

## Introduction to e-Governance

In India, the government deals with several matters affecting people's lives. It is said government is all encompassing as it touches the lives of human beings from cradle (health services for women and children) to grave (payment of pensions, gratuity etc.).

Government has to tackle unending problems and challenges emanating from over-population, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and underdevelopment.

Government is expected to look after defense, foreign policy, communications and infrastructure, maintenance of land records, maintenance of law and order, collection of revenue, promotion of agriculture, science and technology, international trade, banking, insurance, transport, social welfare, family planning etc.

As citizens of India, we have to deal with government in our day-to-day lives. Citizens expect speedy service, courteous treatment, and quick disposal of grievances or applications. This interaction, however, is not always pleasant. The general perception among citizens is that the quality of administration is deteriorating day-by-day and that quality of governance needs to be considerably improved upon. The general feeling outside the government is that the government is huge, it lacks direction, it is unmanageable, is

wasteful and it is uncaring of the citizen. But those in the government continue to feel that they are doing a fine job and nothing could be done better. There is, therefore, a wide gap between the expectations of the citizens and their experience with the government. This gap can only be filled by drastic simplification of procedures and change in attitude of civil servants vis-à-vis the citizens.

Just as business corporations have discovered over the last few decades that information technology can make their service (or product) delivery value chain more efficient and lead to quality improvements and cost savings, governments in developing countries, over the last 5-7 years, have discovered that information technology can make the provision of services to the citizen more efficient and transparent, can save costs and lead to a higher level of comfort and satisfaction to the citizens in dealing with Government.

So far as governments are concerned, the coming together of computerization and internet connectivity/web-enablement in association with process Re-engineering, promises faster and better processing of information leading to speedier and qualitatively better decision making, greater reach and accountability, better utilization of resources and overall good governance. In the case of citizens, it holds the promise of enhanced access to information and government agencies, efficient service delivery and transparency in dealings and interactions with government.

With the increasing awareness among citizens about their rights and the resultant increase in expectations from the government to perform and deliver, the whole paradigm of governance has changed. Government, today, is expected to be transparent in its dealings, accountable for its activities and faster in its responses. This has made the use of ICT imperative in any agenda drawn towards achieving good governance. It has also led to the realization that such technologies could be used to achieve a wide range of objectives and lead to faster and more equitable development with a wider reach.

You can't solve a problem on the same level that was created. You have to rise above it to the next level.  
This is possible through Innovation...

Albert Einstein

## Concept and Definition of e-Governance

The “e” in e-Governance stands for ‘electronic’. Thus, e-Governance is basically associated with carrying out the functions and achieving the results of governance through the utilization of what has today come to be known as ICT (Information and Communications Technology). The reason why countries around the world are increasingly opting for ‘e-Governance’ is that governance per se has become more complex and varied in the last few decades and more importantly, citizens’ expectations from government have increased manifold. ICT facilitates efficient storing and retrieval of data, instantaneous transmission of information, processing information and data faster than the earlier manual systems, speeding up governmental processes, taking decisions expeditiously and judiciously, increasing transparency and enforcing accountability. It also helps in increasing the reach of government – both geographically and demographically.

The primary purpose of governance is the welfare of citizens. While one aspect of governance relates to safeguarding the legal rights of all citizens, an equally important aspect is concerned with ensuring equitable access to public services and the benefits of economic growth to all. It is expected that e-Governance would enable the government to discharge its functions more effectively. However, this would require the government to change itself – its processes, its outlook, laws, rules and regulations and also its way of interacting with the citizens. It would also require capacity building within the government and creation of general awareness about e-Governance among the citizens.

During the initial stages of introduction of ICT in governance there was resistance from some quarters. Some felt that computerization cannot work in the complex government system and that introduction of computers would lead to un-employment. There were also serious doubts whether government employees at all levels would be able to handle computers. Fortunately all these misgivings have proved wrong. Today, new software tools have enough flexibility, to accommodate the most complex situations. The new technology makes the machine-human interface very user-friendly. The Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) sectors have created millions of jobs besides improving vastly on the services provided by government undertakings like Banks, Airlines, Railways, etc. Thus e-Governance is no longer a far-fetched dream. In fact, for a Government in a country like India -- with 1.2 billion population, more than 600,000 villages, growing economy coupled with increasing aspirations of the citizens for better quality of life – use of Information Technology in improving government processes has not just become vital but essential and without which it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to serve its citizens efficiently and transparently and ensure participation of larger number of people in decision making at all levels of Government – Centre, State and local.

e-Governance is, in essence, the application of Information and Communications Technology to government functioning in order to create ‘Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) governance. This would generally involve the use of ICTs by government agencies for any or all of the following reasons:

- Exchange of information with citizens, businesses or other government departments
- Speedier and more efficient delivery of public services
- Improving internal efficiency
- Reducing costs / increasing revenue
- Re-structuring of administrative processes and improving quality of services

“e-Government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth,

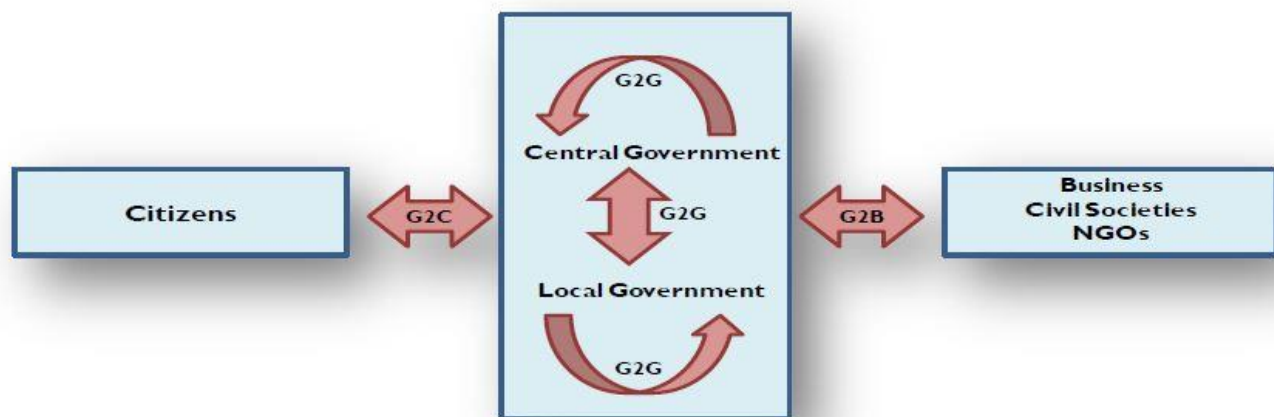
Although the term 'e-Governance' has gained currency in recent years, there is no standard definition of this term. Different governments and organizations define this term to suit their own aims and objectives. Sometimes, the term 'e-Government' is also used instead of 'e-Governance'.

e-Governance aims to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive.

The goals of e-Governance are:

- Better service delivery to citizens
- Ushering in transparency and accountability
- Empowering people through information
- Improved efficiency within Governments
- Improve interface with business and industry

e-Governance facilitates interaction between different **stake holders in governance** using ICT (indicated by block arrows in the diagram below).



### Interactions between main groups in e-Governance

These interactions may be described as follows:

❖ **G2G (Government to Government)** – In this case, Information and Communications Technology is used not only to restructure the governmental processes involved in the functioning of government entities but also to increase the flow of information and services within and between different entities. This kind of interaction is only within the sphere of government and can be both horizontal i.e. between different government agencies as well as between different functional areas within an organization, or vertical i.e. between national, provincial and local government agencies as well as between different levels within an organization. The primary objective is to increase efficiency, performance and output.

❖ **G2C (Government to Citizens)** – In this case, an interface is created between the government and citizens which enables the citizens to benefit from efficient delivery of a large range of public services. This expands the availability and accessibility of public services on the one hand and improves the quality of services on the other. It gives citizens the choice of when to interact with the government (e.g. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week), from where to interact with the government (e.g. service centre, unattended kiosk or from one's home/workplace) and how to interact with the government (e.g. through internet, fax, telephone, email, face-to-face, etc). The primary purpose is to make government, citizen-friendly.

❖ **G2B (Government to Business)** – Here, e-Governance tools are used to aid the business community – providers of goods and services – to seamlessly interact with the government. The objective is to cut red tape, save time, reduce operational costs and to create a more transparent business environment when dealing with the government. The G2B initiatives can be transactional, such as in licensing, permits, procurement and revenue collection. They can also be promotional and facilitative, such as in trade, tourism and investment. These measures help to provide a congenial environment to businesses to enable them to perform more efficiently.

❖ **G2E (Government to Employees)** – Government is by far the biggest employer and like any organization, it has to interact with its employees on a regular basis. This interaction is a two-way process between the organization and the employee. Use of ICT tools helps in making these interactions fast and efficient on the one hand and increase satisfaction levels of employees on the other.

## **Benefits / Outcomes of e-Governance**

e-Governance is about reforms in governance, facilitated by the creative use of Information and Communications Technology. The following can therefore be achieved as a result of e-Governance:

❖ **Better access to information and quality services for citizens:** ICT would make available timely and reliable information on various aspects of governance. In the initial phase, information would be made available with respect to simple aspects of governance such as forms, laws, rules, procedures etc later extending to detailed information including reports (including performance reports), public database, decision making processes etc. As regards services, there would be an immediate impact in terms of savings in time, effort and money, resulting from online and one-point accessibility of public services backed up by automation of back end processes. The ultimate objective of e-Governance is to reach out to citizens by adopting a Lifecycle approach i.e. providing public services to citizens which would be required right from birth to death.

❖ **Simplicity, efficiency and accountability in the government:** Application of ICT to governance combined with detailed business process Re-engineering would lead to simplification of complicated processes, weeding out of redundant processes, simplification in structures and changes in statutes and regulations. The end result would be simplification of the functioning of government, enhanced decision making abilities and increased efficiency across government – all contributing to an overall environment of a more accountable government machinery. This, in turn, would result in enhanced productivity and efficiency in all sectors.

❖ **Expanded reach of governance:** Rapid growth of communications technology and its adoption in governance would help in bringing government machinery to the doorsteps of the citizens. Expansion of telephone network, rapid strides in mobile telephony, spread of internet and strengthening of other communications infrastructure would facilitate delivery of a large number of services provided by the government. This enhancement of the reach of government – both spatial and demographic – would also enable better participation of citizens in the process of governance.

❖ **Enabling Environment for Promoting Economic development** - Technology enables governments to create positive business climates by simplifying relationships with businesses and reducing the administrative steps needed to comply with regulatory obligations. There is a direct impact on the economy, as in the case of e-procurement, which creates wider competition and more participants in the public sector marketplace.

❖ **Enhancing Transparency and Accountability:** e-Governance helps to increase the transparency of decision-making processes by making information accessible - publishing government debates and minutes, budgets and expenditure statements, outcomes and rationales for key decisions, and in some cases, allowing the on-line tracking of applications on the web by the public and press.

❖ **Improving Service Delivery:** Government service delivery, in the traditional process, is time consuming, lacks transparency, and leads to citizen and business dissatisfaction. By putting government services online, e-Governance reduces bureaucracy and enhances the quality of services in terms of time, content and accessibility through integrated service delivery platforms at the door steps of citizen.

❖ **Improving Public Administration-** e-Governance administrative components, such as a computerized treasury, integrated financial management information systems, and human resource management systems, lead to greater efficiency in public administration. Features include the integration of expenditure and receipt data, control of expenditure, human resources management, intelligent audit through data analysis and the publishing of financial data.