

Chapter 5

Framework of E-Governance at the Grass Roots Level

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ABSTRACT

E-government theories are prevailing in a variety of formats and concepts around the globe, nations, and institutions, but there are not many examples to emulate in terms of developing a comprehensive framework of e-governance system at the outer periphery of the government tiers. This research would like to carry out a comprehensive analysis on various theories built around the e-governance perception, but the prime focus will be devoted to the penetration of e-government system, particularly at the grassroots. To narrow down further, the study will conduct analytical observations in a few developed, developing, and transitional economies. Furthermore, to be more concise, the research will specifically focus on various e-government implementations at the grass roots that penetrated the lowest tier of the governance system for community empowerment and knowledge enhancement. Before conclusion, it will try to put forward prospective research agenda, including the framework of a future e-government system at the local government level.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, e-government refers to the utilization of modern technology resources such as Internet, mobile and similar technologies to improve the functioning of the government. It is an attempt to improve the political and social environment and to drive a fundamental transformation in the ways in which functions are performed. It has been observed that these e-services provide better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, and at the same time more efficient government management. Furthermore, the resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater governance, decrease in the time and effort, growth in revenue, and increased cost reductions. (Rajagopalan & Vellaipandiyam, 2013).

Despite the popularity, potency and precision of electronic form of government (e-Government), it is yet somehow remain in uncharted territory for many countries in terms of implementing e-governance

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at the lowest tier of the governance system. In theory it is known as the local government in almost all countries, and in practice the lowest tier of any governance system always lack of proper incentives, adequate resources, satisfactory management and mainly any standardize framework (Zwahr & Finger, 2004; Das & Chandrashekhar, 2006; Malhotra, Chariar, Das & Ilavarasan, 2007; Gessi, Ramnarine & Wilkins, 2007).

The nature and characteristics of e-governance predominantly depend on numerous parameters across the society, culture, economy, politics and geographies, but researchers in most cases are found to be engaged towards achieving pre-conceived outcome. However, the good point is that many nations have taken ICTs as their thrust sector for many years, involving patronization from the highest authorities of their countries. Moreover, global organizations like, World Bank, United Nations including their sub-agencies, and institutions like United Nations University, Center of e-Governance Research of renowned universities and research institutes, and others have been conducting researches exploring aspects of promoting e-government theories and practices around the globe for quite a long time. But, surprisingly till date most of the e-government programs in the country of implementation, or e-government research at the research institution could not be taken as comprehensive. Foremost, many of them could not come out as a major accomplishment (Bovaird, 2003; Das & Chandrashekhar, 2006; Malhotra, Chariar, Das & Ilavarasan, 2007).

At the current global context, grass roots development is the prime concern of governance that can be addressed by imbibing participatory approaches. In the rural context, the development initiatives should strive to improve the quality of life of the marginal groups and at the same time, involves use of physical, financial and human resources for economic growth and social development of the rural economies (Burkey, 1993). Furthermore, the term rural development also represents improvement in quality of life of rural people in remote regions. As per Chambers (1983), rural development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, especially, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. In this aspect, Singh (1999) defines rural development as a process leading to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of rural people, especially the marginal poor. Also, the process of development in a country is to be aided by its governance. Hence, the goal of governance should be to develop capacities that are needed to realize development that gives priority to the grass roots community and creates needed opportunities for employment and other livelihoods (The World Bank, 1992; Mukherjee & Sahoo, 2010).

Governments throughout the world are in quest of finding novel ways to deliver public services more efficiently and effectively to reach the people at large. Incorporation of electronic form of governance (e-governance) in the local governments tier is an option widely discussed, although the expectations often vary. They vary in nature, culture, practice, habits and habitations among communities, regions, states and nations. For example, some foresee service delivery costs to be reduced, many expect for equitable stipulation of public services and others anticipate better planning across a geographical boundary. Various social motivations and political commitments motivations may also be reasons for the change as well (Rahman, 2009).

Moreover, due to non availability of any accepted e-governance framework (this may raise another elaborated dimension of research), some countries and agencies of implementation are yet at the stage of simulation or at stages of experimentation or at state of confusion, even after years of successful operation of e-government system in many countries. Countries in the developing and transitional economies are major victims of this situation, as most of the time they just try to replicate an established system in a country or try to simply manipulate on their own without enough researches in this aspect or try

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