E-Governance - A Smart way to detect & handle Corruption

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Abstract

This paper explores and investigates the role of E-Governance as a smart way to tackle corruption by removing the middle man from between the Government and the citizens.

Corruption is there in the society from ages. Yes the degree of corruption has varied from time to time and today it is prevalent in all the spheres of life. There are a number of reasons why corruption is there. One is the inherent greediness and the other is due to compelling factors like rigid rules and regulations, discretionary power of the civil servants, red tapism, making choices between a number of visits to a government office or paying a babu some money and getting the work done on the same day etc. Another important reason in a developing country is the scarcity of resources, there is an imbalance in the demand and supply situation. If the supply is more and the demand is less then the chances of corruption are greatly reduced. But in a developing country like India the demand is more and the supply is less. In such a situation people adopt illegal means to get what they want. The illegal means include political pressures, money and muscle power etc. for example in the railways the demand of the seats / berths was and is always more than the available seats. In such a scenario that little bit of bribe works wonderfully. Earlier due to lack of transparency, computerization and networking people were at the mercy of the booking clerk. I am not saying that there is no corruption now but the discretion of the booking clerk had been reduced to a great extent because now the individual can see the numbers of seats are available on the screen or can book the seat by visiting the railway ministry site1.

In the developing nations like India corruption is prevalent in almost all the spheres of life. The form of corruption with which people are affected most is administrative corruption. Basic reasons of corruption are rigid rules and regulations, secrecy and lack of transparency, lack of accountability etc. These things lead to red tape and delays, which is a breeding ground for corruption. On one hand the red tape and delays are due to the tendency of our public servants not to take decisions and on the other hand we have those who are prepared to take even the
most illegal decisions if they get the right amount of bribe. Corruption is more prevalent in those government offices where there is maximum amount of government-citizen interaction.

The government has adopted a number of ways to control corruption but it has shown its ugly head at all the places from time to time. The judiciary has also helped in controlling corruption but a lot still needs to be done. E-Governance can be helpful in tackling corruption due to its inherent advantages like easier access and transparency. Let us now understand the concept and how it can be helpful in tackling corruption.

E-Governance as we all know is the use of Information and Communication Technologies by the government to improve and transform relations with citizens, industry, and other parts of Government. It helps in giving the citizens a choice of accessing information and utilizing the services of the government as and when they like rather than the usual office hours. It takes away the discretion of the government to give information and gives freedom to the citizens to access information according to their needs. It helps in bringing about a citizen-centred approach. It helps in putting the citizen at the centre of the services provided by the government. It helps in making the government – A SMART GOVERNMENT

- Simple
- Moral
- Accountable
- Responsive and
- Transparent

The basic aim of the paper is to project E-Governance as a tool, which can be helpful in controlling corruption.

**Simplification of government procedures:** The traditional form of government has very rigid and complex procedures, which are beyond the comprehension of the masses. This results in the people not understanding the procedures and falling victims to the corrupt and middleman. As there is discretion of the government servant in applying the procedures, there is arbitrary and unjust action in a large number of cases. The very process of making the services available on-line requires that the rule and regulations are reviewed and made simple. Standardization of procedures and rules and regulations will also be required in the whole country. The services and the required procedures will be On-Line in such a way that even a common man will be able to understand and access the service. The government would not like to be caught on a wrong foot
so the rules will have to be very simple and self-explanatory. In a majority of cases corruption is due to the fact that the common man is unable understand and interpret the procedures. Not only this even the government servants are not clear about a number of things and the result is a long delay in decision-making, which ultimately results in a corrupt practice. Simplicity and standardization will make procedures simple. So a common man will not fall prey to the corrupt. It will also deter a large number of people from a corrupt practice, as then all will be able to understand the correct procedure. In an E-Governance project started by Belandur gram panchayat in Bangalore Rural district has simplified the procedures and made the services available to the villagers in local languages. Due to the availability of software in local languages even ordinary citizens have experienced no problems in getting involved in the project. It has changed the way the Panchayat functioned. It has speeded up processes such as tax collection and property transfer and set off other developments besides tackling corruption.

In a survey conducted by the researcher in Chandugarh 90% of respondents felt that the procedures required getting the services from the government departments like Electricity, Water, Vehicle Registration etc. were complicated. They also felt that the employees themselves were not clear about the procedures. When asked if the officials gave them the required information 60% of the respondents said that officials were indifferent while 25% stated that the employees of certain departments were discourteous only 15% felt that they were helpful. 100% of the respondents felt that there is a need to simplify the procedures. 90% respondents felt that simplification of the procedures will result in controlling corruption.
Transparency: There is lack of transparency in most of the developing countries. In India the Official Secrets Act-1923 also threatens transparency. Transparency is one aspect, which has been highlighted by every party and every government but never implemented. The issue of transparency has also been has also been actively discussed in the media. Lack of transparency results in corruption. E-governance will require the government to put up all rules, regulations, and information, on-line, which will make the government more transparent. It will help in speeding up the government processes and make the government less corrupt. The Bhoomi Project of the Karnataka government is an example of Transparency leading to less corruption. In this project the 20 million land records of 6.7 million farmers have been computerized. The government delivers the land records on-line. This has made the records and procedures more open, reduced the discretion of the civil servants and also speeded up the process. Openness has also enabled the citizens to challenge arbitrary bureaucratic action.

In the survey when asked if the government officials were forthcoming in providing the information, 60% of the respondents felt that the officials were secretive most of the times. When asked whether transparency is required 90% said yes 78 % said that it would help in reducing corruption. 75% stated that providing the services through the websites would lead to transparency. They said E-Governance would help in bringing Transparency. 10% said that it would not have any effect on corruption. The remaining 15% were not aware of E-Governance.

Service Delivery: There is a lot of corruption in those offices where the government is providing service to the people. In the traditional form of government the citizens are at the mercy of the government servants and have to make various trips to the government offices. In order to avoid a number of trips a short way is adopted by the people—give bribe and get the work done. Even getting the form from the concerned government department means a lot of harassment. A lot of time is wasted first to get the forms and then deposit them. At time either the forms are not available of the concerned official is on leave or one is too busy to get the forms. If the number of forms available is less then the premium for getting the form goes up. E-Governance can be of a great help in this sphere. There are a number of government sites from where one can access the forms on-line and reduce the time taken to procure the forms. It also helps in reducing the cost of making the service available to the citizens. All government departments, which provide services to the people, can make use of E-Governance to tackle corruption. For instance the Delhi Government has a web site, which provides 'single window' for all the citizen’s information needs and queries regarding various public services of the Delhi Government, ranging from obtaining a
driving license to getting a marriage registration certificate made. The site provides all relevant application forms for downloading and printing. Provision of the services on-line by the government results in, people assessing the information as and when they require. There are similar sites of various Union Ministries and State governments like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat etc. In many E-Governance projects like the Bhoomi project of Karnataka, Land registration project of Andhra Pradesh, the Belandur E-Governance project the benefits include:

- A reliable and transparent system that the government and citizens can easily use;
- Speedy information—Less time to register and get information;
- Removal of the discretion of the civil servant as well as the middleman;
- Self Sustaining Model;
- More accurate revenue collections;
- Increased security, as documents are safe.

In the survey 90% of the respondents felt that the time taken in providing services is too long. They felt that the time for providing the services should be more flexible otherwise people would have to rely on the middleman to do the job.

Removal of Middlemen: In a majority of cases the middlemen earns more money than the producer. This results in corrupt practices and the producer not getting his due share. In this regard provision of virtual markets to the rural folk with the help of information technologies can be provided. The government as well as the private sector can tap the potential of E-Governance together. Following are some examples of the same: Under the Gyandoot Project of Madhya Pradesh there is a village auction site. It makes auction facilities available to farmers and villagers for land, agricultural machinery, equipment, and other durable commodities. One can put one's commodity on sale for a charge of Rs. 25/- for three months. The list of saleable commodities can be browsed for Rs. 10/-. The site eliminates the role of the middleman and provides a wider market to the producer. The other example is of E-Choupal, a project started by ITC. Under this project ITC has set up over 700 choupals covering 3,800 villages in four states — which include Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh — dealing with products ranging from Soya bean, coffee, aqua-culture and wheat. Last year it transacted business of over Rs. 80 crore through the E-Choupals all across the country. Both ITC and the farmers make a neat saving by bypassing the middleman in the mandi. The ITC virtual mandi is emerging as a one-stop shop for selling and buying of all kinds of products and services including government services in the rural market.
82% respondents felt provision of services through the websites would help in removing the middleman and also help in reducing corruption.

**Feedback and Public Grievance Redressal**: E-Governance can be of a great help in providing a feedback to the government and redressing the grievances of the public. If the grievances of the public are dealt with in time and not swept under the carpet a number of problem related to corruption can be tackled. For example CM of Andhra Pradesh Mr. Chandra Babu Naidu who calls himself as the CEO of the state is always on line with heads of the districts/corporations/boards and his ministers and the public. The official are required to e-mail and keep him posted about the developments and other complaints of the citizens everyday by evening. Similarly in the Gyandoot project of the Madhya Pradesh a complaint can be filed and a reply received within 7 days for a cost of Rs. 10. These can include complaints regarding drinking water; quality of seed/fertilizer, scholarship sanction/disbursement, and employee establishment matters, functioning of schools or village committees, etc.

Only four respondents filed complaints against the government employees. The rest i.e. 51 stated they did not file complaints, as nothing would have happened. When asked if the procedures of filing the complaints was made simple as well as provided through the Internet then would they file complaints a majority said yes but were not sure whether action will be taken or not. One out of the four who filed complaints said that he filed complaint through the website and action was taken within 15 days.

According to a survey conducted by the researcher all the respondents felt that the procedures of the government need to be simplified. They also felt that E-Governance could be of a great help in simplifying as the procedures.

**Concluding Remarks**

If E-Governance is applied and accepted widely it will definitely lead to overall growth in the nation and make the life of people happier, easier and successful. It is a tool, which has the potential to empower poor people and enable them to access essential services speedily and with minimal harassment. Simplification of procedures and provision of information on line help be of a great help in tackling corruption. The transparency it offers to the poor makes it easier for the poor to deal with the government. Its speed helps in minimizing the inefficiencies and high costs the poor tend to experience in accessing public services. Many people have perceived e-governance as the preserve of the elite. But on-going projects have shown that even the rural folk
are able to derive benefit from E-Governance. The basic reason for that is that the information is available in the local languages. In one such project TARAhaat.com even small children, village housewives, and illiterate people can use it from day one. The computer displays information in the local language of each region. For those who cannot read, it uses animated pictures, self-explanatory diagrams and voice-over. Though Chandigarh is a highly literate city yet during the survey it was found out that not many people were aware of the potential of E-Governance. But if promoted by the government it can be potent instrument, which will definitely be of a great help in speeding up and simplifying government procedures and controlling corruption.

References:

1. Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation Ltd., Online Railway Ticket Booking, [http://www.irctc.co.in]
5. Delhi Government, [http://www.delhigovt.nic.in]

Other References:

Results of the Survey
Conducted in Porbandar in June, 2017

Government Procedures
90% Respondents felt the government procedures were complicated. (49 out of 55)
100% Respondents felt there is a need to simplify governmental procedures (55 of 55)
90% Simplification of procedures will result in reducing corruption. (49 of 55)

Transparency
60% Respondents felt that government officials were secretive most of the times and do not give information. (33 of 55)
90% Respondents felt Transparency was required. (49 of 55)
78% Respondents felt Transparency will help in reducing corruption. (43 of 55)
75% Respondents felt E-Governance will lead to Transparency. (41 of 55)

Service Delivery
90% Respondents felt that the time taken to provide services is too long. (49 of 55)
90% Respondents felt that the time to pay bills and access services should be flexible. (49 of 55)

Removal of Middleman
82% Respondents felt E-Governance can help in removing middleman. (45 of 55)

Feed Back and Grievance Redressal
92% Respondents did not file complaints against government officials as nothing happens.

51% Respondents felt that E-Governance can be helpful in reducing corruption (28 of 55)
15% Respondents were not aware of E-Governance. (9 of 55)
E-GOVERNANCE CAN CHANGE THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT

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COMPLEX
OPAQUE
UNRESPONSIVE
UNACCOUNTABLE
UNECONOMIC
BUREAUCRACY ORIENTED

SIMPLE
TRANSPARENT
RESPONSIVE
ACCOUNTABLE
ECONOMIC
PEOPLE ORIENTED