

The Future of e-Governance in India

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“Welcome to India on the skies!”, smiled a sweet looking air-hostess as I boarded the 05:15 Air India NY-DEL flight. I returned the smile. After all it was homecoming! Ten years of service in the United States of America is a long time away from home.

The frame jumped straight to the green, rice producing fields of West Bengal - the impoverished land where I grew up as a child.

Ours was a family of farmers to begin with. Farmers then worked against terrible odds. Unpredictable monsoons, lack of irrigation facilities, in-efficient marketing channels for produce and greedy middlemen reducing the ever so low margins had broken our back. This could have been the story of any other family, in any other village in India. Poor basic infrastructure, lack of transparency in governance and unabashed corruption had resulted in a feeling of hopelessness about democracy becoming an instrument of progressive change. The air was that of all-round negativity.

“But why does it look and feel so different now?” I wondered. My eyes suddenly fell on a group of farmers assembled at what seemed like a community meeting center. They were hooked on to the projected image emanating from a computer. On close inspection, I realized that weather forecasts, agricultural commodity prices and rural credit policies were being beamed live from the Kolkata based government procurement agency. The motley crowd dispersed to assemble again at what looked like a ‘*mandi*’ of old, but minus the middle men and the chaos. It was there that I met a familiar face, *Kalicharan Kaka*.

The ensuing conversation was revealing. One startling fact led to another. I gathered that various e-governance initiatives implemented with full gusto by the administration with active participation from the people had markedly bettered people’s lives. *Kaka*’s big, broad smile was emphatically symbolic. And it didn’t seem to end.

It did end, however, as my hostel roommate shook me vigorously to wake me up. “It was all just a dream!” I resigned. “But then again, is it a dream waiting to turn into

reality?” I teamed up with a class-mate and decided to analyze the situation. We used the following framework:

- e-Governance in the Indian context
- Objectives
- Implementation model
- Challenges in deployment
- Government initiatives
- Some projects in implementation
- Team’s conclusion about future directions

E-Governance in the Indian Context

Electronic Governance is beginning to find its feet in India, thereby facilitating the delivery of government services catering to a large base of people across different segments and geographical locations. E-governance effectively uses IT services in government administration with a view to enhance existing efficiencies, drive down communication costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments. It also aims to give 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. The growing acceptance of e-governance is evident from the fact that having recognized the benefits of an IT-enabled working environment, almost every state has an IT policy in place with the aim of evolving itself from being an IT-aware to an IT-enabled government.

The emerging significance of e-governance in the Indian context is exemplified by the benefits reaching to a wide spectrum of citizens on account of a few successful implementations. One such is e-Seva.

Project Name	e-Seva
Project Type	E-Governance
Project Initiator	Govt. of Andhra Pradesh
Project Initiator Type	State Government
Partners	N.A.
Objectives	To provide efficient services to the citizens in an integrated manner at the Integrated Citizen Service Centres (ICSCs)
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched on the 25th of August 2001 • There are currently 32 eSeva centres spread across the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, operating from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM every day and between 9:30 AM and 3:30 PM on holidays • Citizens can pay utility bills, avail of trade licenses and transact on over 30 facilities • Future plans include establishing 229 eSeva service centres in all the 117 municipalities in Andhra Pradesh by March 2003 • The government also plans to roll out the project to other parts of the state, including rural areas
City, State, Region	West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, Southern India

*Source: <http://itforchange.net>

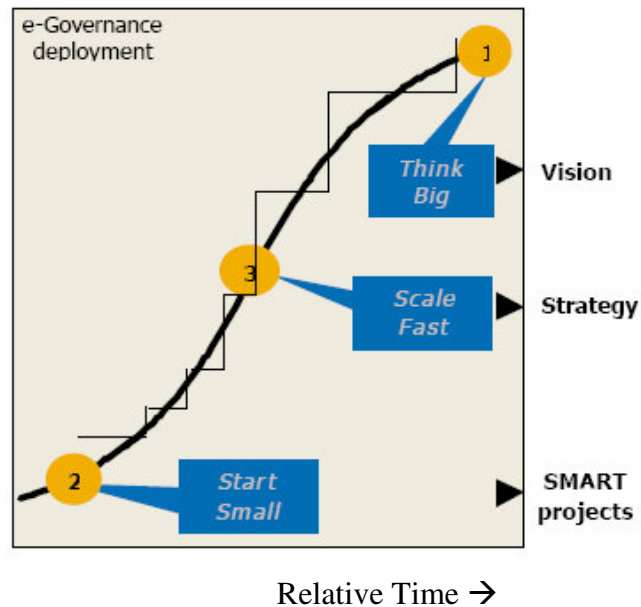
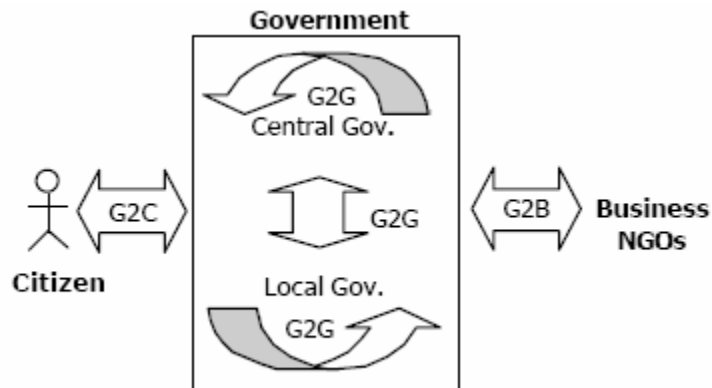
Objectives

The strategic objective of e-governance is to support and simplify governance for all parties; government, citizens and businesses. The objectives of e-governance should be similar to the objectives of good governance. They should therefore be as follows:

- To provide citizen access to information and knowledge about the political process, about services and about choices available
- To enable the transition from passive information access to active citizen participation by:
 - Informing the citizen and representing the citizen
 - Encouraging the citizen to vote
 - Consulting the citizen
 - Involving the citizen
- External strategic objective: Satisfactorily fulfill the public's needs and expectations on the front-office side, by simplifying procedures and providing ease of use for various online services
- Internal strategic objective: Facilitate a speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective process for performing government administration activities

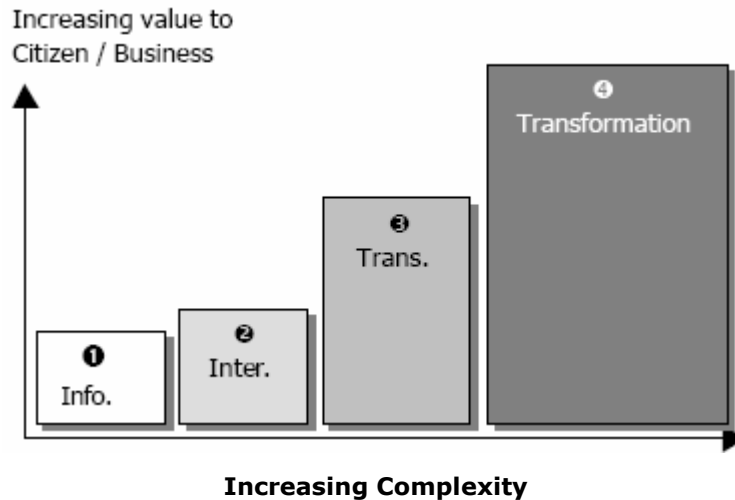
Implementation Model

We discuss here an implementation model that mainly targets at three groups - the government, citizen and businesses. The model has been formulated in four phases on the basis of increasing value to the citizens and increasing complexity. Abbreviations like G2G, G2B and G2C are used to describe the transactions between different groups like Government to Government, Government to businesses, and Government to Consumers. The interactions between the various parties are shown in the diagram below:



India's implementation campaign for e-governance should ideally follow the four phases of the model as shown in the diagram below. As the implementation body

successfully implements initiatives of one stage, it graduates to the stage higher assimilating the cumulative learning from previous stages:



*Source: IICD Research Brief - No 1, March 2001

PHASE 1: Information

- Relevant information is made available on the web
- Facilitation of transparency
- Information made accessible leading to improved democracy and service

PHASE 2: Interaction

- Interaction between government and the public through various applications
- People can ask questions via e-mail, search engines etc
- Replacement of physical submission of forms etc with online applications
- Communication and data exchange through LANs, intranets and e-mails

PHASE 3: Transaction

- Increasing complexity but higher value to the citizens
- Complete online transactions possible. E.g. Renewal of licenses, Visas etc

- Increased complexity due to security and personalization issues
- Digital signatures become necessary to enable legal transfer of services.

PHASE 4: Transformation

- Integration of all information systems into one virtual counter
- Government employees of different departments work together
- Responsibilities within the government institutions
- Cost savings, efficiency and customer satisfaction reach the highest possible levels

Implementation Phase	Description
Information	Presence
Interaction	Intake Processes
Transaction	Complete transactions
Transformation	Integration & change

Challenges in deployment

Illustrated below are Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats analyses on the Political, Economic, Social and Technological aspects

Political aspects	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Combination with democratisation reforms Internet as pull factor Modern image	Budget Lack of cyber laws No problem owner within government Slow decision making process Hierarchical structures Short term approach due to elections Integration and reform
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
Raise external funding Show competitive edge Transparency causes natural change of processes Reinvent government	Bureaucracy Piracy, misuse Corruption Maintaining disorder, no transparency Political instability Resistance

Economic aspects	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
E-governance argument for external funding Transparency for businesses (procurement)	Investors Budget control
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
Higher cost efficiency New business	Corruption

Social aspects	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
People eager to learn IT skills Skilled people possible export product	Basic education poor Low literacy IT literacy Different languages Public acceptance of self-service models Skill shortage: competition with private sector
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
Employment increases Education system improve People get structural job Cheap manpower widely available Promotion of Internet	Brain drain IT skilled people after training Influence of other cultures Resistance of people Digital divide Privacy

Technological aspects	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Everything is new: no negative legacy Leapfrogging possible Internet as pull factor Lack of IT standards?	Shortage IT skills High cost of internet Heterogeneous data Lack of IT standards? Software licenses
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
2 nd hand hardware available Use one standard	Dependency of technology

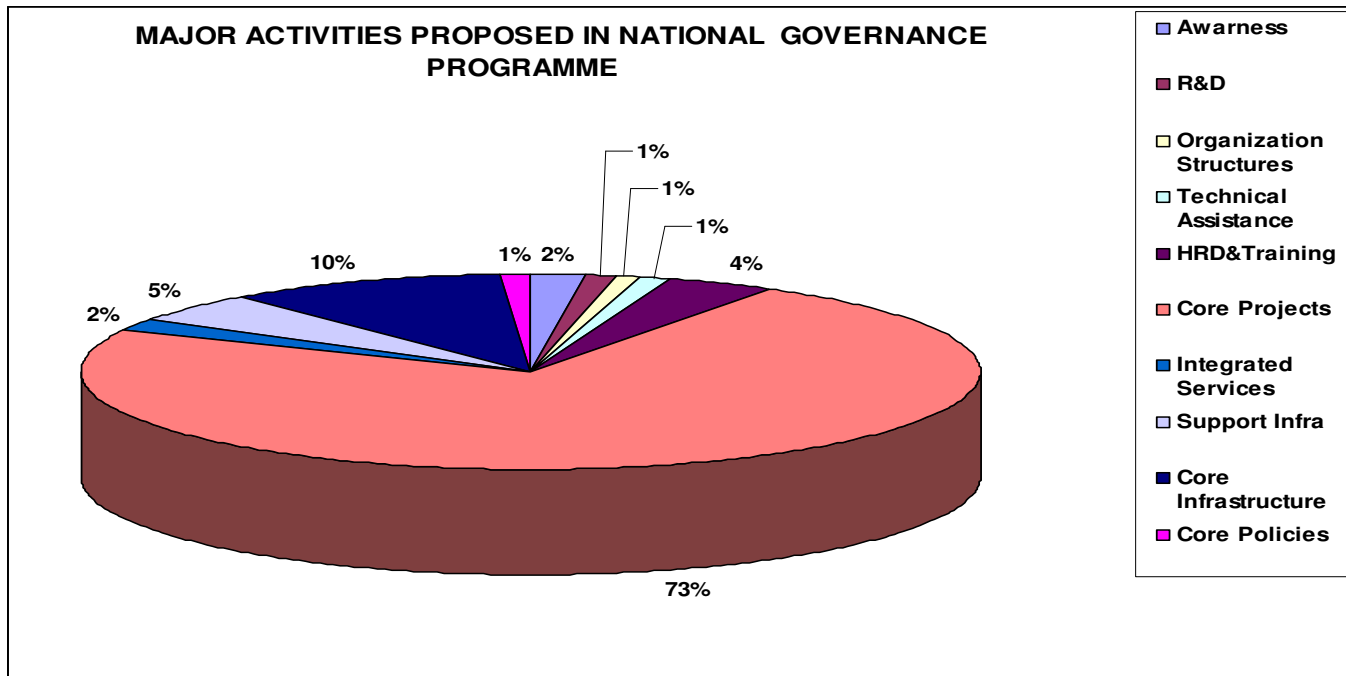
*Source: IICD Research Brief - No 1, March 2001

Government Initiatives

The Government of India has approved the National E-Governance Action Plan for implementation during the year 2003-2007. The Plan seeks to lay the foundation and provide impetus for long-term growth of e-Governance within the country. The plan intends to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms. It has identified certain core infrastructure and policies leading up to the implementation of a number of Mission Mode Projects at the center, state and integrated service levels. The end objective is the creation of a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance.

The National E-Governance Action Plan was presented to the Prime Minister on 6th November, 2003. The Plan has been approved in-principle and endorsement has been given to the overall program content, implementation approach and Governance structures.

2003-2007, Amount in Rs. Crores, *Source: <http://www.mit.gov.in>



S.No	Mission Mode Projects	Line Ministries/ Departments responsible
Central Government		
1	Income Tax	Ministry of Finance/Central Board of Direct Tax
2	Passport Visa & Immigration Project	Ministry of External Affairs/Ministry of Home Affairs
3	DCA21	Department of Company Affairs
4	Insurance	Dept. Of Banking
5	National Citizen Database	Ministry of Home Affairs/Registrar General of India (RGI)
6	Central Excise	Department of Revenue/Central Board of Excise & Custom
7	Pensions	Dept. Of Pensions & Pensioners welfare & Dept. Of Expenditure
8	Banking	Dept. of Banking
State Government (tentative, to be finalized in consultation with the States)		
1	Land Records	Ministry of Rural Development
2	Road Transport	Ministry of Road Transport & Highway
3	Property Registration	Department of Land Resources
4	Agriculture	Department of Agriculture & Cooperation
5	Treasuries	Ministry of Finance

6	Municipalities	Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation
7	Gram Panchayats	Ministry of Rural Development
8	Commercial Taxes	Ministry of Finance
9	Police (UTs initially)	Ministry of Home affairs
Integrated Services		
1	EDI (E-Commerce)	Ministry of Commerce and Industry
2	E-Biz	Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion / Department of Information Technology
3	Common Service Centers	Department of Information Technology
4	India Portal	Department of Information Technology and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances
5	EG Gateway	Department of Information Technology

*Source: <http://www.mit.gov.in>

Selection Criteria for the Mission Mode Projects:

- Impact in terms of number of people likely to be affected by project
- Impact in terms of likely improvement of the quality of service
- Impact on the economy or economic environment in the country
- Impact in terms of the likely cost-benefit of investments in the project
- Readiness and willingness of ministry/ department to position a project
- Feasibility of implementing the project from a financial, administrative and political perspective within a reasonable time frame

Projects in implementation

We consider ten examples of initiatives under deployment:

S.NO	NAME	INITIATOR	DESCRIPTION
1.	Akashya	Kerela State Department of IT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting up E-centers across Kerela• E-literacy to at least one member every household
2.	Bhoomi	Govt of Karnataka	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Computerization of land records• Securing title and saving rural graft• Database to be used for other developmental applications also
3.	Cyber Grameen	Swarna Bharat Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services to be provided include telephony, telemedicine, and distance learning over high speed internet
4.	Dairy Information System Kiosk(DISK)	National Dairy Development Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data analysis and decision support for rural societies• Improve productivity and yield of milch cattle
5.	Drishtee	Drishtee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishing community owned and sustainable IT projects in poverty stricken areas across the country
6.	e-choupal	ITC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost effective alternative supply chain system to deal directly with the farmers
7.	e-Cops	Govt of Andhra Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Computerization of crime control and administration

			<p>related activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and monitoring information and performance
8.	Nai Disha	Govt of Haryana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic interface between Haryana govt and the citizens • Making Govt services available to the citizens anytime via internet
9.	Vidya Vahini	Ministry of Information Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portal for school teachers and students across the nation to share their creative and academic potential via the internet
10.	Versatile Online Information for Citizen Empowerment VOICE		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computerization of day to day operations • Quick transparent and efficient administration • Lower operating cost with increased revenue collection

*Source: <http://itforchange.net>

Team's conclusion about future directions of e-governance in India

The team has looked at the past, analyzed the present situation and has used the inferences to derive pointers to a likely future course for e-Governance in India.

- *Seriousness of the Government of India in this endeavor:* The history of its past performances was not impressive to say the least. However, with the booming Indian economy commanding respect and attention from the entire world order, the government seems to have pulled up its socks. There's a new wave of professionalism and alertness. The formulation of the Electronic Governance National Action Plan (EGNAP) leading up to the Mission Mode Projects' implementation is proof of a systematic thought process followed up by action
- *Analysis of requisite fundamentals:* Abundant availability of requisite technical expertise notwithstanding, lack of electricity and education are major hindrances. However positive steps have been taken in this direction. We are likely to see the benefits in due course. Till then, community hubs like Panchayat offices in rural areas, town halls in semi-urban areas, and kiosks in prominent government institutions in urban areas need to be identified and adopted for implementation. Within this arrangement, under-equipped people could assemble at these hubs to help themselves, with aide from trained staff. This would be in addition to all possible applications being made available on the internet for people who can, to access. Again, for the applications to be effective, they must be in the vernacular language of the local region
- *Brick and mortar implementation model:* Like majority of e-commerce floats that were buried during the technology bubble of 2000, any e-governance project which is not supported by a robust brick and mortar back-end machinery risks failure. There should be staffed monitoring teams behind every initiative. Implementation is not the end. The team should continuously plough back user feedback and look for further enhancements

- *Awareness of prospective benefits is low:* This obviously being a ‘top-driven’ initiative, the grass-root level arms of government machinery are largely unaware of the promise of e-governance. At the moment, no concerted effort is on to find effective application areas at the people’s strata. Also, awareness campaigns to get schemes patronized by the targeted end users, especially in rural areas are below the mark. These novel projects left on their own, run the grave risk of extinction
- *Benefits:* The huge promise of e-governance stands uncontested. If implemented with sustained gusto, we see e-governance realistically transforming the Indian landscape in the future. On our way to becoming a developed nation, as we fight the menace of poverty, illiteracy, population, corruption, red-tape, lack of accountability and transparency, e-governance would serve to perform quality control on the process of governance. It will eventually also generate alternate employment for technology literate youth who can double up as trained facilitators at the people interface. Surely, the nation stands to benefit as a whole with its passive citizens evolving into a billion strong community of empowered development agents. The team’s optimism is not too removed from reality, we are confident.

The dream that I saw, may not after all stay just a dream. *Kalicharan Kaka* might just be a few days away from sporting that big, broad smile of his – something that he so rightfully deserves!

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