E-Governance in Bangladesh: Public Service Delivery Challenges

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Abstract

E-governance enables citizens to participate in decision-making processes, improve communication within government agencies, businesses, and engages the public as a whole. Bangladesh government has taken many initiatives to enhance public services through ICT (Information and Communications Technology) in recent time within the goal under "digital Bangladesh" with a target to make Public Administration speedy, effective, transparent, accountable, and facilitate sustainability. Digital Bangladesh goal has four pillars: Digital Government, Human Resource Development, IT Industry Promotion, and Connecting Citizens. However, the digitalization process of public services in Bangladesh faces some obstacles while implementing the process to connect the citizens. This paper has tried to examine the government's current position on e-governance to facilitate public services at the doorsteps of people through online platforms. In doing so, this study concentrates on the advantages of the digitalization process; identify the primary barriers to e-governance and recommends strategies for overcoming those barriers in the country. This study is qualitative in nature and methodology comprised of content analysis, in-depth interviews, and a robust internet search for the purpose of the research.

Key Words: E-governance, Development, ICT, Digitalization, Administration.

Introduction

E-Government uses information and communication technologies (ICTs) to help government agencies enhancing their operations. Today, governments all over the globe use a variety of e-communication tactics to manage public and private operations efficiently. With the introduction of government websites in the late 1990s, the notion of e-government was born. It is usually defined as the use of information technology to exchange data, administer services, and negotiate with the citizens, the private sector, and other government agencies. E-Governance is defined as using government agencies' information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the quality and breadth of knowledge and services accessible to people. The goal is to foster public empowerment while also improving government openness, efficiency, and accountability. E-governance is essential to distribute various benefits of economic growth to all the sects of society. It blends technology and citizen centricity, catalyzing government operations to create a safer, more efficient, and sustainable community. Governments are under pressure to become more effective, integrated, responsive, and speedier to satisfy people'

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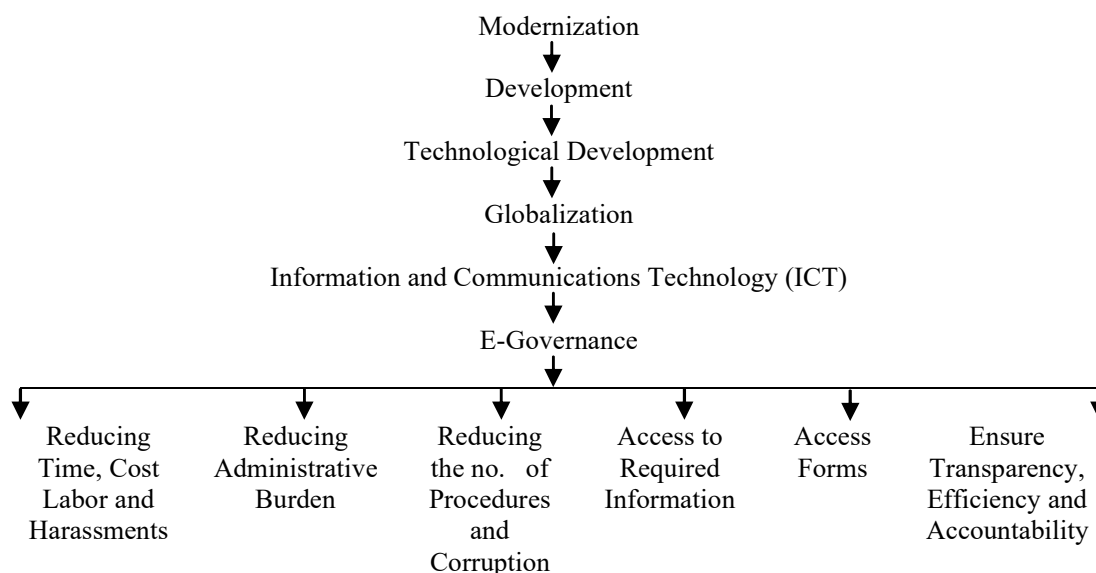
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expectations in today's world. They are under pressure to function and react to respect people's freedom of choice and speech. In many circumstances, they must be as quick as constantly being ready to serve at the click of a citizen's mouse. In this position, no government in the modern world has a choice except to adopt new technology at random. In light of the technological revolution and globalization, governments throughout the globe are adopting creative efforts to confirm desirable improvements in the domain of public administration to stay up with people's newer expectations. In today's world, no government can resist such developments. Instead, they must reconsider how they should be structured from the standpoint of the people. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are considered as new instruments for governments in this course. Governments are becoming more electronic due to the possibilities of ICTs, a process known as "E-government." The implementation of e-governance, on the other hand, impacts not only systems, procedures, and processes of relevant services, but also the manner and relationships in which people and the business community, or society as a whole, interact with government agencies. Bangladesh's government has already begun working toward e-governance to provide better citizen services. The purpose of this research paper is to assess the present posture of the government on e-governance, find out what it has to offer; identify the critical obstacles to e-governance, as well as the ways for overcoming them, from the perspective of Bangladesh. This research is qualitative in nature, and it has used data and information from primary and secondary sources. A case study approach is followed to investigate with the support of in-depth interviews. Besides in-depth interviews, a robust internet search to carry out this research and compare to another country's e-services was executed.

Conceptual Framework

Modernization is an excessively popular notion and an idea. At present, the sense of illumination describes values such as freedom, individuality, the dignity of man, tolerance, and reason (Bernhard, 2007). Development is an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation. In the 18th century in Europe technological development started. Technological development plays a vital role to different development stages .Globalization is a process of change that makes people more interconnected and interdependent. Also, globalization focuses on the interaction and integration promoted by international trade, investment, and information technology (Levin, 2015).ICT is an integrated system that incorporates the technology and infrastructure required to store, manipulate, active and transmit information. The use of ICT for promoting more efficient and cost-effective government, more public access to information and more government accountability to citizens are called e-governance (Uddin, 2012).Four stages characterize e-governance. a) Government has a presence on the Internet. b) Government will be able to interact with its citizens via the Internet. c) About public service delivery, communication between the government and its citizens is essential. d) Government will transform its organizations and institutions to support e-service delivery. (As_Saber, Srivastava & Hossain, 2006)

Fig. 1: Stages of e-governance Development

Modernization

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Development

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Technological Development

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Globalization

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Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

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E-Governance

| Reducing Time, Cost Labor and Harassments | Reducing Administrative Burden | Reducing the no. of Procedures and Corruption | Access to Required Information | Access Forms | Ensure Transparency, Efficiency and Accountability |

Background of e-governance in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the first Internet service was introduced by Drik ICT as an offline email service in 1992. Bangladesh has taken affirmed stance in favor of ICT since late 1996 (Sadik, 2014). In 1996, Information Services Network (ISN) Limited started the first online Internet service in the country. At that time, World Wide Web (WWW) services were the first of their kind of service. In 1996, the country saw only two ISPs (Internet Service Providers), but in 1997, it reached to over a dozen IPS because of client demand. In August 2004, BDIX (Bangladesh Internet Exchange) started its operation. The country was connected to the SEA-ME-WE 4 (South East Asia–Middle East–Western Europe) submarine cable in 2006 which bring a big change in the speed and connectivity of internet in the country (The Daily Star, 17 January 2019).To set up an ICT operate nation, knowledge-based society and empowered people, escalate democratic values and sustainable development, Bangladesh introduced The ICT Policy-2002 in 2009 which was amended later in 2015 and 2018 respectively. To ensure more accessibility to government services and information, Bangladesh aims at e-governance and highlights "Digital Bangladesh" to achieve the vision of transforming Bangladesh to a digital economy by 2021, and a knowledge-based economy by 2041 implementing the policy. (The Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041, 2020). It has four key objectives such as a) Digital Bangladesh, b) Human Resource Development, c) IT Industry Promotion d) Connecting Citizens. In 2008 national election, Bangladesh Awami League (AL) pledged in its election manifesto to achieve Vision-2021 which is closely intertwined with Digital Bangladesh. Nowadays, "Digital Bangladesh" has become the central political commitment of the government of Bangladesh because of the election promise of AL (Hasan, 2014).

E-governance Prospects in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has the 9th position in top 20 countries with the highest number of internet users in 2020 (Internet world stats, 2020). In 2000, the internet user in Bangladesh was 1,00,000, when the total population was 13,15,81,243, and in 2020 the internet user in Bangladesh is 9,41,99,000, when the total population is 16,46,89,383. The Internet growth rate from 2000 to 2020 is 94.199% (Digital 2020: Bangladesh, 2020). The tremendous growth of internet users and facility in Bangladesh has creates more potentiality to Bangladesh to use different digital technological measures of E-governance for effective public service delivery in the country. In order to reach out to the government services at the grassroot level without consuming time and cost, there are union digital centers (UDC) for the people who living in rural areas and cannot get access to the internet, for poor livelihood impact. UDC also ensures the information for rural women, physically disabled, the elderly illiterate, or ICT illiterate people. Besides providing information, this citizen-centric service helps to decentralize the government services to the field level. In this regard, 5,292 UDCs are providing 150+ public and private services that entrepreneurs earned $32.95 million (a2i.gov.bd/publication/union-digital-centers). The internet and video chat capabilities at UDCs are particularly helpful to a lady whose spouse works in the United Arab Emirates whom we interviewed, "It used to be really difficult for me to contact my husband. I need to go to the Upazila, and have to pay 200 takas for it." "*I can now chat to him for just 10-20 taka and not only communicate with him, but also see him through the video call. With the support of UDCs, it is feasible*". "The government has done a lot for us."

Digitalization of Government save time of the citizens and is an effective instrument to ensure hassle-free services to people by directly connecting people to government services "**my gov**" web forms portal of the government creates a digital platform for bring all government services in one place where all government forms are available (eksheba.gov.bd/). This web portal of government forms is accessible to 1721 forms (forms, the portal.gov.bd/).Using internet people can get all types of government forms covering trade forms, treasury forms, and so on. In this portal 417 services are available where the registered members are 2155627**. Shebakunjo** is the platform where also all digital link of all government services are provided (https://services.portal.gov.bd) It is yet another one-stop service portal, with fifty-four agricultural, fisheries, and related animal services; seventy securities and disciplinary-related services; forty-two infrastructure and communication interconnected services; fifty-eight services on loan, allowances, grants, distribution, and rehabilitation; thirty-two services on land correspondent services; eighty-nine services on education, information, and certification; and eighty-nine services on health-related facilities.

Furthermore, essential government files and data can be entered transparently through tabs without direct human contact. Any government decision can be taken rapidly through virtual government meetings sitting anywhere. That seems to have slowed down red-tapism while at the same time increasing transparency and accountability among the public servants. Furthermore, without any physical reporting at the inter-ministerial level,

one can connect from one ministry to another through government-certified e-mail, making for a flexible working procedure. Not only is it a flexible working procedure for inter-ministerial matters, but it is also responsive to any inter-country correspondence. The biggest notable thing is that the use of paper is declining in the office. What inspires an eco-friendly working environment? The data input is quick, ensuring real-time information that decreases the likelihood of calculating errors and improves resource quality. A government official discussed the advantages of e-Government; one famous e-Government service is "e-Nothi" or "e-Filing." It also explains how e-filing ensures transparency and accountability in government, workflow and reduces the possibility of corruption in government files. Because the real-time uploading and downloading of any files can be seen, that enables accountability.

"But high-speed Internet service and adequate Wi-Fi/Broadband connection could further accelerate the government's digital services", said a official as a recommendation to make effective fast e-governance services. Besides providing these services to the people, it is important to make people aware of these services too. About the overall performance of e-governance, the government official further describes that this way they were able to provide very high-quality updated information and services by the saving time, cost, and without visiting the spot, by using the government website in order to achieve the goal of SDG (2030) and the DELTA plan (2041) along with the governments' 8th Fifth Year Plan.

E-governance in Public Service deliveries in Bangladesh
Land Records information services

In Bangladesh, the land system is dependent mostly on the age old British time Colonial enacted directions. Most of the rules are paper-based and the process is time-consuming. Yet, in the era of digitalization, land possession, enrollment, movement, planning, charge installment, will or confirmation, and other authoritative records enrolled in an electronic framework has been started to make the process more effective and time saving. In the e-governance system of Bangladesh, people are getting digital land record facilities along with E-Namjari, Mouza Map, NamjariKhatiyan, R.S Khatiyan, and so on important filing (land.gov.bd). Besides these services, there is an "Uttaradhikar Calculator" and an emergency Hotline number 16122 for making the process easy and accessible.

Education and Training Services

By introducing the online admission system students, teachers, and guardians now can get any kind of public examination result by just typing a common number and get the result on mobile any time and any place without presenting any academic institutions. Besides, through the online education system, students can get all educational directions from school, college, and admission process (www.shed.gov.bd). During Covid-19's lockout, students and instructors got attached in virtual classroom for any training or lesson which was administered through Access to Innovate (a2i) program of the government   (www.teachers.gov.bd).Rajna Begum, a 20-year-old girl from Noldory

village of Karmodha Union completed her HSC with a GPA 5 result from Science group in 2019. She envisioned to get admitted to any public university of the country and have benefited from the digitalized admission process. According to her "*One of my cousins recommended me to use the internet to fill out the form. So, I went to the Union Parishad Information Service Centre (UISC) and filled up my application. Following the admissions exam, I was offered a spot in Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet to pursue my honors in Physics* ". Students now can apply to any university or college by going to that institute's website and filling up an application, which saved their time and money. An integrated university admissions exam is in the plan to take in the coming days . It will save time, money, and many forms of harassment if it is adopted.

The Passport and Immigration services

In Bangladesh, corruption in passport office is a major problem to reach effective services to citizens. Migrant workers contribute heavily in the economy of the country and provides the source of remittances. Unfortunately, harassments at passport offices is very common and for that, digitalization of passport and immigration procedures target to bring transparency and accountability in the whole procedure . Passport process can now proceed within a short time by self-applying online enrolment. Not only one ordinary citizen can apply, but also can cross-check any Immigration information(http://www.dip.gov.bd).

Tax Management

The NBR (National Board of Revenue) has started digitalizing the complex tax administration where citizens can now get access to the information and can submit the tax returns online. Registering for TIN (Taxpayer Identification Number) is already digitalized and mandatory for all people who are in the threshold of eligible tax payers as per the tax policy. The government e-service initiative is to get this pivotal service at the hand of the people. (secure.incometax.gov.bd/Registration).

Health information

To get all types of health-related information, E-health assistance services in Bangladesh provides multiple services for the citizens. The call center for health service named "Telemedicine" provided by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare can be connected for any type of health-related query at 16263 numbers available for all citizens. During the Lockdown of Covid-19, this service provides services actively. In order to get the fastest identification of Corona Patient, there is a mobile application "Corona Tracer BD", an emergency number 333 and 16263 to call (dghs.gov.bd/index/bd/).

Circulation of Government Jobs

The government creates a one-stop job portal to reduce the cost and time in the job circulation process. Almost all government job circulation processes are proceeded with

some simple steps using mobile network where job seekers apply within the transparent circulation process with self-processing (https://bangladesh.gov.bd/site/view/eservices).

Emergency Call Service

Among the e-services provided by the government of Bangladesh, the emergency call service 999 is the most popular among the people. This service is actively connected with the emergency sections of the Hospitals, Ambulance, Fire Services, and the Police. People can get other services over the phone using these following phone numbers: 106 for anti-corruption commission (toll-free); 16123 for agricultural (including charge); 16402 (With Charge) for BTCL; 16263 (With Charge) for health Information; 10922 (With Charge) for Women welfare issues, 10941(with charge) for advance disaster news; 1098 (Toll-Free) for child help; 16236 (With Charge) for Bangladesh Bank; 109 (For all Operator) & 10921(without GP & Banglalink) for the cell of "Women and Child Abuse Prevention"; 09654333333 (with charge) for Immigrants; 100 (Toll-free) for BTRC; 01799090011(With Charge) for immigrant welfare and foreign correspondence; 105 (With Charge) for NID, 16430 for Government Laws services; 16162 (With Charge) for Dhaka Wasa and 16256 (With Charge) for Union Parishad Services (www.999.gov.bd/call-centers).Rumena is a 15-year-old girl from Karmodha Union's Husonabad village . Her parents arranged her marriage. Rumena, on the other hand, wisely called the national hotline number 333 to call off her marriage. The mobile court fines Rumana's father 30,000 takas. *It was hard for me to quit marriage without support 333,*" according to Rumena.

The Agriculture sector

The Bangladesh Agricultural sector contributes a pivotal role in the economy of the country. In order to provide the appropriate information to the farmers at right time, "Krishi Batayan" a single platform for agriculture information is established by the government. "Krishi Batayan" web portal is resourceful for the farmers of the country that is enriched with 178 seasonal crop's information with 1000 disease names and prescribed information; and 861 video tutorials . Farmers and agriculture entrepreneurs can get in touch with the agriculture expert for any kind of agriculture-related problem with an inexpensive 25 paisa/minute phone call by just dialing 16123. A farmer can access that information in the field with a mobile phone to get information from the union digital center.

Mobile Banking Transactions

The Mobile Financial Service or MFS in Bangladesh has brought a revolutionary change in financial sector of the country. As day-by-day people are dependent on using mobile phones, the number of mobile phone subscribers is increasing rapidly. In March 2020, the number of mobile phone subscribers was 165.337. At the end of the year of December 2020, the number of mobile subscribers increases to 170.137. The number of mobile subscribers has reached 173.357 Million at the end of February 2021

(www.btrc.gov.bd/telco/mobile). So, this huge number of people can easily access to the services of Mobile Financial Services at any time with Bkash, Nagad, and Rocket at a reasonable charge. During the Covid-19 lockdown, online transactions were getting more popular in Bangladesh.

Laws of Bangladesh in online

Citizens will be highly benefited if all laws can be accessible easily . In this regard, all law-related information is now available on the 'Laws of Bangladesh' website at bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/laws-of-bangladesh.html. The 'Laws of Bangladesh' website has provided a search system to find out any law, Act, Ordinance, or any law related documents.

Challenges faced in implementing E-governance Endeavors
1. Illiteracy

According to Bangladesh Statistics Bureau 2019, the literacy rate of the population (7+years) in 2018 was 73.2 (www.bbs.gov.bd) where the rest of the population is far behind the light of education. To spread the government services at the doorsteps of all people, these people are important to connect through e-governance services. In addition, the need for technological education is essential for all the citizens of Bangladesh. However, the illiterate portion of population is a major challenge to provide technological expertise to reach an inclusive digital society.

2. Misinformation and online scam

Technology makes our daily life easy and simple. Besides using smart technologies, it is important to adapt to the technology in a positive manner which is not against the norm of society. Sometimes people are deceived by misinformation, sometimes technology left some rooms for online swindle. The problem of justification of real information is difficult for general people. Without a lack of exact knowledge, people can also be involved in such misleading activities.

3. Lack of publicity of the digitalization initiatives

A lot of people still do not aware of the e-governance initiatives of the government. It is crucial to spread the initiatives of the E-governance to the grassroot level in an inclusive manner so that no people are left from the benefits of information technologies. However, the government digitalization ventures   got limited promotional activities and left out of the reach of people for the reason.

4. Building Trust

Building trust on digital platforms and e-governance procedures is difficult from the perspective of involving a vast number of population in Bangladesh who are familiar with paper-based work system. Therefore, building trust on e-governance platform can be crucial for the success of the system with engaging more people online for better

governance and transparency. Connecting people depends on building trust and a consistently positive image of the online platform can bring technological benefits to people's door.

5. The consistent quality of services

It is hard to provide a consistent quality of online services to the citizens. Because of the inefficient bureaucracy and red-tropism, the digital way of providing services sometimes failed to work which is seen in many occasions. Sometimes lack of technology supports and workforce, the consistent e-governance services are hampered.

6. Digital Security Law

In the era of the internet and technology, the Digital Security Act, 2018 is a new term for the purpose of resisting cyber-crime and building IT-related safe environment for the people of Bangladesh. However, it is difficult to ensure safety for all in online spaces because of the global nature of interconnectedness. Moreover, the law is highly debated in political sphere for the allegation of misusing the law. However, to establish "Digital Bangladesh", providing digital security is very crutial.

7. Cost and Slow Internet

The high cost of internet services and the speed of the internet services is matter of big concern for proving e-governance in the country and reaching to the people from grassroot. Transforming "Digital Bangladesh" can not be possible without reaching the internet to general citizen in an affordable cost and ensuring good speed.

8. Updated information, limited IT infrastructure, and regular electricity problems

The expensive cost of smart phones, laptops, internet services, and other computer accessories comes as barriers to bringing government services to people's doorsteps. The consistent availability of the internet is a critical aspect of altering Bangladesh's digital transformation. People are unaware of government services that may be obtained at their doorsteps due to lack of updated information on service provider websites. As a result, finding correct information is difficult.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Bangladesh working hard to integrate ICT into all parts of government operations, especially those that deliver public services and sustain inter-agency collaboration. However, some of the necessary components for the development of e-government are absent. Even if national government seems to have the political will and commitment to adopt ICT-friendly policies in order to advance the IT sector and establish e-government, there are still some obstacles to overcome. Some policy suggestions are made here to overcome the obstacles

1. IT Infrastructure development

Competent IT infrastructure is one of the crucial requirements for Bangladesh to accelerate the growth of the economy as well as to connects the government services at the doorsteps Establishment of IT infrastructure with support of private sectors can generate sustainable growth in this sector and also generate development from the root. In this regard, providing technological support, building strong networks, and ensuring instant power facilities is a first and foremost priority to penetrate development at the root.

2. Ensure Continuous Power Supply

Uninterrupted power supply is important for the digital dream of the nation and Government is working to ensure power generation in the country. For that, Government should focus not only on electricity generation using fossil fuels, but also should concentrate on alternative power generation such as using Solar panels, renewable using natural resources, etc.

3. Proper Publicity and connectivity

One of the major challenges of e-governance in Bangladesh is to bring general citizens under the umbrella of digitalization process and ensure participation. However, lack of publicity makes the process difficult as citizens are not aware of the benefits of e-governance initiatives. To spread the activities of e-governance at the grassroots level, government should come with more promotional activities for citizen attentions. In this regard documentary, strong campaign activities should be given priorities to bring the people to the digitalization boons.

4. Ensure Accountability & Transparency

Getting impartial, accountable, and transparent information is the right of the citizens. The more transparent information is available to the citizens in online platform, accountability will be ensured. So it is important to ensure impartial and transparent information and procedure to the people in digital form to establish better governance in all sort of life.

Bangladesh has attained some notable achievements over the years implementing the digitalization process that contributes in Reducing public harassment; ensuring efficiency and providing accountability and transparency. E-governance has provided services to the people's doorsteps and reach the citizens evading hassles proving some important public services. Government should prioritize the digitalization process in other sectors of the government for efficiency and ensuring accountability.

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