Chapter 13

E-Governance Preparedness of Public Bureaucracy in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, there is an undeniable wave of awareness about e-governance at present. Therefore, it is high time that government prepare itself in terms of implementing e-governance in order to cope with the requirements of the fast changing global environment. As bureaucracy is one of the most vital pillars of government, it is imperative that it is well prepared to face the upcoming challenges of technological boost. This chapter assesses the preparedness level of bureaucracy from the perspective of e-governance implementation. Analysis of primary data reveals that the frequency of computer and Internet usage for official activities is also very low. Most of the officials do not have any formal ICT training, and those who have such training have covered only very elementary aspects. The overall readiness in terms of technical skills is found to be unsatisfactory. Existing laws, rules, and regulations are found to be very insufficient for smooth implementation of e-governance in Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of governance has evolved with the change in the role of the governments along with the increased participation of other stakeholders like market, civil society, NGOs and above all, the citizens in the overall policy formulation as well as implementation. Although primarily this phenomenon emerged in developed countries, 'governance' has become a key agenda even in the developing world as a result of direct and indirect forces of globalization. The advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has added new dimension to the governance arena and the concept of e-governance (electronic governance) has gained much focus in the dis-

course of governance. Bangladesh is no exception to the global trend of inclination towards ICT and e-governance has become an area of concern within the country of late.

The significance of 'e-governance' seems to have been identified by the state actors including the political leaders and bureaucrats along with the non-state counterparts. Now that the important stakeholders have consensus about the indispensability of e-governance from a normative viewpoint, it is equally important that actions are taken in accordance with well conceived short-term, medium-term and long-term action plans (Hoque, 2009). To materialize such plans, all the stakeholders need to be well prepared, and the bureaucracy is one of them. The e-governance readiness of the bureaucracy has got significant implication as far as the success of e-governance initiatives is concerned.

It is very important to realize that e-governance is not only a means to increase administrative efficiency but also a tool to enhance democracy by ensuring the citizens' participation in the policy making process. It also has to be recognized that technology is only a means to an end where the 'end' is citizen welfare by an improved governance mechanism. The preparedness of e-governance is a multifarious phenomenon that includes social, cultural, psychological, economic and legal aspects along with the most commonly perceived aspect of technology.

There is an undeniable wave of awareness about e-governance in the polity of Bangladesh at present. This awareness is, at least partially, motivated by one of the predominant political agenda of 'Digital Bangladesh' of the present government in power.[1] In spite of this 'wave' there is a common feeling among the conscious citizens that the manifestation of the vision is not clear to people, including the politician**s** and even the bureaucracy. Now, bureaucracy is the functioning machine that helps materialize the visions of the political executives of the government. No matter how sincere a political vision is,

if the bureaucracy is not involved in the process of policy formulation and implementation properly, the success of vision will be at stake. Therefore, it is imperative that the preparedness of the bureaucracy in terms of e-governance is assessed properly. Since the field level bureaucracy has a greater opportunity to interact with the citizens than the central bureaucracy, the preparedness at the field level is no less important than that of the central bureaucracy. An objective analysis of the situation in this regard will definitely provide invaluable insights about what needs to be done to materialize 'e-governance' on a priority basis.

Against the backdrop of significant advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and extensive globalization, e-governance is an issue on which all the stakeholders have a consensus to adopt. In spite of some success in this area there is no space for Bangladesh to be complacent. Achievement of true e-governance does not seem to be an easy task in the face of myriad of problems to embrace.

Although the government's ICT infrastructure at the Ministry/ Division level has significantly improved over the years, the inadequacy of ICT logistics in many government offices has been a concern of the researchers. A 2008 study by SICT (Support to ICT) programme found that 24% of the Departments, Corporations and Commissions have no PCs in their offices. The offices at the Ministry/ Division level generally all have Internet access shared over LAN. Internet connectivity at lower levels is sporadic. There is no government wide network yet in place - so government offices have to rely on Internet to relay data and messages. (BEI, 2010)

The existing policy and legal framework does not yet encompass a comprehensive guideline about e-governance implementation. Currently the e-Government policy framework is largely being driven by the ICT Policy, 2009 and the ICT Act, 2009. The present policy framework does not deal with some important issues. Few of such issues are, among others, technological

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