

Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Good Governance Process

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Abstract: With the growing popularity of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in different fields, attempts have also been made to implement it in the area of good governance. ICT promotes the idea of digitization of the world in the form of using modern technologies and devices. Good governance as a holistic approach brings the idea of a citizen-friendly, corruption-free and a transparent administrative system. This paper outlines the role played by ICT in the good governance process by advocating the view that in comparison to the developed countries; the developing countries are lagging far behind in getting the benefit of ICT in the good governance process.

Keywords: Countries, Good governance, ICT, Process, Role

1. Introduction

With the advancement of modern technologies such as internet, mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices the life of human beings becomes more comfortable and easier. The development of such devices and facilities, transfers the world into a global village, whereas one's ideas, experiences and day to day activities can be shared with the people from across the world within a few second of time. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an extended term for information technology that stresses the role of unified communications, and the integration of telecommunications and computers as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage and audiovisual systems, that enable users to access, store, transmit and manipulation of information. The term ICT has been used in academic research since the 1980s. However, the term has become popular since 1997 with the publication of a report by Dennis Stevenson to the UK government and then in the revised national curriculum for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2000. ICT as a broad and an evolving concept gives its primary focus on the store, retrieve, transmit and manipulation of any given products in an electronic form. In short, we can say that ICT is related with the idea of using modern technologies and devices to transform the world into a digital one.

Good governance as a concept gets its momentum across the world only in recent times. As a concept, it emerged in the mid-1980s as governability with the emphasis on adherence to the rule of law. Following the events such as the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold war the term governance came into used to define the reinventing concept of public administration, particularly in the developing countries so as to make it more receptive to the needs of globalization. The term governance was first used by the World Bank in 1989 to conduct a study on "Sub-Saharan Africa-from Crisis to Sustainable Growth". The study described governance as a machinery for institutional reform and a better and more efficient public sector in Sub-Saharan countries. It defined governance as "the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs." However, this definition had failed to explicitly define the term "good". It was Barber Conable (1986-1991), the former President of World Bank who had given a complete definition of "good governance" by terming it as a "public service that is efficient, a judicial system that is reliable and an administration that is accountable to its public." Over the years the concept of good governance has been interpreted differently by the scholars throughout the world and they all have arrived to the conclusion that good governance signifies a participative manner of governing that functions in a responsible, accountable, and transparent manner based on the principles of efficiency, legitimacy, and consensus for the purpose of promoting the rights of individual citizens and the public interest, thus indicating the existence of political will for ensuring the material welfare of society and sustainable development with social justice. Good governance has 8 major characteristics; it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. To quote Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development."

Now, after defining these two terms ICT and good governance, questions have arisen how and in what way these two concepts are related to each other and how it will benefit the citizens of a country? As ICT is related to the use of modern technologies and devices, the governments of many countries are also starting to utilize these devices to make public administrations more efficient and effective to serve the interest of their citizens. This

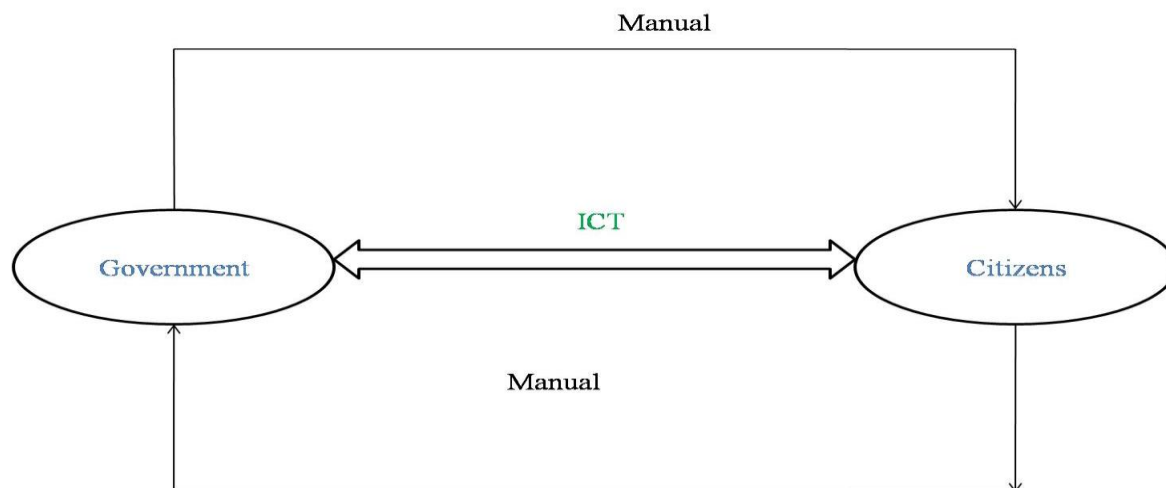
process is popularly known as e-government. With the integration of ICT in public administration, e-government is likely to ensure a transparent, accountable and a citizen friendly administrative system. Focusing on this aspect, the paper is an attempt to study two main attributes, firstly, the role played by ICT in the good governance process and secondly, the limitations of using ICT based government services in the developing countries like India.

2. E-Government and E-Governance:

The terms e-government and e-governance are closely interrelated both of the terms are used to describe the initiatives undertaken by the government to utilize the ICT based services for implementation of different plans and services for the welfare of its citizens. While the meanings of e-government is related to the application of ICT with an aim of supporting governmental operations, aware citizens and deliver the services to them in an effective manner, e-governance works as a tool, that makes all the government services easily available and accessible to the citizens. If we consider e-government as a system, then we can say that e-governance is the operational aspect of that system. E-government works as a one way communication system where websites provide information, regulations, policies and programs to the citizens, such as downloadable forms for government services and applications; on the other hand e-governance follows two way communication protocol, which provides policies and programs requests and receives inputs from their citizens.

3. ICT and Good Governance:

In 1954, W. Howard Gammon wrote e-government research paper for writing about the use of ICT for providing good governance. Now it contains information from both the government and private sectors allowing for tailored solutions to meet diverse needs of the population. Today, the government uses ICT to make public administrations more efficient and effective by cutting the notion of red-tapism. With the increasing use of online services, citizens have been getting more and more information about the government services and as a result, they are becoming more capable of solving their day to day problems. The Internet and World Wide Web has been used as a tool in delivering and implementing different government programmes and services to the citizens. Governing the citizens with the help of such modern devices is named as e-governance. E-governance can only be an effective and efficient tool for good governance if the necessary reform initiatives have been carried out by the due process. Effective implementation of e-governance can take the ICT to the common man by helping the government to align different services with the changing needs of the population. ICT based services are useful to remove unnecessary human involvement and avoid the system of hierarchy during the public service delivery processes from the various departments and government agencies. Generally, the primary features of ICT-based services are active, transparent, efficient, responsive and reliable. As it has been already mentioned that through ICT based services the government uses different websites to deliver the information to the common people, for this purpose the websites are divided into two categories. The first one deals with the one way communication process, the second one is related to the process of two way communication. Government websites process non-financial transactions, e.g., e-voting, downloading and uploading forms, filing taxes online or applying for different types of certificates, licenses and permits. They also handle all types of financial transactions, i.e., where money is transferred on a secure network to the government. Direct Government Jobcentres Plus is a job search service for people who are looking for different jobs. Student loans or Jobseeker's allowance, etc. are also being easy and flexible through online transactional services. Basically, ICT based services work in the following manner to establish a link between the government and citizens. So, we can say that ICT mainly plays the role of a mediator between the government and the citizens to ensure a better administrative system. The following diagram will show the importance of ICT in establishing a link between the two by providing an atmosphere of trust and mutual benefit.



ICT’s value in good governance process.

4. Importance of ICT in Good governance Process:

As it is well known to us that the emergence of the digital world has brought many changes in the society, hence the role and functions of public institutions are also affected by it. Besides undertaking the traditional functions such as defense, law and order, taxation, social justice, education, healthcare, the governments are now required to play a new role by harnessing more power of ICT based services so that it can lead towards a more citizen friendly administrative system. From the experiences of various nations, it has been found that the marginalisation of people in governance process is related to the backwardness and slow progress. Hence, the idea of good governance promotes the idea of participation of the citizens in the governance process to provide a transparent and responsive administrative system. For this noble purpose ICT has been used as a tool to bring every citizen in governance processes by changing the very nature of people-governance interface.

The application of ICT in governance process is basically related with the idea of having an efficient, responsive and accountable administrative system. With this it has been expected that the quality of life of and productivity of citizens, especially the poor and the economic growth rate of the country will be increasing in the future. So, we have to admit that application of ICT in the governance process is not merely implies the installation of the computerization process in the offices and agencies, rather it reflect a fundamental change about how the government operates. It also implies a new set of responsibilities for the machinery of the government.

Besides all these, ICT works as a catalyst for organizational transformation by managing large volumes of data and ensures a better connectivity between the different departments and agencies of the government by reducing the different errors. It is also associated with developing standard applications to ensure efficiency by avoiding repetition of different governance tasks. Application of ICT in the governance process reduces the distance between the people and public service providers and solves the issues such as delay in public works, bureaucratic red tape, corruption, harassment of the public and so on. It gives main focus on giving quicker response to the public grievances. Transparency is the another feature of ICT based services where various information is made available to the people through different websites, hence reducing the information monopoly from part of the bureaucrats and empowering the citizens about their rights.

5. Problems associated with ICT based services in developing countries:

At present time development of any country depends on the effective use of modern technologies in its day to day affairs. For the developing countries like India use of ICT based services in the governance process is the solution to the “Good Governance” to minimize corruption, provides efficient and effective quality services to their citizens. Focusing on these attributes now the Indian Government is trying to deliver minimum 25 percent of its dealings and services in electronic form.

In India, for promoting the idea of electronic governance, initiatives have been taken in the name of Common Service Centres (CSC). CSCs aim for the access points for delivery of essential public utility services, social welfare schemes, healthcare, financial, education and agriculture services, to citizens of the country with the use of electronic means. It is a pan-India network catering to regional, geographic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the country, thus enabling the Government's mandate of a socially, financially and digitally inclusive society. Under this scheme “Jan Suvidha Kendro” has been established in every state of India to deal with the different government and public relations. In spite having these service centres the facilities are yet to reach the common

people. Still a section of people are unable to handle, the proper way of ICT and are dependent on the same old manual process. An ignorant and illiterate section of society without having any idea about ICT based services has been putting another barrier to the successful implementation of these e-services. Apart from this lack of proper physical infrastructures in different service centres is also creating a major hurdle in the well maintenance of ICT based governance services in India. Absence of skilled manpower, lack of investments and various cultural constraints imposed by the societies of developing countries can also be taken into account while discussing about the failure of ICT based services in these countries. So, we can say that failure of ICT based projects in developing countries is varying significantly due to context, time and view point. Some of the probable reasons for failure include limited resources, low literacy rate of citizens, corruption, favouritism, bribery etc.

6. Conclusion:

After going through a detailed discussion on the role of ICT in the good governance process, we can safely conclude that ICT plays a pivotal role for a better interaction and communication between the government and the general public. Use of ICT in the governance process provides access of information and services to the citizens and thus encourages the participation of citizens in the administrative process. It works as the key of good governance by offering an effective, efficient, accountable and transparent administrative system. For the developing countries use of ICT is ideal for resolving the issue of corruption, over workload on the staff and malfunctioning of the administrative system. Since ICT based services are quick and accurate in nature, it can bring more flexibility to the entire governance process. However, for the successful implementation of ICT, the governments of developing countries must have to ensure the presence and availability of proper physical infrastructures, skilled manpower and resources. Besides this awareness programme regarding the use of ICT services must have to organize for the common people. Studies and researches should also be done for the effective use of ICT in different departments so as to provide a better system for the citizens. Hence, we can summarize here that according to the capability and on the basis of availability of resources every country of today's world can bear the expenses of ICT based services for the prosperity and well being of their citizens.

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