

Difficulties and Possibilities of Implementing E-governance in Bangladesh: A Critical Assessment for Justifiable Progress

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Abstract

E-governance is a much talk issue in the present days or even last two decade as a policy to removing corruption, ensuing involvement of mass people, providing eminence and smooth service at minimum costs, ensuring transparent and pro-people administration, improve government efficiency and better service and also for the accountability of government. Though, Bangladesh government took the initiative to appliance e-governance for last two decades but the implementation of e-Governance in Bangladesh is not up to the a remarkable till today and the government is not getting the full benefits of e-Governance yet for many reasons. This paper attempts to discover the activities and achievements of e-governance in Bangladesh as well as identify the obstacles and also propose some counteractive actions to implement e-governance. The observation result indicates that the main obstacles arise from the government policy, inadequate skilled and well-trained human resource, insufficient fund, lack of strategic plan, social and educational background of the nation, and many more. But the situation can be changed by taking necessary steps like political consensus, development of human resource, ICT penetration, and taking proper long-term plan implementing e-government in Bangladesh. After this, the paper suggests some ways to overcome the present situation and bringing it in the expected level of the implementation of e-governance in Bangladesh.

Keywords: E-governance, SMART Governance, Good governance, ICT, Bangladesh.

1.0 Foreword

To meet citizens' expectations of today's world, governments are under pressure to become more effective, integrated, responsive and faster ones. They are under pressure to operate and respond in a way that is adjacent to citizens' choice and voice. Nowadays, in many cases, they need to be as instant as always been ready to serve at the mouse-click of a citizen. This situation leaves no alternative for any government of the present world but to willy-nilly embrace new technologies. In the perspective of technological revolution along with globalization, around the world, governments are accommodating innovative efforts and necessary add-ons to confirm desired changes in the area of public administration to keep pace with newer expectations of citizens. No government in the present world can avoid such changes. Rather, they need to rethink as to how they should be organized from the perspective of the people. In this course, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being considered as new tools for the governments. Exploiting the potentials of ICTs governments are becoming electronic -which is known as „e-government“. However, introduction of e-governance not only involves changes to the systems, procedures, and processes of relevant services but also affects the ways and relationships in which citizens and business community, or the society as a whole, deals with government organizations. Government of Bangladesh has already started moving towards e-governance having its ambition to ensure better citizen services. However, with feeble socio-economic realities the country has to face many challenges, even in the very process of planning for development - i.e., in the process of identifying priorities when she struggles for fulfilling basic needs (like: food, shelter, health, education, pure drinking water, sanitation, etc.). In this context, transforming towards e-governance needs to answer many important questions; also, unavoidably needs to follow a goal-oriented plan of action. Besides, these sorts of steps need constant review and research support to achieve desired goals.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This paper is prepared to assess and meeting up the following objectives-

- To have a look on the present status of e-governance and e-government in Bangladesh;
- To appraise the achievements and the major hindrances to the implementation of e-governance in Bangladesh;

- To diagnose the existing problems and way out from it for the smooth operations of e-governance in Bangladesh.

1.2 Methodology of the study

This paper is prepared based on the both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through discussion with the government officials, project directors (access to information) and other related authorities in the different branch of government and non-government organizations. Secondary data were collected from extensive literature survey from different journals, conference papers, books, articles of newspapers and websites, etc. Finally the collected data is processed and presented in descriptive with its present status, future expectations, major problems and probable solutions to have the real scenario of e-governance of Bangladesh.

2.0 Concepts of E-government and E-governance

Electronic Governance is defined as the application of Information Technology to the processes of Government functioning in order to bring about Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) Governance Budhiraja (2002). That is why it is also called SMART governance. UNESCO defines e-Governance as: “Governance refers to the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs, including citizens’ articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations. E-Governance may be understood as the performance of this governance via the electronic medium in order to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to the public, and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities.” World Bank (2001) defined as the government owned or operated systems of information and communication technologies that transform relations with citizens, the private sector and/or other government agencies so as to promote citizens’ empowerment, improve service delivery, strengthen accountability, increase transparency, or improve government efficiency.

2.1 Three major Actors of E-governance

Mostly, the government, citizen and business concerns are the three main actors in the e-governance. Such as:

G2C (Government to Citizen)

This is the communication process of individual citizens with the government [3]. Payment of utility bills such as electric bill payment system using mobile phone is a common example of G2C. Another example of G2C is Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) website (<http://www.brta.gov.bd/index.php>). Any citizen can see the driving license exam’s result or download the driving licenses form using Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) website. Government should develop more website for all sectors of Bangladesh to involve the public to make the successful e-Governance.

G2B (Government-to-Business)

This is the interaction between central government and the commercial business sector to get the businesses information. This interaction may involves many reasons such as to establish corporate, NGOs or others commercial business or downloading different types of form. Most common example of G2B is corporate tax paying system to the government using National Board of Revenue website (<http://www.nbr-bd.org/incometax.html>) or applying for trade license from the government to run the business through internet using Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (<http://www.roc.gov.bd:7781/>) website.

G2G (Government - to-Government)

This is the non-commercial interaction between Government organizations, departments and authorities and other Government organizations, departments, and authorities. The example of G2G may be a request of allocation of budget by any department of the government. For example city corporation yearly budget depend on central government.

2.2 Stages of E-GOVERNANCE:

To implement and establish e-governance and achieve the targeted result the government must have to consider the different stages of e-governance. Universal e-governance has the following four stages-

Stages	Meanings
Information	In this phase the quality, usability and currency of the content determine the value of the e-government service.
Interaction	In this phase, the e-government provides some degree of online interaction thus the citizens can apply for job applications online.
Transactional	In this phase, government provides secure transactions with a high level of authorization through online process.
Transformational	In this transformational phase, the government or public services are made available online to stakeholders around the clock.

2.3 E-governance Outcomes/Results: Best Practices

If any nation can perfectly run e-governance surely it will be benefited by the following ways-

- ✓ It increased accountability and transparency;
- ✓ Ensure quick and smooth services with expected quality;
- ✓ Higher availability of public domain information;
- ✓ Higher dissemination due to automation;
- ✓ Increased both efficiency and effectiveness;
- ✓ Process Re-engineering– technology only a tool not panacea (solution/ remedy);
- ✓ E-governance create awareness among public servants;
- ✓ Facilitate public-private partnership model to work together;
- ✓ Enhanced access to ICT tools for citizens and mass people;

3.0 E-governance: Bangladesh Perspective

Now, e-governance is a very popular phrase in the development debates of Bangladesh. The term e-governance is known to the people by different names, for example, to the mass it is computer, to the academics it is e-governance, to the specialist it is ICT, to the students it is a discipline of computer sciences and to the politicians it is digital Bangladesh. The government realizes the strategic importance of ICT sector and had declared ICT a ‘thrust sector’ (Alam et al, 2008). Since the last national election of 2008, the term ‘Digital Bangladesh’ has become more popular in the nation.

3.1 Bangladesh E-government initiatives in public sector:

E-government initiatives taken and practiced by Bangladesh can be listed below but the list is getting bigger day by day--

- Automation of Internal Processes
- Electronic Birth Registration Systems
- Financial Management Systems
- Government Forms –Online application
- Hajj Web Site for the religious devotees
- MIS for Project Management and Transparency
- National Board of Revenue introduced e-taxation systems
- Personnel Database of different offices
- Railway, air and bus ticketing and booking
- E-recruitment and staffing process
- E-learning/ distance learning for the students

3.2 Private Services are as follows:

Beside the government private sector also plays an important role to develop and implement the government agenda –“digital Bangladesh” by providing the following services-

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer training • Email / Internet browsing • Mobile Banking • Photography • Compose and print • Scanning • Photocopy • Lamination • Phone call • Mobile money load • Mobile SIM selling • Nebulizer rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English learning content from British Council • Agriculture /Health/Law consultancy • Height and weight measurement • Knowledge services (Agriculture, fisheries & livestock) • Solar system management • Video show by multimedia projector • Money transferring • Online shopping- E-commerce • Online job application • Video conference (Skype) • Video recording and editing
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3.3 Our Expectations from implementation of E-governance:

In the Bangladesh context, the following can be the most direct gain that e-governance can bring to the country through implementing e-governance-

- Enhance the Transparency, Accountability and Efficiency of government: e-governance provides the right tools for monitoring of the government activities by its citizenry by allowing the government to follow predefined and transparent processes whose quality and efficiency are measurable.
- Greater decentralization of governance: e-Government systems make decentralization of government services and makes decentralized decision-making easier.
- Makes ICT relevant to the masses: e-Government systems make ICT relevant to the masses as its benefits gradually extend to citizens and communities throughout the country.

- Private sector development: e-governance systems allow for easy accessibility to government services and allow businesses to access government services on the fly thereby enhancing overall competitiveness of enterprises in a country.

3.4 Bangladesh's e-Govt. Successes at a glance

Think big, start small and grow fast is our vision. Though most projects till now have been pilot projects but we have got a remarkable success which can be listed below:

- About 4.5 million citizens visit administrative websites -DCs/per month;
- Over 78 thousand unbanked citizens (70% women) gained financial access as a result of mobile banking
- Over 35 thousand citizens (70% women) availed tele-medicine service;
- Over 45 thousand students and youth (70% women) received ICT literacy training;
- Over 1.4 million overseas workers registered electronically;
- Officials are motivating for empathetic (adopted) mindset instead of sympathetic consideration.
- Over 90% job recruitments is now processed through e-recruitment.
- More than 50% secondary and about 90% higher education admission, formalities and registration is being conducted in online systems.
- E-ticket systems are practiced by public and private transportation systems.

3.5 International/ Global recognitions and achievements

- Bangladesh wins (WSIS - World Summit on the Information Society) global ICT excellence award (WCIT) (September 2014);
- Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is receiving ICT Sustainable Development Award from International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretary General Houlin Zhao at the UN Headquarters in New York, 2015;
- Sajeeb Wazed Joy, information and communication technology adviser to the prime minister has been conferred upon "ICT for Development Award, 2016" in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the people of Bangladesh through implementation of "Digital Bangladesh" initiative.

4.0 Issues that act as the hinder to implement the e-governance

Implementation of e-governance in Bangladesh is not out of challenges and debates. In the study, the researchers have found the following problems which may act as the glitches to the implementation of e-governance in Bangladesh.

- Low level of ICT literacy and inadequate ICT training, lack of coordination, wide-spread of corruption, poor salary and unrecognized employees status are primarily act as the hindrance of implementing e-governance in Bangladesh.
- E-governance requires a significant amount of fund to be invested but as a developing country it sometimes becomes difficult to supply sufficient fund for such ambitious projects.
- Use of ICT in governance is expected to bring a revolutionary change in the functioning of government. But, it may be difficult to manage the change, if proper planning is not made in advance.
- Political stability is important for successful implementation of e-government in any country. But in Bangladesh this is yet to be achieved. For this reason, implementation and continuation of any e-government project suffer (Bhuiyan 2011).
- The quality of e-governance heavily depends on the skill, training and performance of human resources (Bhuiyan 2011). But in Bangladesh this is still in scarce state.
- Lack of uniform and consistent IT policy but it is essential for the proper implementation of IT in the government sector. It is one of the impediments of increasing e-governance in Bangladesh.
- Insufficient power supply, expensive internet connection and band width, social awareness and improper education are also create problem to implement e-governance.

5.0 Remedial Measures and Policy Implementation

To get the proper result and ensure good governance it is important to implement the e-governance in the governing systems for both public and private sectors. A number measure could be taken to overcome the challenges identified in the way of successful implementation of e-governance. Some of these are listed below-

- To get quick and remarkable success in this sector – massive publicity is necessary about its benefits and also establish an online complain center for the service seekers.
- Both public and private partnership is needed for the greater success and ensures the greater interest of mass people. Government and private organization should act jointly for its success. Creation of ICT job positions for each and every organization as a part of it.

- To flourish e-government in Bangladesh the proper ICT policy should be promulgated and these policies should be implemented consistently. Beside this, spread out the ICT education & training and ICT access for all is ensured.
- Proper training is needed to make the people skilled, efficient, knowledgeable and capable which is the key to e-government success. In all the relevant positions of the projects trained and intelligent personnel should be appointed to carry out e-government projects.
- Shortage fund is one of the most important impediments for such high capital intensive projects and the government may seek fund from donor agencies to fund such projects.
- ICT education in technical and vocational institute and private and public universities are to be spread (Alam & Hassan 2011). High rate of ICT penetration does not ensure a high rate of ICT literacy.
- Proper plan and ICT policy is important for the proper implementation of e-governance as a good plan act as a good stewardship. Without proper planning and preparation, failure is almost guaranteed.

Conclusion

By the blessing of e-governance, it is a real situation where people are getting all the government facilities round the clock that mean all interaction with the government can be done through one counter 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without physically waiting in lines at government brick-bound offices. Each and every citizen able to contact with the government through a website where all forms, news and other information will be available 24/7.

So, the term e-Governance is the effective and efficient use of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Internet, LANs and Mobile Phones to improve the activities of public sector organizations with a view to establish good and transparent governance and to promote democracy for any country. The final objective of e-Governance is to create good governance. Several hindrances like delay in project implementation, spiraling cost, financial feasibility and financial sustainability along with technical bottlenecks is also there but we should move forward to e-government.

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