E-Guarantee Government Services-Sakala

Dr. S.V. Kulkarni
HOD and Associate Professor,
Department of Political Science
C.S.B. Arts, S.M.R.P. Science and
G.L.R. Commerce College, Ramdurg 591123
Karnataka

Abstract

The ICT-blessed e-governance is transforming public administration systems worldwide and forcing a paradigm shift. E-governance renders a new way and style in each and every aspect of public administration. It brings about changes in the structure, functions, and processes of public service delivery, ushering transformation in the system through effectively connecting, engaging, and streamlining the relations among government, businesses, citizens, and other relevant stakeholders. Irrespective of certain obvious limitations and challenges. The purpose of this paper is to examine the challenges encountered in e-government implementation, as well as the potential opportunities available in the context of Karnataka State.

Keywords: Service delivery, Sakal, Karnataka, Public Administration

Introduction

Good Governance is a concept that has recently come into regular use in political science, public administration and, more particularly, development management. It appears alongside such concepts and terms as democracy, civil society, popular participation, human rights and social and sustainable development. In the last decade, it has been closely associated with public sector reform.

When we hear the term government services, a picture of piles of paper, long queues and procrastinating officials automatically crops up in our minds. It is true that as compared to the other countries, India is quite late in getting into the e-governance ecosystem. But, one must not forget that India is a huge country and we are talking about serving a population of more than 1 billion and other entities involving multiple agencies, stakeholders/entities catering to

over 35 languages and 150 dialects. Thus, implementing e-governance projects in India poses a greater challenge, but we are catching up. It has been recognised world over that good governance is essential for sustainable development, both economic and social. The three essential aspects emphasised in good governance are transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the administration. "Citizens' Charters" initiative is a response to the quest for solving the problems which a citizen encounters, day in and day out, while dealing with the organisations providing public services.

A visit to the government departments is a nightmare; it is characterized by a lot of paper work, long queues, bureaucracy, cramped spaces and a lot of frustrations. With the growing demands of citizens and changing global rules and regulations, governments are under pressure to deliver at the right time and quality. Governments are trying to tackle the demand by re-engineering their processes and eventually ICT play a role in the proposed solution. ICT properly used, ICT has the potential to empower people to overcome development obstacles, address social problems, and strengthen democratic institutions. However, for a country to gain from the benefits of ICT, technology must be implemented and used effectively. The transformation to use of ICT to provide services by government; e-government is slowly gaining ground across the world.

E-Governance is an important innovation for enhancing good governance and strengthening the democratic process and can also facilitate access to information, freedom of expression greater equity, efficiency, productivity, growth and social inclusion. Successful e-government initiatives can have demonstrable and tangible impact on improving citizen participation and quality of life as a result of effective multi-stakeholder partnerships. African governments need to develop policy frameworks, supported by legislation for e-Governance, that are linked to strategic development objectives.

Governments bear the role and responsibility of targeting individuals, communities and the organisations of civil society with information and knowledge. The objective is to create the conditions for the empowerment of individuals, communities and the civil society. Initiatives in the empowerment of individuals, communities and the civil society can be classified into the following generic areas:

* Enabling participation in the information society;
* Creating the infrastructure for the information society;
* Fostering a sense of citizenship and cultural identity using ICTs.

Electronic Governance (eGovernance) offers an opportunity for governments to re-invent themselves, get closer to the citizenry and forge closer alliances and partnerships with diverse communities of interest, practice, expertise, conviction and inter-dependence within the context of national development agendas.

Open Government and Citizen Access to Information & Knowledge

Citizens the world over demand that governments be more open in their interaction with the civil society. Access to information and knowledge about the political process, about services and about choices available, is a characteristic requirement in all good governance systems.

- A more informed citizenry is in a better position to exercise its rights, play its roles, carry out its responsibilities and define its relationships to others; and
- Citizens as consumers expect to be involved in the process of securing services to suit their needs, and to receive a higher standard of 'customer care' from government.
- Access to information is both a consequence, and a driver of, the digital revolution.

Sakala brushes the cobwebs off government offices

Right to Public Services legislation in India comprises statutory laws which guarantee time bound delivery of services for various public services rendered by the Government to citizen and provides mechanism for punishing the errant public servant who is deficient in providing the service stipulated under the statute. Right to Service legislation are meant to reduce corruption among the government officials and to increase transparency and public accountability. Madhya Pradesh became the first state in India to enact Right to Service Act on 18 August 2010 and Bihar was the second to enact this bill on 25 July 2011. Several other states like Karnataka, Bihar, Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand have introduced similar legislation for effectuating the right to service to the citizen.

The Karnataka government is doing something phenomenal for the common man whose life has never been easy in government offices. The common citizen often had to go through the rigmarole of knocking the doors of various government departments to get his

rightful job done. It's always been a daunting task when he had to approach the Revenue department for getting a caste or income certificate, or when he had to approach the urban local bodies before building a house. It's no brainer that his work often got delayed, neglected, or worse rejected without any reason.

Sakala, which means 'in time or good time', is the citizen charter scheme which was recently launched and has hogged the limelight of Bangalore. This scheme was initiated on a pilot basis in four taluks including Jayanagar by bringing 151 civil services under the citizen charter scheme. Consequently, it will be flourished to all the districts in Karnataka.

Sakala has created a smile on people's face by making most of their legal tasks easier and in a jiffy. Likewise, a person under the Sakala scheme will be issued with a birth certificate in just three days. The main aim behind the initiation of Sakala is to deliver services to the citizens in a stipulated time. This policy was applied to 57 government departments which will be servicing the common man.

The launch of Sakala has given a hope to people and the senior officials feel that this was one of the favorable changes seen among the subordinates. A survey was conducted on the success of Sakala and it was found out that 87% citizens were benefited with this policy.

Talking about the people's usage of this policy, there have been calls to Sakala from faraway districts like Bidar, Belgaum and Bijapur. The authorities received about 2,773 calls which were related to BBMP Bangalore works, issuing of ration cards by the food and civil supplies department and the issues related to the revenue department.

Initially the launch of the Sakala scheme got a cold response from the public as the people were not aware of its uses completely and had a misconception about it. People were reluctant to avail offers from the Sakala like plan approvals for residential buildings, even though the constructions were on full swing. However, the BBMP officials are now taking initiatives to make the citizens aware of the Sakala services.

Bye to babugiri? Law promising to revolutionize public service delivery must be pushed through

Public service delivery looks poised on a groundbreaking cusp. At a meeting chaired by the PM, the Union cabinet approved The Right of Citizens for Time-Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011. Yes, the title is a bit of a mouthful. But the occasion is suitably momentous. When passed, this legislation might just remind India's ramshackle, unresponsive bureaucracy that to be accountable doesn't just mean to be accountable to administrative or political superiors. The core accountability of a democratic state is, by definition, to its citizens.

The proposed law will require every public authority to publish a citizen's charter specifying its obligations, including information about goods and services to be provided, the individual responsible for the same, and the time limits for delivery. Every public authority will also designate a grievance redressal officer and an aggrieved citizen can expect this officer to provide a remedy within 30 days. The babus found guilty of causing the grievance will have to cough up a penalty of Rs 250 a day, subject to a maximum of Rs 50,000. If this is implemented properly then from the garbage piling up or the street lights going dim in one's neighbourhood, to delays in passport verification, property registration and pension delivery, our plaints will get a time-bound hearing.

The standing committee that examined the Bill had concluded that the Centre has the power to promulgate it under the concurrent list, as long as the states have independence in implementation. Still, it will have to be properly integrated into existing grievance redressal mechanisms - which exist in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act as much as in the Karnataka Public Services Guarantee Act and the Madhya Pradesh Right to Public Services Act - and proposed ones like Lokpal and Lokayukta laws.

Citizen-centric approach on its journey to improve the services for citizens, the government has undertaken several successful e-governance initiatives such as MCA21 (to improve the speed and certainty in the delivery of the services of Ministry of Company Affairs), online submission of income tax returns, Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) etc. These e-governance projects have drastically improved the quality of citizen services. Biswajeet Mahapatra, Research Director at Gartner shares his experience. He recently renewed his passport and was surprised to see a drastic improvement in the services."Nowadays, to get a

passport, the citizens do not have to wait in long queues. The process can be done online, which has reduced the time of getting a passport from months to days," Mahapatra observes.

Main benefits of Sakal are

1. Cost reduction and efficiency gains (Tapscott, 1996; Amit and Zott, 2001; Malhotra, 2001)
2. Quality of service delivery to businesses and customers
3. Transparency, anticorruption, accountability
4. Increase the capacity of government
5. Network and community creation
6. Improve the quality of decision making
7. Promote use of ICT in other sectors of the society

Aim of Sakala

The main aim of the introduction of Sakala was to cater to various services like acquiring certificates, obtaining land record extracts, building plan approvals and others. All of these activities consumed a lot of people's time and in order to curb that, The Karnataka Guarantee of Services Act – Sakala was introduced. This will guarantee the delivery of citizen services in a short span of time.

Awareness of Sakala

To make people aware of these services the government is planning to introduce an online application system for Sakala services from next month. This will be done by making the citizens and the officials aware about the system's functioning. This scheme will also be equipped with many other services like the social security pension schemes. Public meetings will be held in each of the assembly constituencies to make people aware about the services with a workshop being held for all the 198 corporators of Bangalore.

Sakala will be made more user-friendly and the helpline numbers will be increased to provide more services.

The launch of Sakala

Sakala will be live online in a month's time in order to cater to the services based on the complaints by people. Apart from the helpline for queries related to Sakala, a non-Sakala helpline will also be set up for any public grievances. Since it is the beginning, the overall pace of the people's response is lower than what was expected. This is due to the unawareness of Sakala amongst the public.

In order to cater to more services the government has decided to introduce more number of services at a faster pace. It is also decided that the RTI (Right to Information) will come under Sakala from the end of this month. Another service which is on the way to be included other than the death and birth certificates is the pension service. Currently the total numbers of services included under Sakala are 152. Services like FIRs, caste certificate, income certificate, driving license, vehicle registration, enrolment of children in Aganwadi Centres, Grant of Trade Licence and Building plan approval from municipal bodies, water supply and underground drainage connections from Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Registration for schools, opening new Pre-University Colleges and others will be included too.

The area of concern in Sakala is the building plan approvals. Since the real estate in Bangalore is on a high rise, it is mandatory for Sakala to have major services related to real estate. The surprising fact was that there were only 58 applications of building plan approvals received for the sanction of house plan for up to 2,400 square feet area. Adding on to it Sakala also witnessed that there were only 58 houses which were under construction, which proves that not many people were coming forward to seek a building plan sanction approval under Sakala.

Sakal ushers in multiple advantages:

- It greatly simplifies the process of information accumulation for citizens and businesses.

- It empowers people to gather information regarding any department of government and get involved in the process of decision making.

- Sakal strengthens the very fabric of democracy by ensuring greater citizen participation at all levels of governance

- Sakal leads to automation of services, ensuring that information regarding every work of public welfare is easily available to all citizens, eliminating corruption.

- This revolutionizes the way governments function, ensuring much more transparency in the functioning, thereby eliminating corruption.

- Since the information regarding every activity of government is easily available, it would make every government department responsible as they know that every action of theirs is closely monitored.

- Proper implementation of Sakal practices make it possible for people to get their work done online thereby sparing themselves of unnecessary hassles of traveling to the respective offices.

- Successful implementation of Sakal practices offer better delivery of services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, better management, greater convenience, revenue growth, cost reductions etc.

Furthermore, introduction of Sakal brings governments closer to citizens. So much so that today it becomes extremely convenient to get in touch with a government agency. Indeed, citizen service centers are located closer to the citizens now. Such centers may consist of an unattended kiosk in the government agency, a service kiosk located close to the client, or the use of a personal computer in the home or office.

How to use Sakala?

There are official sites explaining on how to use Sakala. The instructions are given in the regional language with a tagline stating 'Karnataka Guarantee of services to citizens systems'. The instructions are given in the form of slides wherein the first slide has been

explained with all the types of services which are offered. The next slides tell them about the categories and the listed services. For any assistance the phone numbers are mentioned along with cheque services and a helpline number along with the gallery. The website is maintained by the government officials.

The much acclaimed 'Sakala,' e-governance scheme launched by the previous BJP regime and continued by the present Congress government in Karnataka headed by Siddaramaiah has bagged the national award under the category "outstanding performance in citizen centric service delivery" for the year 2013-14.

More than 250 services have been covered under the scheme, which has already caught nation-wide public awareness with several State Governments sending their team of officials to study its performance in Karnataka.

Challenges of Sakal are identified as follows:

1   IT Infrastructural weakness

2   Lack of knowledge about the e-government program

3   Lack of security and privacy of information

4   Lack of qualified personnel and training courses

5   Culture differences

6   Leaders and management support

7   Lack of policy and regulation for e-usage

8   Lack of partnership and collaboration

9   Lack of strategic plans

10   Resistance to change to e-systems

11   Shortage of financial resources

Our nation is taking a big leap on the e-Governance front with a number of innovative e-Governance projects. These e-Governance projects closely connect the government and citizens on the digital platform and also improve the interfacing between the government and industry. Some of the high-profile e Governance projects include 31 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs), Aadhaar-the unique ID project and Integrated service delivery framework. This year, India has registered over two billion e-Governance transactions (as per eTaal) with

about 100 million internet users. And with more projects in the pipeline, the benefits of e-Governance are sure to reach more people across the country in the coming years.

Conclusion : -

Karnataka made huge strides in the field of e-Governance with proactive policies. State's e-Governance policies envisage speed and transparency in governance and strive for improvement in the quality of life for the common man. The vision of the State is to utilize IT for effective and transparent governance through an integrated e-Governance framework.

Government forms the backbone of a community. Public welfare is the key agenda of any sane government, be it socialist, capitalist or otherwise. It has to ensure that the benefits reach the needy. However much this sounds simple, it surely isn't. The state needs to run its affairs in a transparent and efficient way to reach and be reachable to its citizens. Sakal has the ability to lend the required efficiency and transparency. The right blend of political will and technology is what it takes to make Sakal a success.

References

1. Backus Michel (2003). E-governance and developing countries;Introductions and examples.Research Report, No.3. April, www.ftpiicd/org/research/reports/pdf.

2. Bajpai, Nirupama and Radjou Navi (2000). Rising global competitiveness of Tamil Nadu's IT industry. Economic and Political Weekly, 36(6): 449-65.

3. Barthwal, C.P. (2003). E-governance for good governance, The Indian Journal of Political Science, 64 (3-4): 285-308.

4. Bhatnagar, Subhash C. (2003). E-Government: Building a SMART administration for India's States. In Stephen Howes, Ashok K Lahiri and Nicholas Stern (eds.), State level reforms in India, towards more effective government. New Delhi: Macmillan.

5. Biscon, T.K. and B. Gutek, (1984). Implementation of office automation. Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation. In Pandit (2002), Issues in Designing Information Systems for Government Organizations. Management in Government, 33 (4): 35-47.

6. Bonilla, Marcelo and Gilles Cliché (1994).E-governance and society in Latin America and Caribbean , Penang, Malaysia: South Bound Publication.

7. Jain, R.B. (2000) Bureaucracies in the Third World: A comparative analysis. In R.D. Sharma (ed.), Administrative systems in developing societies. New Delhi: Mittal.

8. Jhunjhunwawala, Ashok (2002). Challenge of rural connectivity for India. ASCI Journal of Management, 31, 40-47.

9. Joshi, Shard (2001).E-governance for India or Bharata. Financial Daily,The Hindu Group of Publications, Wednesday, August 01.

10. Ramachandriah, C. (2003). Information technology and rural development. Economic and Political Weekly, March, 22-29.

11. Sachdeva Sameer (2003). E-governance Strategy in India. Management in Government, 34 (4): 35-53.

12. Sangita, S.N. (1995a). Institutional arrangements for controlling corruption in public life: Karnataka experience. New Delhi Indian Institute of Public Administration, Indraprastha Estate, Ring Road.