Information and Communication Technologies in State affairs: challenges of E-Governance

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Abstract: **The mainstream conclusion about the purpose of implementing e-governance procedures is that these enhance good governance. This good governance is generally characterised by participation, transparency and accountability. This has proven to be a major problem in many developing countries. But the recent advances in information and communication technologies provide opportunities to transform the relationship between governments and citizens so as to enhance the achievement of good governance goals. In this paper we analyze the benefits than can be achieved by implementing E-Governance programs, and also the challenges these changes associated with these innovations.**

Index Terms—E-Government, Governance, Transparency

I. INTRODUCTION

E-Governance is modifying the way that State affairs affecting individuals is implemented on a daily basis. Although the potential for improvement is not questioned, the practical implementations are still quite challenging. This is why a deeper understanding if these issues must be achieved in order to transcend the current limitations.

In Section II we analyze the meaning and scope of the term E-Governance to set a common definition and understanding throughout the rest of paper. We also mention some of the goals of E-Governance as a means to achieve good governance. In Section III we look at some of the main challenges in implementing E-Governance programs. In Section IV we mention some conclusions regarding implementation of E-Governance programs.

II. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY E-GOVERNANCE?

First of all we must agree on the meaning and scope of the term E-Governance, because if is often used in different senses and different contexts. There are many definitions of E-Governance, but we will mention just a few to put the term in perspective:

"E-Governance is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective." [1]

"E-governance involves the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to transact the business of government. At the level of service, e-governance promises a full service available 24 hours a day and seven days a week." [2]

"E-government commonly refers to the processes and structures pertinent to the electronic delivery of government services to the public." [3]

Additionally, Bannister and Connolly summarize some characteristics that are present in e-governance implementations:
-Technology mediated services;
-A commitment to technology;
-Functions that empower citizens;
-Internally focused use of ICT by government;
-Use of ICT to improve the quality services and governance;
-Something that enhances e-democracy;
-A technology mediated relationship between citizen and state. [4]

Although there are countless other definitions of e-governance, the idea is basically the same.

Having agreed upon what we mean by E-Governance, we must ask ourselves, why would it be important or useful to introduce e-governance procedures? The mainstream conclusion about the purpose of implementing e-governance procedures is that these enhance good governance. This good governance is generally characterised by participation, transparency and accountability. This has proven to be a major problem in Latin American Democracies. But, the recent advances in information and communication

technologies provide opportunities to transform the relationship between governments and citizens so as to enhance the achievement of good governance goals. The use of ICTs can increase the involvement of citizens in all levels of the process of governance. Advantages for the government involve that they may provide a better service, making governance more efficient and more effective. In addition, the transaction costs can be lowered and government services can become more accessible for the general population.

As far as the goals of e-governance, according to UNESCO, they include:

-*"Improve the internal organisational processes of governments.*
-Provide better information and service delivery.
-Increase government transparency in order to reduce corruption.
-Reinforce political credibility and accountability.
-Promote democratic practices through public participation and consultation." [5]

Also according to UNESCO, the fields of implementation of e-governance are:

-*"E-administration- refers to improving of government processes and of the internal workings of the public sector with new ICT-executed information processes.*
-E-services- refers to improved delivery of public services to citizens. Some examples of interactive services are: requests for public documents, requests for legal documents and certificates, issuing permits and licenses.
-E-democracy- implies greater and more active citizen participation and involvement enabled by ICTs in the decision-making process." [6]

For example, in Bangladesh, the "i*mplementation of 'Digital Bangladesh' was an election promise means appropriate use of technology to materialize all the commitments of the government including the ones regarding education, health, employment and poverty mitigation. The key intention behind this idea is to improve the standards of livelihood of the citizens by empowering them, ensuring transparency and accountability in every sector of life, and setting up effective-governance and, above all, deliver public services to their thresholds through the most effective use of latest technologies."* [7]

In another continent, particularly in Nigeria, Ojo argues that *"the use of information technology can increase the broad involvement of citizens in the process of governance at all levels by providing the possibility of on-line discussion groups…"* He also states that he benefits for government include that they *"may provide better service in terms of*

time, making governance more efficient and more effective." [8]

This tendency is occurring world-wide. For example, *"the Government of India is transcending from traditional modus operandi of governance towards technological involvement in the process of governance. Currently, the Government of India is in the transition phase and seamlessly unleashing the power of ICT in governance."* [9]

III. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING E-GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS

Signore et al. refer to these challenges by grouping them into three categories: Technical, Economic and Social issues.

Some of the most relevant Technical issues include security of the system even more so when electronic payment is involved. Privacy is a great concern on behalf of the citizens as it regards confidentiality of their personal data

Regarding Economic issues, these include aspects such as costs, maintainability, reusability and portability.

The Social issues regard aspects like accessibility; usability and what is most important, acceptance by the general public. [10]

Mittal & Kaur, in the paper "E-Governance - A challenge for India," refers to the challenges of implementing E-Governance programs in a segmented format. Some of the most interesting obstacles singled out, include:

- Different Language spoken by potential users: People belonging to different states speak different languages. The diversity of people in context of language is a huge challenge for implementing e-Governance projects as e-Governance applications are written in English language.

-Low Literacy and Low IT Literacy: Much of the Indian people are not literate and those who are literate, they do not have much knowledge about Information Technology (IT).

-Lack of confidence on technologies provided by government

-Technical issues such as user friendliness of government websites.

-Cost: In developing countries like India, cost is one of the most important obstacles in the path of implementation of e-Governance where major part of the population is living below poverty line. Economic poverty is closely related to the limited information technology resources. [11]

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IV. CONCLUSIONS REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF E-GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS

It is quite clear that E-Governance programs are being implemented worldwide. From the leading nations to developing countries, these initiatives are taken o at different levels of government and this is not a new occurrence, as this 2002 paper affirms: "*Governments worldwide are faced with the challenge of transformation and the need to reinvent government systems in order to deliver efficient and cost effective services, information and knowledge through information and communication technologies.*" [12]

As for some cases in India, Mittal & Kaur considers that for E-Governance programs to be successful, some factors may have to be taken into consideration. "*Although Indian government is spending a lot of money on e-Governance projects but still these projects are not successful in all parts of India. Unawareness in people, local language of the people of a particular area, privacy for the personal data of the people etc. are main challenges which are responsible for the unsuccessful implementation of e-Governance in India.*" [11]

In the case implementation of E-Governance programs in Australia, Freeman argues that "*governments often equate improved information access and service delivery with online civic engagement, overlooking the importance of two-way participatory practices.*" She also concludes that "*to facilitate participatory e-government practices and online civic engagement, governments will require policies that guide the development of ICT infrastructure, enhance citizens' ICT adoption and use, support online content and spaces to which citizens can contribute, and ensure that citizen involvement influences decision-making.*" [13]

All over the world, governments are investing more and more on information and communication technologies as a means to communicate and interact with their citizens. E-Governance programs will reach more individuals and involve more government agencies in years to come. But the challenges of effectiveness and efficiency still remain open to debate.

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