

E-governance in bangladesh: problems and prospects essay sample

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1. Introduction

An emerging concept, e-governance has become trendy since mid 1990s around the world, with various moves by the governments integrating information and communication technologies in the public sector management and in the process of delivering services for citizens. The policy makers of the developed countries envisioned that new developments in ICT and especially the TCP/IP protocol would pay a significant contribution in achieving objectives of good governance. So, the term e-Governance refers to the efficient and effective use of modern ICT technology with a view to establishing good governance for any country. From the management and technological perceptions, the e-governance can also be defined as Electronic State Management System based on information and communication technologies (ICT), including the Internet technology. The far-reaching developments in e-governance have encouraged governments around the world to establish an on-line presence by publishing statistical information on the Internet. In so doing, they hope to increase efficiency, effectiveness and organizational performance. Bangladesh has joined the race toward adopting e-government. This paper deals with the e-governance initiatives in Bangladesh with focuses on the challenges and prospects of e-governance in Bangladesh.

2. Concept of eGovernment

A clear definition of e-governance has yet to emerge. A recent joint research initiative for the study of e-government sponsored by the United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration and the American Society for Public Administration defined e-government as “ utilizing the

internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens.” According to the World Bank, e-government refers to governmental use 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 agencies of government. E-Government can be defined as the application of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the efficiency, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability of government. Common applications of eGovernment include online delivery of government information and services, computerized licensing and registration, web-based tender notification and procurement, web-enabled complaints submission, and online public comment for draft legislation.

3. Components of eGovernment

E-Government has four major components: These are

1. G2C (Government-to-Citizen): This component involves interaction of individual citizens with the government. Examples include payment of utility bills or downloading government forms from the Internet. Singapore’s e-Citizen Portal is one of the most highly acclaimed G2C sites.
2. G2B (Government-to-Business): This component involves interaction of business entities with the government. Examples include corporate tax filing or government procurement through the Internet. A notable success story for online government procurement is Malaysia’s e-Prohelan website, which has about 3, 500 government procurement centers and about 30, 000 suppliers.
3. G2G (Government-to-Government): G2G component involves interaction among government officials, including interactions within a particular

government office and interactions among various government offices.

Examples include the use of email for internal government communication or customized software applications for tracking the progress of government projects. A popular G2G service is the e-Police System in Karnataka, India, which features an electronic database of police records.

4. G2E (Government-to-Employee): It involves interaction between the government and government employees with respect to services such as salary, pension, and vacation leave. For example, a government may introduce a database-supported personnel data sheet for each government employee that serves as a record of personnel information that can be easily accessed for various applications.

4. E-Governance in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has only recently begun to take serious initiatives in E-Governance. The National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy 2002 gives due emphasis to the gradual implementation of E-Governance in all government offices. To realize the goals set forth by the Policy, an ICT Task Force has been formed with the Prime Minister as the Chairperson and the Secretary of the Ministry of Planning as the Member Secretary. In 2003, a program entitled “ Support to ICT Task Force (SICT) Project” was undertaken by the Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning with the mandate of serving as an administrative and secretarial arm to assist the ICT Task Force to realize various projects related to ICT. As a result some government offices have already begun to apply ICT to achieve more

efficient governance. For example, some of the Selected ICT Projects in Bangladesh are mentioned below:

1. Ministry of Finance: Ministry of Finance has customized software for budget planning, sensitivity analysis, impact analysis, financial projections and various reports.
 2. National Board of Revenue: Much of the activities of NBR have been computerized. NBR is computerizing the revenue budget procedure.
 3. Ministry of Science and ICT: Ministry of Science and ICT creating web-sites containing information about various ministries
 4. Ministry of Communication: Ministry of Communication provides online searchable database of contractors, tenders. They have also created a Project Monitoring System for tracking progress of projects. They have databases of 9, 011 bridge structures and 20, 000 km roads.
 5. Bangladesh Planning Commission: Creating software for interfacing between development and revenue budget. The IT system at Bangladesh Planning Commission has the following features:
 - a. File sharing facilities through LAN
 - b. Video Conferencing
 - c. Electronic Notice Board
 - d. Digital Library containing policies of Bangladesh in searchable format, minutes of meetings, other useful documents etc.
 - e. ADP database facilities
 - f. Software for tracking movement of files
 6. Ministry of Education: The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), the statistical wing of the Ministry of Education, has created a geographic information system (GIS) map-based software that
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provides information on density of academic institutions in particular regions, individual institution-level data, and other useful educational statistics. Apart from this under the SICT Programme, several ministries and government departments have undertaken major eGovernment projects. Examples include the Dhaka Passport Office under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the General Manager North's Office of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, the Department of Agricultural Marketing under the Ministry of Agriculture, the Land Record Office in Manikganj under the Ministry of Land, Ministry of Labor and Employment, and the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment. Many other government offices—including the Bangladesh Bank, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and Dhaka City Corporation—are also in the process of implementing important eGovernment initiatives.

5. Problems of E-governance in Bangladesh

The journey for establishing e-governance system in Bangladesh faced challenges that can be summarized by three A's: Access, Awareness and Applications. Being a developing country, it was always a challenge for the country to finance capital intensive endeavours like access backbones and communication infrastructure. The Problems of E-governance in Bangladesh can be categorised and summarised as follows: 1. General Challenges of e-Governance

- a. Lack of necessary regulatory/legal framework
- b. Inadequate human resource capacity
- c. Preparedness of local software companies

- d. Supply of electricity across the nation
- e. High-cost, low-reliability of Internet access

2. Challenges of ICT

- a. Inadequate ICT Infrastructure within the government b. Inadequate access to ICT by government officials
- c. Awareness of government officials about ICT
- d. Non-acceptability of IT systems
- e. Lack of incentive structure for government officials

3. Challenges of G2G/e-Government

- a. Lack of reliable maintenance
- b. Lack of sustainability of IT Systems
- c. Frequent, unpredictable transfer of government officials
- d. Lack of ownership of IT systems
- e. Lack of Bengali standardization

4. Challenges of G2B and G2C

- a. ICT infrastructure across the nation
- b. Access to ICT by citizens
- c. Access to ICTs by businesses
- d. Public Awareness about ICTs

6. Prospects of E-governance in Bangladesh

The single most important lesson learned during the past years of e-governance initiatives of the country is ' e-governance is a strategic choice not an operational alternative for service delivery'. A nation needs to be

sufficiently 'ready' before shooting for e-governance objectives. At present Information Technology (IT) is a subject of widespread interest in Bangladesh. Some active steps and initiatives are already there, as described below for an exposure of the present and future prospects of e-governance in Bangladesh.

1. Formulation of National ICT Policy 2009 and ICT Act 2009: The government of Bangladesh has formulated National ICT Policy 2009 and ICT Act 2009 in order to facilitate e-governance in Bangladesh. The necessary regulatory/legal framework is now set for facilitation of e-governance in Bangladesh.

2. Enhance access to ICT tools for citizens: The government is trying to ensure equitable access to government services delivered online to all potential users. The ICT policy has extended access to ICT throughout the country. The Government of Bangladesh has taken some important initiatives to develop our IT sector. All taxes and duties from import of computer hardware and software are waived. Hundred percent remittances of profit and capital gains for foreign investors without any approval is ensured. BTTB has implemented of DDN service. Bangladesh is already linked to global highway through submarine cable.

3. Human resource: Human resource is the most important component for e-governance in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has a huge educated, unemployed youth force with the ability to read and write English. The country can take advantage of its immense manpower to train and prepare programmers and IT professionals. Government has already started a project to develop Computer Programmers in Bangladesh. All the universities are offering one year post-graduate Diploma course for the graduates.

Due to lack of institutionalized means of developing related skills many e-Government implementation projects suffer from lack of skilled human capital. Training courses for the civil servants are now designed to enhance their ' soft-skills' associated with managing implementation of e-Governance systems.

4. IT awareness: Young generation in Bangladesh is very enthusiastic and has correctly identified IT as the future of the country. There are numerous computer clubs, computer festivals, programming contests, web design contests; IT related seminars and discussions in many cities of the country. About 16 magazines and four digital IT magazines are being published monthly and some daily newspapers publish IT pages once/twice a week.

5. E-commerce: Recently there has been a surge in E-commerce activities in Bangladesh. There are E-commerce related seminars and symposiums in the country almost everyday and all the major training centres are offering courses on E-commerce. Government is now formulating laws for e-commerce to enhance the business rapidly and smoothly.

6. IT Park and international market: Some private Organisations have already started to work for setting up IT Park and IT villages in the country. Some investors are foreigners and they are very much interested to build Bangladeshi students as IT professionals. They have already started to commission their views. Our Bangladeshi students can take this chance and hit the international job market in the IT field. There are lot of scopes of working and entering into the international market. Just we have to take proper initiatives. Bangladeshi IT professionals have a good demand in international IT job market, which has been proved by some of our BUET students.

7. Access to Information (A2I) Programme: Access to Information (A2I)

Programme at the e-Government Cell, Prime Minister's Office of Bangladesh, launched with technical assistance from UNDP, aims to ensure the appropriateness of new initiatives and programmes for ICT for Development within the context of national priorities. A fundamental government activity is providing information and services aimed at improving the social and economic welfare of its citizens. Bangladesh faces several obstacles for the effective delivery of public services. Widespread outdated manual processes, resistance to change by civil service staff and a lack of transparency frustrates citizens in their attempts to avail of government information and services.

The objective of the project is to increase transparency, improve governance, and reduce the time, difficulty and costs of obtaining government services for under-served communities of Bangladesh. This is to be achieved by a. Strengthening existing e-services and launching a second generation of integrated, inter-operable e-government applications; b. Sensitizing government officials, training service providers and expanding digital literacy among the general public; c. Forging strong policy and strategy links to ensure implementation of needed legal and regulatory changes in support of the project and d. Promoting innovation in the delivery of e-services.

7. Conclusion

The growth and status of e-governance varies from country to country regarding degree of their preparedness that relates to availability,

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accessibility and the nature and level of use of e-governance tools by the civil servants in respect of providing services at the needs and ease of citizens. The members of the Bangladesh Civil Service show considerable strengths for e-governance in respect of their interest and adaptability to new technologies, also in respect of their levels of awareness and attitude towards e-governance. It is also true that use of ICT by the civil servants is often locked up with word processing and other elementary applications. Hence it may be concluded that robust training and motivational program can erect a brilliant supply side for e-governance service delivery in Bangladesh.

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