-democracy

Critical Elements in E-governance[7] **:**
(A) Information System
(B) Information
(C) Technology
(D) Processes
(E) People
(F) The Environment

2.0 Stages of e-Governance in Indian Context :

It is evident that e-Governance is intrinsically linked with the development of computer technology, networking of computers and communication systems. In developing countries, such technologies and systems became available with a perceptible time lag as compared to developed nations. However, in the case of India, with the liberalization of the economy from the early 1990s onwards, there has been a convergence in the availability of cutting edge technologies and opportunities in the field of e-Governance. Generally speaking, the Indian experience demonstrates that the onset of e-Governance proceeded through the following phases:

2.1 Computerisation : In the first phase, with the availability of personal computers, a large number of Government offices got equipped with computers. The use of computers began with word processing, quickly followed by data processing.

Networking: In this phase, some units of a few government organizations got connected through a hub leading to sharing of information and flow of data between different government entities.

2.2 On-line Presence : With increasing internet connectivity, a need was felt for maintaining a presence on the web. This resulted in maintenance of websites by government departments and other entities. Generally, these web-pages/ web-sites contained information about the organizational structure, contact details, reports and publications, objectives and vision statements of the respective government entities.

2.3 On-line Interactivity : A natural consequence of on- line presence was opening up of communication channels between government entities and the citizens, civil society organizations etc. The main aim at this stage was to minimize the scope of personal interface with government entities by providing downloadable Forms,

Instructions, Acts, and Rules etc. In some cases, this has already led to on-line submission of Forms. Most citizen-government transactions have the potential of being put on e-Governance mode.

3.0 Benefits of E-governance :
E-governance is rapidly finding favor with governments across the world and the US government is in the forefront of e-governance initiatives. By using the internet and other modern communication technology, governments can hope to reach out to the populace in larger numbers.

The internet is a powerful medium for customer relationship management and it enables governments to extend service more effectively to the people. E-governance models are built around objectives that include better use of information, quicker dissemination of information, transparency in government-people transactions, and creating services that cover as broad a spectrum of society as possible.

E-governance also allows governments to participate in business transactions in a more profitable manner. For the government, the benefits include better service to the citizens, reduced transaction costs, reduction in paperwork and paper records as well as better utilization of space that would otherwise be used for storing documents.

Communication between the various government departments improves, information sharing is much better which aids governance, business transactions, and stimulates the growth of a new economy. The overall reduction in transaction costs can be up to 45%. Companies that deal with government organizations too stand to benefit by the implementation of e-governance measures. They can customize their bids and their offerings to government requirements more quickly.

They have constant access to relevant government information and the stimulus provided by increased business opportunities can lead to all-round infrastructural development. The taxpaying citizens, who are in way customers of the government, benefit from 24 x 7 accesses to information via 3G, call centers, the internet, etc. The response time of the government improves and an aware citizen can make better use of government services.

Also, a citizen can avail multiple government services from a single point. With respect to managing its relationship with the citizen/customer, the government has to strategize in terms of the various delivery channels that it can use for E-governance. These channels include internet, digital TV, handheld PCs, and mobile phones. As with every new enterprise, initiating and sustaining E-governance ventures has its own set of challenges.

Government organizations need administrative support and a go ahead from state and federal departments; in order to obtain this they need to first convince the bureaucracy of the benefits of E-governance. Legacy systems need to be incorporated into the E-governance infrastructure. Information needs to be dispensed almost in real time to the government, business partners, and citizens.

A government department's work processes will have to be altered to accommodate E-governance; this will require educating employees in facets such as human resources, customer management, information technology, risk management, etc. A government with an online presence is in a position to tap emerging markets for its requirements, have its finger on the pulse of the populace, and address citizen needs according to demographics.

The extensive use of Information Technology (IT) in every walk of life has redefined the fundamental principles of delivery of services and operation of service sectors, resulting in faster and easier delivery of much better services than before. Governments around the world have started realizing that the advancements in IT can as well be utilized to provide better services to citizens and business. As a result, a wide range of IT applications are being developed in various Government departments. Electronic Governance has emerged as a keyword for all such IT applications that take advantage of IT to reinvent the way the Government works. Often e-Governance is used as a synonym to describe an IT driven system of Governance that works better, costs less and is capable of servicing the needs of the citizens and businesses as never before. Its goal is to create a more responsive, productive and effective administration. E- Governance is also referred to as SMART Governance because it aims at using IT to the processes of Government functioning to bring about Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent Governance.

4.0 Conclusion :
E-governance not only improves efficiency, accountability and transparency of government processes, but it can also be a tool to empower citizens by enabling them to participate in the decision-making processes of governments. However, government continues to face many challenges in meeting the increasing demands of citizens to deliver better services and results. With the increasing awareness among citizens about their rights and the resultant increase in expectations from the government to perform and deliver, the whole paradigm of governance has changed. Government, today, is expected to be transparent in its dealings, accountable for its activities and faster in its responses. This has made the use of ICT imperative in any agenda drawn towards achieving good governance.

5.0 References :

(1)   11th Report of 2nd ARC on E-Governance (Part-1), December, 2008, p. 3-4.

(2)   Pardhasaradhi, Y., Ramesh Raju, K.V. and Venkatamallu : ìPublic Administration and ICT Paradigmî, Public Administration in 21st Century, (ed.) Noorjahan Bava, IIPA, Kanishka Publishers Distributors, New Delhi, 2010, p.302.

(3)   11th Report of 2nd ARC on E-Governance (Part-2), Op. cit., p. 8.

(4)   http://go.worldbank.org/M1JHE0Z280

(5)   http://portal.unseco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=440&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION =201.HTML

(6)   11th Report of 2nd ARC on E-Governance (Part-1), Op.cit., p.2.

(7)   Mehrotra, P.K. and Ranjan, A. : ìE-governance: Options and Opportunitiesî, Good Governance: Initiatives in India, (eds.) E. Vayunandan and Dolly Mathew, Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 57-60.