

## E-GOVERNANCE: PROMISES AND CHALLENGES

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E-governance is much more than just a government website. E-governance is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote more efficient and cost-effective government, facilitate more convenient government services, allow greater public access to information, and make government more accountable to citizens. E-Government is to describe the e-democracy activities of government institutions. They are expressing "democratic intent." Their efforts make this one of the most dynamic and important areas of e-democracy development. The focus of e-government resources on services does not mean that e-democracy is not gaining increased attention in some governments. In fact, leading e-service governments are now at a point where they are exploring their e-democracy responsibilities more seriously. This paper describes the basic fundamentals of e-governance and the role of citizens in creating the e-governance environment.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic Governance is an emerging global phenomenon within public sector institutions and is a fast growing significant discipline within the field of public administration. It is the movement of governments online to deliver their services and programs and also to provide government information. It further interacts with the citizen and all this is done electronically. This results in the formation of new relationships between the citizen and the state. E-governance differs from e-government: E-government constitutes the way public sector institutions utilize technology to apply Principles of public administration and conduct the business of government. It is government using new tools to enhance the delivery of existing services. On the other hand E-governance includes the vision, strategies, planning, leadership and resources needed to carry this out it means the ways that political and social power are organized and utilized.

If we further penetrate within the concept of e-governance, e-democracy is also included in it. It deals with how the citizen interacts with government or influences the legislative or public sector process. It seeks to engage the citizen with governments and legislatures through the use of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). In this paper section 2 and 3 describe the promises of e-governance and their relation with e-government. In the section 4 and 5 features of e-democracy and their relation with e-governance are explained. In section 6, this paper describes the role of citizens to change the e-governance scenario and finally conclusion is given.

### 2. PROMISES OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-governance is about the ways in which public sector organizations might have to transform themselves because of the impacts ICTs are having on governments. The authors predict that the new ICTs will create change within government organizations as agencies and departments increasingly develop transactions with the citizen. The programs being developed are mainly about how government will deliver services to the citizen, not how to bring the citizen into the democratic or decision-making process.

As governments deliver more services online there will be a drastic shift in the willingness of citizens to use the various tools of e-democracy. This stream of thought contends that the development of e-governance will inevitably lead to e-democracy. The belief is that an online population busy using ICTs like the Internet in all aspects of their lives, will expect government itself to be more and more online, and it will have greater expectations from government such as speed of access to information and services, interactivity and security of information.

But simply because government engages in online activities with the citizen does not necessarily mean that mechanisms for e-democracy will follow. Many public servants see a number of administrative difficulties in doing even simple online consultations and consider that they are not ready for citizen participation.

### 3. E-GOVERNANCE VS E-GOVERNMENT

E-government and e-democracy comprise the two different branches under e-governance. For many years now e-governance has been coming into its own as a subject in the discipline of public administration. However, general discussion of e-governance and e-government as two distinct

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concepts has become blurred, and these terms are often used interchangeably in the current literature, with e-democracy laid to the sidelines. In a recent paper, Andrew Acland includes e-voting in his definition of e-government, apart from e-democracy, and reduces the problem of voting online to one of security, likening it to shopping online.

According to the United Nations' Public Economics and Public Administration Division and the American Society for Public Administration conducted a global survey, which broadly defined e-government as:

"including the use of all information and communications technologies from fax machines to wireless palm pilots to facilitate the daily administration of government. However, like e-commerce, the popular interpretation of e-government is one that defines it exclusively as an internet-driven activity that improves citizen access to government information, services and expertise to ensure citizen participation in, and satisfaction with the governing process." Although it speaks of e-government, the UN definition captures the essential role of e-governance and the evolving, new relationship of government with the citizen. E-governance results in the formation of new relationships with non-governmental organizations, citizens groups, unions, associations, volunteer groups, business, along with citizens and other levels of government. One aspect of the changing nature of this relationship is the capacity that citizens now have to access a wide range of services and information from all manner of organizations.

#### 4. E-DEMOCRACY

Clift describes and analysis E-democracy as referring to "how the Internet can be used to increase our democratic processes and provide increased opportunities for individuals and communities to interact with government and for the government to seek input from the bcommunity." Characteristics of the Internet which he claims smoothen e-democracy are those which provide opportunity to participate in debates as they happen. This e-participation is less limited by geography, disability or community networks, and further enhances the access to information and provision of input by individuals and groups who previously had not been included in these debates (2001).

According to the International Teledemocracy Centre in Scotland specializes in e-democracy. Their main goal is to strengthen democracy through the use of innovative ICTs to deliver improved democratic decision-making processes, thereby increasing citizen participation specifically through the use of electronic consultation and electronic petitions (Macintosh 2001). This is undertaken within a backdrop of the devolution of control for its own domestic legislation to the Scottish Parliament. The Centre takes its cue from the OECD study namely, a two-way relationship where citizens are given the opportunity to give feedback on issues.

Furthermore the Centre strives to promote a citizen/government relationship based on partnership in which citizens are actively engaged in the policy-making process.

#### 5. RELATIONSHIP OF E-DEMOCRACY TO E-GOVERNANCE

One of the propounders of e-government in Canada, the Centre for Collaborative Government, has made elaboration with the term 'e-governance'. It uses e-government to encompass all such electronic activities and programs, with e-democracy included as a 'growing' part of e-government. Terms such as 'digital government' and 'digital voice' have also come into use. E-democracy is treated more as a result of e-government rather than an equal part of the equation. The Centre's emphasis on the use of ICTs by government and elected officials often overshadows the real difficulties involved in online citizen engagement, which is presented as if it were merely an extension of more traditional consultation methods.

Gilles Paquet in relation to organizations, moving from centralized to distributed governance. In his view, "e-government presents a real transformation in democratic governance which also includes design, decision-making and service delivery capabilities. E-governance means a new processes of coordination made possible or even necessary by the advent of technology – and the spreading of online activities in particular. Consequently, e-government refers to an IT-led reconfiguration of public sector governance – and how knowledge, power and purpose are redistributed in light of new technological realities."

#### 6. ROLE OF THE CITIZEN IN CHANGING E-GOVERNANCE SCENARIO

Our representative form of democracy in Canada – as in other parliamentary governments around the world – has concluded in the development of specific practices on how to consult with the public on issues of the day and the development of legislation. Parliament and provincial legislatures create legislation through the Committee process of their respective assemblies. These Committees invite members of the public to submit briefs and comments on the bill being considered. In some instances, Parliamentary committees will travel across the country, holding public hearings to get input from professional groups and associations, non-governmental organizations, academics, and citizens groups and individuals with expertise in the specific subject of the proposed legislation. This process is also followed when the government releases White papers (legislative proposals) or Green papers (a discussion paper of the various alternatives the government is considering on a specific issue). In Canada they are generally announced in the Canada Gazette and details given on how to provide input. Ministers' staff and public administration officers

also ensure that the White paper or Green paper is circulated to people who should know about it and whose input the government is seeking. This is a very controlled mechanism run from the top. An important pieces of legislation, concerted efforts are made by the government in power to seek input from specific groups or allies of the legislation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Citizens are increasingly using the new ICTs to organize themselves so that their voices can be heard, as well as to develop tools to attempt to influence government policy and programs at the political and public administration levels. However, more fundamental questions are raised: Does the public want to be engaged in government, or do they only want the opportunity to make their views known every once in awhile? If governments do engage the public more frequently into public debate, how often do they do this and what subject matters should be considered priorities? What institutions need to be set up to make the wider transition to e-democracy beyond online voting and online consultations?

Although the ICTs may have the potential to strengthen but it is cleared that any significant evolution of e-democracy will depend on the desire and interest of citizens, rather than simply on computer access and literacy. A movement towards e-democracy would also depend on the type of programs that citizens, groups, or governments develop to stimulate online participation between the citizen and the government. Active participation is likely to be in proportion to the value that will be accorded the ICTs by citizens and institutions alike in relation to their own pursuits.

Finally it is concluded that, future of e-governance will be determined by the extent of the energy and practice from both government and the public sectors in the years to come.

The ICTs, if creatively utilized, could be a significant tool to address the democratic deficit and to expand e-democracy.

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