

E-Governance in Controlling Corruption (An Indian and Global Perspective)

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Abstract

Generally, E-government means use of information and communication technology to carry out government operations such as delivering government information and services [1]. E-government is seen as a means in making government more efficient and transparent when it satisfies the needs of the customers [2]. E-Governance can also be defined as monitoring of various schemes formulated by the government, electronic service offered by the government to business people and the citizens, internal service made by one department of the government to the other department of the government. Even though India is a diversified country, still the E-Governance in India is increasing day by day which needs to be appreciated. E-Governance simply means providing ICT enabled services at various levels which includes rural and urban level. In developing countries like India, the problem is not the poverty which hinders the economic development but lack of good governance which completely eradicates poverty. It is always the roles and responsibilities which are associated with positions, not with the individuals; and the internal allocation of responsibilities is not subjected to public scrutiny. Seeing anonymity from the theoretical angle, it shows the impartiality of administration but in practical aspect, it is very difficult for the public to access the information which is also dealt by the public officials. So not making equally the information available to the public, gives rise to abuse and illegal exploitation of the public power for personal gain. Today "Control of Corruption" is seen as a key indicator of good governance. "Corruption" is one of the elements that perpetuate poverty, thereby hindering the economic development of a country. This paper brings out the contemporary understanding of how e-Governance measures are being used for controlling corruption, and some literature reviews are made in order to bring the linkage between "e-Governance" and "control of corruption".

For this paper, the type of research used by the researchers are based on theoretical approach which involves the reviewing of published works like researching through archives of public libraries, court rooms and published academic journals.

Keywords: Corruption, E- governance.

1. Introduction

1.1. Corruption - An Abstacle to the Development of a Country

Corruption has been cited as one of the most prevalent and persistent challenges in developing the economic growth and improving the quality of life of citizens across the globe. The World Bank's 2011 guide has recognized corruption as "one of the single greatest obstacles to economic development and social development". It also states that "through bribery, fraud and the misappropriation of economic privileges, corruption diverts resources away from those who need them most". Scholarship on corruption in the past decade has showed that corruption discourages investment, bars economic growth, changes the composition of government spending, usually prevents a nation's mission of reducing poverty and hinders improvement in the quality of life for the rural and poor segments of developing countries [3].

Mauro (1997) by using the country level economic data states that the amount of corruption is negatively linked to the level of investment and economic growth [4]. Although, the contention that bribery may be seen as payment of speed and efficiency for the rich, in countries with high levels of corruption the poor have to bribe even for access to basic services and they pay a high share of their income on bribes, income inequality is made worse [5]. From an economic angle, corruption arises from economic rent, which refers to "... the extra amount paid (over what would be paid for the best alternative use) to somebody or for something useful whose supply is limited either by nature or through human ingenuity" This author feels that getting economic rent by building artificial limitation are some source of corruption [6]. Kaufmann et al. (2003) identifies three drivers of corruption namely, Monopoly of power, where public officials have absolute authority to enforce rules, regulations and policies, Discretion given to the public authorities makes them to ex-

exercise it in a discretionary way, and lack of transparency & accountability in public official's act where they exploit it to a great extent [7].

Bhargava and Bolongaita suggest that the reason for financial crisis in Thailand, Indonesia and Korea was partly due to corruption. According to Tanzi, there are factors that contribute to affect the demand for corruption and others that affect the supply of corruption. The factors that affect demand include regulations that restrict or create artificial limitations of goods and services, certain characteristics of tax systems, spending decisions, and price controls resulting in goods at below market prices and other sets of factors that affect supply include rigid bureaucratic traditions, low level of public sector wages, weak or ineffectual penalty systems, institutional controls, lack of transparency of rule processes [8]. Two major factors that contribute to the growth of corruption are the low probability of discovery, and perceived immunity against prosecution. Dark government mechanism, preventing the citizens in using the information, complex rules and regulations are all the factors that lead to low chance of discovery.

A lack of transparency in the functioning of the government offices also makes the wrongdoers to burry completely corruption, thereby preventing it to be tracked. From the above discussion, it is been contented that the monopoly and discretionary power given to the officials are the main reasons for corruption. These powers given to the officials have to be limited whenever there is unlawful exercise of power given to them otherwise it will be very difficult to mitigate corruption. So these powers have to be dismantled to improve the transparency and accountability.

1.2. Ict In-Build E-Governance

E-Governance is the use of ICT in public delivery services, thereby increasing the participation of citizens, NGOs, companies and other institutions in governance system [9]. Information about services is published on a web site and citizens can interact with the site to download application forms for a variety of services which is followed by involving the use of ICT in the actual delivery of service such as filing a tax return, renewing a license, etc. E-Governance has been soiled in India way back in seventies, concentrating on the construction of in- house government applications in the areas of defense, economy, planning and Information Technology to manage data for intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration etc [11]. E-government means "... entails streamlining operational processes, transcribing information held by government agencies into electronic form, linking disparate databases, and improving ease of access to services for members of the public" (p. 256) [11].

Some of the factors that have influenced the E-Governance are income levels, strength of institutions and the commitment of the government to promoting e-government. Some socio-economic factors like economic development, technological development, and education also influences E-Governance to some extent. It has been found that the characteristics of public agencies like organizational complexity,

institutional capacity, and degree of leverage, administrative effectiveness and control of corruption are imperative for the development of E-Governance [12]. Electronic delivery of services which includes submitting internet applications and tax returns for computer processing can reduce corruption to a great extent by preventing the interactions with officials, speeding up decisions, and reducing human errors [13]. Just by using the information technology, to digitalize public services or functions, transparency and accountability cannot be achieved. What have to be done is that record keeping has to be made accurate and reliable. Public access to information on public sector performance supports the demand for accountability as an expected regulation.

1.3. Interrelation between E-Governance and Corruption

There is a link between e-Governance and Good Governance, particularly with reference to controlling the corruption. E-Governance can reduce corruption by following three ways namely, disclosing the corrupt activities, reducing citizen dependence on information by giving services at a fair price and by providing services through self-service, automated processes.

1.4. Role of E-Governance in reducing information inequalities:

With the increase in accessibility to internet, it is possible to make a website for each department especially for displaying the information related to the high value transactions. By this way, every transactions made, could be properly watched. So E-Governance is not just a method to increase the efficiency and process automation rather it connects a link between governments and governed. E-Governance is also not just about creating forums to display the public expenditure decisions, but it also empowers the citizen with information about everyday services. In e-governed societies, citizens can have access to interactive help routines or video films to make better decisions and there is no need of paying any price for basic information.

1.5. Linking E-Governance to corruption

The study by Shim and Eom, 2008, seeks to find the effectiveness of traditional corruption control measures and also the impact of e-Governance on corruption [14]. For traditional corruption control measures, the factors that are taken into account are establishment of professionalism, Institutionalization of high quality of bureaucracy and Law enforcement in society. E-Governance measures take into account two approaches namely, by enhancing the effectiveness of internal and managerial control and by enhancing government transparency and accountability. These two approaches are as good as other traditional approaches.

1.6. Role of E-Governance in Combating Corruption in Various Jurisdictions

Seoul Municipality - South Korea: One of the best approaches of e-Governance being used for fighting corruption is the OPEN system of South Korea. This system was initiated by the Seoul Municipality in order to enhance the on-line tracking of applications submitted by the individual for getting the licenses from municipality. The situation before 1998 was

that the whole country was flooded with corruption which made the Mayor of the City to take steps in combating corruption thereby resulting in increased transparency and administration and also enhanced public-private partnership. So the decision making processes and actions of public officials have made the system transparent to the public. One of the initiative for achieving transparency and accountability was E-Governance measures which involved the setting up of a portal naming it as OPEN-Online Procedures Enhancement for Civil Applications.

This portal functions in a user-friendly way by explaining to the users the elements of anti-corruption drive, educating citizens on rules and procedures, monitoring the process of the application for a permit or licenses. The OPEN system which was extended to 54 cities was a big success as in the first 13 months of the launching of the system, civil applications made by the people reached 28,000 and nearly 2 million people reached the OPEN website in the end of year 2000. From the Seoul's experience what has to be learnt is the understanding that reformers must look beyond individual instances of corrupt behavior and emphasize on the factors that allow corruption to flourish. The Success in Seoul was due to the strong leadership, participation of the citizens and mainly on the strategic usage of the technology.

Electronic Graft Management – Kenya: Kenya used E-Governance in a different way in order to reduce corruption. In 2001, the Information Technology Standards Association (ITSA) of Kenya started an Electronic Graft Management (EGM) pilot project, with the aim to enhance public awareness and increase public participation in fighting corruption. This project by the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority (KACA) resulted in success thereby soliciting information from the public on corruption incidents and following up on them.

1.7. Scenario in the Developed Countries

The common important features of e-government strategic plan of 6 developed countries were identified and reviewed. By reviewing e-government strategic plans of US, UK, Canada, Singapore, Denmark Selection of critical success factors, New Zealand, some of the important features which are recognized are, organization of steering committee for implementing the E-Governance plan effectively, emphasizing on the mission, vision and objectives which needs to be accomplished from E-Governance, determining the current situation and transaction strategies, selecting the critical factors for monitoring and evaluation, giving priority to the E-Government projects, construction of action plans for effective implementation of E-Governance, and the most important is determining the strategies for achieving all the aspects of E-Governance which includes designing the different models from an action point of view, development model, finding out the position of the stakeholder, determining the suitable infrastructure, and determining a reference maturity model of E-Government [15-20].

The federal states, like Russia and Mexico, and countries which are with vast subsidiarity traditions, such as Canada and the UK, regards it imperative to extend e-government au-

thority from central to sub-national level. Most of the OECD countries report that e-government may serve as a contribution to the economic recovery in 2009-2010, irrespective of the fact that they have decided to include it as a part of their crisis response and recovery packages. OECD survey also states that many of its member states have chosen this occasion to accelerate the speed of its implementation. In 2010, the United Nations published a global survey on leveraging e-Government at a time of financial and economic crisis, which emphasized on the monitoring, regulating, international cooperation, transparency and privacy [21].

1.8. E-Governance Initiatives in India

Dating back the history of E-Governance in India, Department of Electronic was established by the Government of India in 1970 followed by the subsequent established of National Informatics Centre (NIC) in 1977 where Government started emphasizing the 'Information, Communication and Technology'. The main focus on E-Governance was made after the establishment of NICNET in 1987 – the national satellite-based computer network. A National Task Force on Information Technology and Software Development was set up in May 22, 1998 [22]. Some of the important e-Governance measures implemented by the Union and State Governments in the last 10 to 15 years are discussed under the following categories:

1.9. Government to Citizen (G2C) initiatives

E-Governance is a very important tool in order to increase quality of government services to citizens, to bring in more transparency and accountability thereby, reducing the corruption and subjectivity, which increases the accessibility of these services to the citizens. Some of the initiatives taken by the union and state government in this regard are,

Computerization of Land Records (Department of Land Resources, Government of India): The Union Ministry of Rural Development based upon the recommendation made in the Conference of the Revenue Ministers of States/UTs in computerization of Land records selected 8 districts in 8 States for a pilot project on Computerization of Land Records, which was 100% centrally-sponsored [23]. One of the main objective of this scheme is to ensure the landowners to get a computerized copies of ownership, crop and tenancy and updated copies of Records of Rights (RoRs) on demand and in realizing low-cost and easily-reproducible basic land record data through reliable and durable preservation of old records, thereby ensuring accuracy, transparency and speedy dispute resolution [24].

Bhoomi Project in Karnataka: Online Delivery of Land Records: Bhoomi is a self-sustainable e-Governance project for the computerized delivery of 20 million rural land records to 6.7 million farmers through 177 Government-owned kiosks in the State of Karnataka [25]. The project offered farmers two critical services, one was procurement of land records and other was requests for changes to land title. This project was very successful because of its innovation and the Ministry of information technology has announced this project as a national model [26].

Gyandoot (Madhya Pradesh): Gyandoot is an Intranet-based Government to Citizen (G2C) service delivery initiative which was started in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh in January 2000 with the main objective of providing relevant information to the rural population and acting as an interface between the district administration and the people [27]. The services offered through the Gyandoot network include Daily agricultural commodity rates (mandi bhav), Income certificate, Domicile certificate, Caste certificate, Public grievance redressal, Rural Hindi email, BPL family list and Rural Hindi newspaper [28].

Lokvani Project in Uttar Pradesh: Lokvani is a public-private partnership project at Sitapur District in Uttar Pradesh which was started in November, 2004 and the project aimed to provide a single window, self-sustainable e-Governance solution with respect to handling of problems faced in land record maintenance and providing a mixture of essential services [29]. The services offered by Lokvani are availability of land records (khataunis) on the internet, online registration, disposal and monitoring of public grievances, information of other Government schemes, online availability of certain Government forms, online status of Arms License applications, GPF Account details of Basic Education teachers, information of work done under MPLAD/Vidhayak Nidhi, information relating to allotment of funds to Gram Sabhas under different development Schemes, information on allotment of food grains to Kotedars (fair price shops) and other useful information of public interest [30].

Project FRIENDS in Kerala: FRIENDS whose abbreviation are Fast, Reliable, Instant, Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services and this project is a Single Window Facility which provides citizens the means to pay taxes and other financial dues to the State Government. This project aimed at achieving front end computerized service delivery to citizens without waiting for completion of back end computerization in various government departments. Government order was issued to treat a receipt from a FRIENDS counter as equivalent to a receipt from the concerned government entity [31].

E-Mitra Project in Rajasthan: E-Mitra is an integration of LokMitra and JanMitra pilot projects which was launched in 2002 in 32 districts using PPP model. There are two major components – ‘back office processing’ which includes computerization of participating departments and establishing an IT enabled hub in form of a mini data centre at the district level and ‘service counters’ [32].

eSeva (Andhra Pradesh): This project was basically brought to bring a E-business to the Citizens especially for payment of utility bills but the success of the project was largely ascertained based upon the payment of the electricity bills [33].

So these are some of the projects taken by the government to improve the E-Governance mechanism in India, and all these projects had ensured a transparency and accountability in delivering the public services, thereby fighting the corruption to a great extent.

1.10. Government to Business (G2B) initiatives

The objective of G2B initiatives under e-Governance is to provide a legal environment to business, expedite various processes and provide relevant information to business. Some of the projects are,

E-Procurement Project in Andhra Pradesh: The project was introduced in 2003 in order to attain objectives such as to reduce the time and cost of doing business for both vendors and government, to realize better value for money spent through increased competition, to increase buying power, to provide a single-stop shop for all procurements and to allow equal opportunity to all vendors [34].

E-Procurement in Gujarat: The project was introduced by the State of Gujarat which aimed at establishing transparency in procurement process, shortening of procurement cycle, availing of competitive price, invoking confidence in suppliers and establishing flexible and economical bidding process for suppliers. The project was a big success because of its sustained capacity building and awareness generation [35]. MCA 21: The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has implemented the MCA 21 Mission Mode Project which aimed at providing corporate related services to all corporates and other stakeholders. MCA 21 has given a way for the stakeholders to approach the government for seeking the services in a more accountable and transparent way [36].

1.11. Government to Government (G2G) initiatives

G2G initiatives help in making the internal government processes more efficient but they do not contribute much in reducing the corruption as the other two initiatives does. The above mentioned projects of the government are a successful attempt in fighting against the corruption. So all the projects that are discussed in Government to Citizen initiative (G2C) and Government to business (G2B) initiative contribute in bringing accountability and transparency, thereby these initiatives reduces corruption to a great extent. In India, some emerging areas where e-governance can play a vital role in upliftment of the society are agriculture, allied services, education, health, sanitation, milk production and use of ICT in Energy conservation.

Conclusion and Outlook

Government is always in the process of finding solutions for reducing corruptions. E-Governance always prohibits the opportunities for arbitrary actions and enhances the chance of corruption discovery by having a proper track on the data. In this study, certain developed countries has been looked at, which makes us to a finding that common features of certain developed countries can also be recommended to developing countries like India. Most of e-government aspects reviewed in the paper have direct implications in combating corruption. One of the important pre-condition for a user-focused e-government is a built-in customer relationship management, which covers constant tracking and user's satisfaction and user needs. These days, the country has started to adopt a mobile technology in delivering the service and non-internet E-Government technologies. We really contend that better ICT infrastructure, greater individual and business ICT

usage are connected with the better control of corruption, as perceived by citizens.

There is some criticism in E-Governance which includes limitations in coping with the technology trends in digital signatures, cloud computing, mobile technology. In India, E-Governance is poorly implemented as we don't have a proper law which includes privacy laws and Data – protection laws as foreign countries do have [37]. One of the problems is that there are some outdated laws in India like Cyber laws and Telegraph laws which need to be repealed. Apart from these, one of the biggest challenges which India is facing is the lack of proper cyber security [38]. So there should be a proper Cyber Security policy in India otherwise it would create a big problem in the future [39]. The delivery of E-Governance services in India should be made mandatory. Even though E-Governance cannot cure mass corruption, effective implementation of E-Governance can reduce corruption to some extent particularly those for basic information and every day services. The e-Governance route to corruption control is certainly worth pursuing as it is been followed in various countries of the globe.

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