E-Governance in Bangladesh Challenges and Problems

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Introducing e-governance in Bangladesh is a public demand to ensure good governance, corruption-free government, simplification of government functions, maintaining transparency and accountability of the government and effective delivery of public services at the people's doorstep. The demand also relates to decreasing the gap between the government and its citizens and ensuring some fundamental rights (right to information, freedom of speech and expression) of the people. One must not deny the fact that there have been some commendable initiatives taken by the present government. But it is also true that the citizens have not got the real benefit of e-governance yet. Thus this article will be focused on the challenges for the government to establish e-governance in Bangladesh.

Corruptions

Corruption in the public sector has significantly fallen in Bangladesh once it tempts to adopt electronic system in its many working areas. A survey in India shows that the states, where e-governance has been established even partially, the corruption rate has dramatically come down. The survey found that in Kolkata and Mumbai, due to adoption of e-Governance, the corruption rate declined, in some of the public sector organizations, to 19 per cent and 18 per cent compared to 51 per cent and 38 per cent respectively in 2000. In Bangladesh, computerization of Railway Reservation System, black-marketing of tickets has significantly gone down. Thus many government officials are very reluctant to introduce e-governance as this will stop the source of their black money.

Poverty

Internet access is too expensive for the poor in developing countries like Bangladesh. The setup cost becomes too high in suburb areas in Bangladesh. Installing the necessary telephone lines needed for internet or email access is equally unaffordable in most poor countries. It is also very expensive to gain internet access in Bangladesh. It is seen that it costs about BDT-25 per hour in cities and BDT-150 per hour in rural areas.

Technical Illiteracy

There is general lack of technical literacy as well as literacy. Large portion of our people are illiterate. To make them technically literate first of all we have to educate them. Government has realized this and introducing computer education compulsory. They are even thinking it to be introduced in Primary school. If this can be realized then people will get the technical knowledge to get the government services online.

Resistance from Government Officials

The psychology of government servants is quite different from that of private sectors. Traditionally the government servants have derived their sustenance from the fact that they are important repositories of government data. Thus any effort to implement Documents Management and workflow technologies or bringing out the change in the system is met with resistance from the government servants.

Language Barrier

The potency of English on the internet tightens the access of non-English-speaking population. It is found that of all the web pages in the world, about 84 percent are in English followed by 4.5 percent in German, 3.1 percent in Japanese, 1.8 percent in French, 1.2 percent in Spanish, 1.1 percent in Swedish, 1 percent in Italian and less than 1 percent in all other languages. Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over these communication channels, computers and the internet are quite useless in villages, and the use of local languages does little to alleviate the problem due to the poor literacy level mentioned earlier. Even the government generated contents are still in English. We should realize that if contents are written in Bangla it will be more accessible and effective. So, all the government websites should have dual languages English for the international visitors and Bangla for native visitors.

Unawareness

There is general lack of awareness regarding benefits of e-governance as well as the process involved in implementing successful Government-to-Citizen, Government-to-Government and Government-to-Business projects. The administrative structure is not geared for maintaining, storing and retrieving the governance information electronically. Even if some government services are getting online, these are not getting noticed by the citizen as these services are not promoted in the main stream media. Government should launch awareness program for the citizen to avail these services online.

Impediments for the Re-Engineering Process

This is one of the most important aspects of challenges. Sometimes digitalize the manual process into digital process does not help rather create obstacles. And most importantly, the aim of the digitalization is not just doing the same thing electronically, rather doing the same thing in more smart way. That is why; implementation of e-governance projects requires lots of restructuring in administrative processes, redefining of administrative procedures and formats which is sometimes very difficult and challenging. Government should hire experts and domain specialist to do the process re-engineering job.

Concluding remarks

It can be said that e-Governance is the key to the "Good Governance" for the developing countries like Bangladesh to minimize corruption, provides efficient and effective or quality services to their citizens. But we find that e-government preparation in Bangladesh is still in its primary stages. It has not yet fulfilled what actually the time demands due to technical, infrastructural, and political obstacles. A well-coordinated effort of political leadership, bureaucrats, and private entrepreneurs could surely facilitate the desired development in the ICT sector. This will help accelerate the implementation and presence of e-government in Bangladesh **CJ**