



Stakeholder Empowerment through Participatory Governance: A Case Study

Neeta Verma^{1*}, Sangeeta Singh² and Durga Prasad Misra¹

ABSTRACT

Stakeholder participation in the process of governance is one of the important aspects of good governance. National Portal of India (NPI) along with Sixth Central Pay Commission (SCPC) developed an e-Government application laying thrust on the Government to Citizen to Government (G2C2G) model based on stakeholder participation and feedback. Institutionalizing stakeholder participation through ICT has the potential to make the current practices of government more efficient and to transform the very relationship between the citizens and government. This was first of its kind initiative in the Indian Government. This paper illustrates the association between the NPI & SCPC to initiate a participatory model by leveraging the questionnaire formulated by the Commission encouraging comments and suggestions from the stakeholders on important aspects as feedback to the SCPC. This paper also lays thrust on the effectiveness of the necessary ICT utilized for information management and decision making.

Keywords: Stakeholder involvement, Institutionalization of stakeholder participation, Pay Commission, National Portal of India, Good Governance, Participatory Governance, ICT Enabled Decision Making Process.

1. Introduction

“Well formed democracy, comprehensive e-Governance framework and maximum stakeholder involvement is key in maintaining Good Governance.”

Nurturing value based public judgement through voluble, informed and collaborative consultation is one of the key aspects of the *Good Governance*. With the growing advent and usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools the evolution of knowledge-based societies is palpable. Such an equation provides ample/greater avenue to the masses to participate in the development process. Thus governments all over the world are striving hard to achieve efficiency, transparency & responsiveness, the basic tenets of governance and are constantly innovating mechanisms for responsive administration and effective citizen service delivery mechanism. Use of ICT in the governance is one the popular & effective means to provide 'Anytime-Anywhere Access' to government information and services, adding an important dimension to *Good e-Governance*.

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In order to open up avenues for direct participation of individuals in the governance processes a concept of Government to Citizen to Government (G2C2G) model is under progressive development and has gained wide acceptance. This innovative model exploits the concept of commercial viability by leveraging the potential ICT/Internet for greater participation, efficiency and transparency in functioning of the government combined with savings in time and costs related to decision-making. To provide seamless integration of information and services, the Government of India launched National Portal of India two years back as a Mission Mode Project under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) of Prime Minister of India. One of the mandates of the National Portal of India is to provide a platform for encouraging Citizen Participation and Stakeholders involvement in the process of governance in the country.

The Sixth Central Pay Commission, constituted by Government of India to revise the pay and perks of government employees, has leveraged on the strengths of the National Portal of India to invite comments and suggestions from various stakeholders in response to a structured questionnaire. This is the first time wherein through the innovative use of ICT, such a large scale fully online system opened for citizens to participate in the process of decision making in Government of India. The project involved the following stakeholders viz:

- Citizens of India
- Individual government employees
- Various employee associations
- NGOs
- Sixth Central Pay Commission
- NIC

Apart from inviting online responses from the citizens to the questionnaire, the system continually provided up-to-date information regarding developments at the 6th CPC during its term, and also published the final report along with all annexures as well as studies undertaken by the Commission in the web space immediately after it was presented to the Finance Minister. Due to popularity of the platform with stakeholders, the infrastructure was also extended for releasing the Office Memorandums, Gazette Notifications, etc. on implementation of the 6th CPC. Besides providing wide and ease of access to stakeholders this also resulted in reduction of cost on printing and circulation of the report.

2. Limited Participation in the Process of Decision Making in Government

Another pertinent issue is that governments are constantly formulating plans, schemes, acts, rules and regulations for the development of the nation and betterment of its people. Quite often it is seen that these plans & schemes are not able to adequately address the needs of the people. One of the important factors for this could be limited participation of people, beneficiaries or stake holders in the process of formulation of Plans, Schemes as well as Acts & Rules, etc. The government recognizes the need of public involvement during the formulation of schemes/programs. However, the conventional mode of communication and information gathering mechanism makes it difficult to enable stakeholder involvement in the process of governance. The stakeholder involvement initiative of National Portal of India with its infrastructure and technology is geared up to facilitate such a cause for various organizations of the government.

3. Governance through Stakeholder Involvement

The International Association for Citizen Participation describes stakeholder involvement as "*any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make better decisions*". Stakeholder involvement aims actively to increase attention to and inclusion of the interests of those who are usually marginalized or poor people. In fact it is widely felt that there is a need to define more clearly and adapt key terms to promote stakeholder involvement in governance.

3.1 Stakeholder involvement: Key Constituents

We may have to define factors such as:

- Level of stakeholder involvement;
- Process of stakeholder involvement, including who initiated the process and who participated at each stage;
- The communication medium or platform for stakeholder involvement;
- The role of facilitation and consultation;
- Institutionalization of stakeholder participation for effective and responsive service delivery (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008).
- The role of Information and Communication Technology (Libor Jansky & Juhal I. Uitto , 2005).

These various characterizations should be scrutinized in adapting a definition of stakeholder involvement that is pertinent to good governance. The result should clearly describe how stakeholder involvement fits into governance at local, national and international levels. The stakeholder participation and involvement should be institutionalized to ensure integration into the governance process.

3.2 Indicators of successful stakeholder involvement

Monitoring and evaluation indicators are frequently used to measure the progress and impact of participation in ICT enabled governance. Such indicators of success are also needed to track the success of stakeholder involvement as it contributes to societal goal of “good governance”. Specific stakeholder involvement indicators should measure progress and adherence to a stakeholder involvement vision, plan and its impact. Transparent monitoring of indicators can also enhance stakeholder involvement; increase the accountability of authorities leading to a better performance and compliance with agreed norms.

Multiple Assessors including stakeholder evaluation is also an important stage increasing the reliability and dependability of the evaluation process. The participation of stakeholders in the design and their institutional integration into the evaluation framework is necessary for effective stakeholder satisfaction and feedback (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008). “*Transparent, participatory and accountable governance is an essential foundation for sustainable development*” (Libor Jansky & Juhal I. Uitto, 2005).

4. National Portal of India and 6th Central Pay Commission

Governments all over the world are striving to achieve good governance. The Indian Government has also laid a lot of emphasis on good governance, adoption of best practices and integrated delivery of information and services. An important dimension of good governance in any Country is provision of ‘Anytime-Anywhere-Access’ to government information and services through utilization of ICT tools (Gupta M P, Kumar P & Bhattacharya J, 2005). These services are often provided through a number of different departments working in different sectors of development. This implies that citizens may have to visit a large number of websites for different information and services. At times, one may have to visit multiple websites to avail a single service which results in a lot of inconvenience at the citizens’ end and requires a lot of learning time on their part to avail these services, thus defeating the very purpose of such initiatives.

Thus, Government of India envisaged an ideal solution to address all the above issues by providing a ‘single window access’ to electronic delivery of Information and Services to the citizens, businesses and other stake holders is a significant step towards the goal of good governance. It has been realized by setting up a National Portal of India (<http://india.gov.in>) under the Mission Mode Project (MMP) of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). This shall also lead to improved efficiency in service delivery, enhanced transparency, reduced corruption and increased stakeholder involvement, the very objectives of good governance. “*Enhancing transparency & accountability, raising the trust levels of the stakeholders, increasing efficiency in service delivery, increasing the revenue and encouraging effective stakeholder*

involvement in the process of governance” (Neeta, Alka & Sonal, 2007).

4.1 India and Pay Commissions

Historically, the Central Pay Commissions of India is a successor to the Royal Commissions set up during the British period for various purposes including for pay revision like the Atchison Commission (1886-87) and the Lillington Commission (1912-15). A great many changes take place in the structure of emoluments of Government employees over a decade. It thus becomes necessary to modify the pay structure so as to enable Government employees to lead clean honest and respectable lives at standards compatible with what their peers have meanwhile attained or what they themselves accept as reasonable at the standards of living to which they have become accustomed. Till now six successive Central Pay Commissions have been constituted at periodic intervals. These Pay Commissions examined various issues such as pay and allowances, retirement benefits, conditions of service etc. and submitted recommendations thereon.

4.2 Sixth Central Pay Commission

Over a period of time the “*Terms of Reference*” and priority of the Pay Commissions do change and this time the following important terms of reference have been the focus of the Sixth Central Pay Commission (6th CPC) constituted on 5th October 2006 (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008):

- To transform the Central Government Organizations into modern, professional and citizen-friendly entities those are dedicated to the service of the people (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008).
- To work out a comprehensive pay package for the Central Government employees that is suitably linked to promoting efficiency, productivity and economy through rationalization of structures, organizations, systems and processes within the government, with a view leveraging economy, accountability, responsibility, transparency, assimilation of technology and discipline (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008).

4.3 National Portal of India & Sixth Central Pay Commission: A joint initiative

The 6th CPC decided to take views directly from the public apart from service associations and other stakeholders before actually working on the report. It carefully devised a detailed questionnaire specially targeted to the general public at large. In this respect the main challenge before the Commission was –

- What are the alternative modes to invite responses?
- How to publicize such a stakeholder involvement initiative in feedback for the decision making process?
- How to compile and analyze these responses, once received, to provide feedback to the Commission?

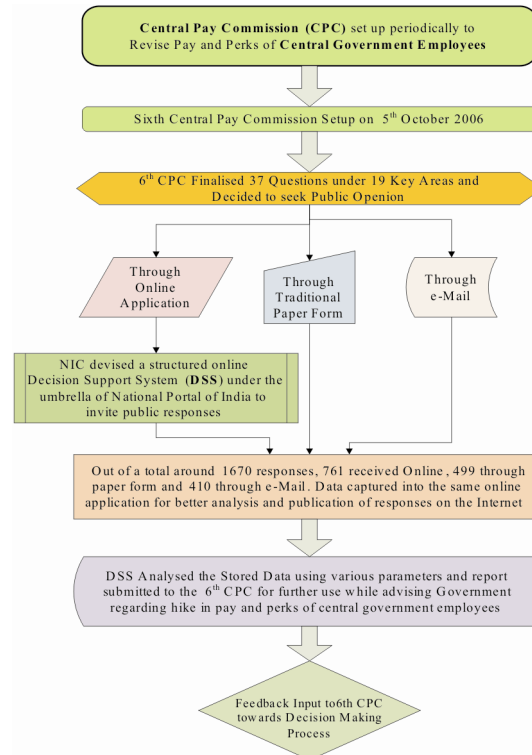
Then Sixth Central Pay Commission approached the National Informatics Centre (NIC) the nodal ICT organization of the Government of India for supporting this initiative. NIC decided to facilitate the same through its National Portal India (NPI) Project as one of the major mandates of the NPI is to encourage **Stakeholder Involvement** in the process of **governance**, which is one of the very basic tenets of good governance. Thus emerged the concept of devising an online Decision Support System (DSS) to invite comments and suggestions from the public in response to the questionnaire designed by the Commission. During the deliberations following answers emerged to the above-mentioned questions:

- Responses are to be invited through an Online DSS, e-Mails and Paper Form through postal service.
- The 6th CPC will maintain its informative pages as well as DSS under the umbrella of the National Portal of India. NIC will design, develop, host and maintain the DSS of the 6th CPC.
- All responses in different forms will be captured through the DSS for analysis purpose. The online application will be made open to public for submitting responses against the questionnaire. This

would facilitate analysis as inputs to the recommendations of the Commission through the DSS.

This case study illustrates how the strength and reach of ICT can be leveraged to gather such opinions and views from all the stakeholders and citizens at large and enable stakeholder feedback as an input to the decision process of the Commission:

- The 6th CPC had designed a detailed questionnaire with 37 questions in 19 key areas to invite public comments through the NPI. The questionnaire was open to the public for two months to invite responses. The questionnaire was publicized through both the print and electronic media. The DSS was developed in modular fashion using Open Source Technology. A user has to register with the National Portal of India to submit his/her response. *This registration was mandatory to help the DSS analyze behavior/ pattern of the respondents and their responses.*
- A total of around 1670 responses to the questionnaire were received from employee unions/associations and individuals. These associations/unions represented from few thousands to 1.5 million employees depending upon their working Ministry out of total 4 million central government employees serving for the country. The detailed process is represented in the flow chart in the next page as Figure-I.
- The process of gathering such responses in a structured and planned manner helped carry out a wide range of analysis on the data so received and are an aid to the process decision-making.
- The registration process captures the respondent category and status viz. Individual/Group Affiliation and In-Service/Pensioners/Others.

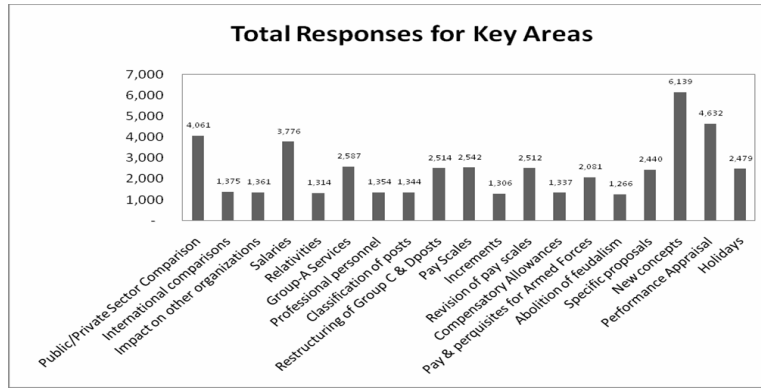


(Annex to the Sixth Central Pay Commission Report 2008)
Figure 1: 6th CPC & the Stakeholder involvement Process

5. Analytical Perspective

5.1 Extent of Participation

The Sixth Central Pay Commission decided to obtain feedback from not only employees and their representative organizations – trade unions and associations – but also from all stakeholders of Government including citizens. There were 1674 respondents in all including 412 employee unions/associations (group responses) and 1262 individuals (individual responses). The details of number of responses against each type of question (including aggregation of sub responses) are placed below for ready reference:



(Annex to the Sixth Central Pay Commission Report 2008)

Figure 2: Responses received against type of questions (Includes all responses received for key areas)

The registration process takes information about the different categories of the respondent i.e. Association or Government Employee or Pensioners or Respondents Others. Figure-II shows that a total of 425 employee associations/unions, each representing from few thousands to millions of employees, submitted their point of view. 507 Respondents were from the category “others”. This reflects the widening of the response base and participation of stakeholders. (Neeta Verma, Durga Prasad Misra & Sangeeta Singh - ICEGOV, 2007)

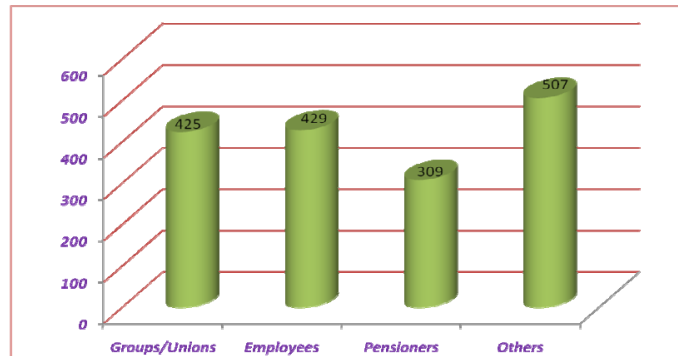


Figure 3: Category wise respondents

There were a total of 37 questions under 19 key areas as shown in the Figure-II. Figure-IV shows the number of questions responded by number of respondents i.e. 1019 or 60% of total respondents answered more than 30 questions. Whereas only 243 or 14% responded to less than 10 questions. *This indicates the responsiveness of the stakeholders towards the initiative.* (Neeta Verma, Durga Prasad Misra & Sangeeta Singh - ICEGOV, 2007)

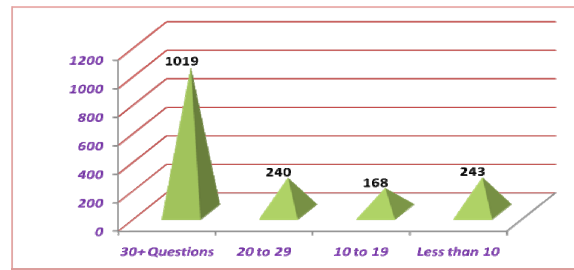


Figure 4: Respondents replying to number of questions out of a total of 37 questions

5.2 Response to Key Questions

The following questions and the responses, out of the total number of 37 questions, are illustrated below to give broad analytical perspective of the whole exercise: -

Question-1: Should there be any comparison/parity between pay scales and perquisites in Government and the public/private sector?

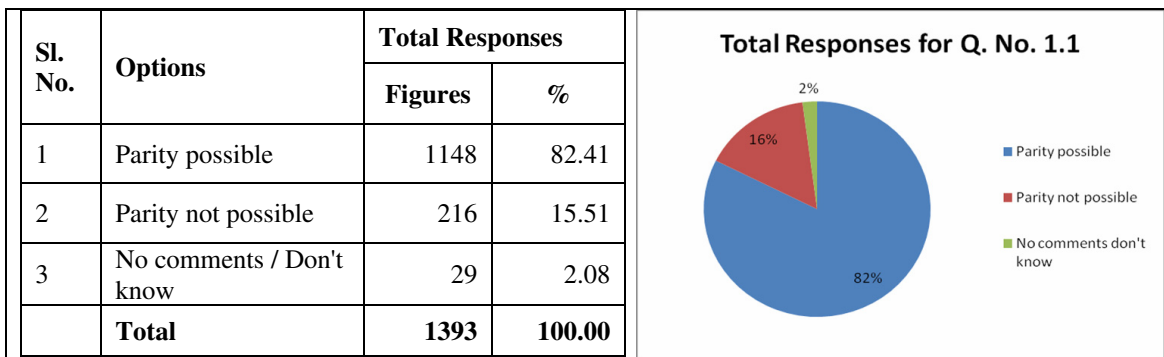


Figure 5: Question 1.1, Annex to the Report of the SCPC, 2008

Question-2: In order to ensure a fair comparison based on principles of equity and social justice, would it not also be appropriate to take into account the economic conditions of large sections of the community that are less privileged than Government employees and many of whom live below the poverty line?

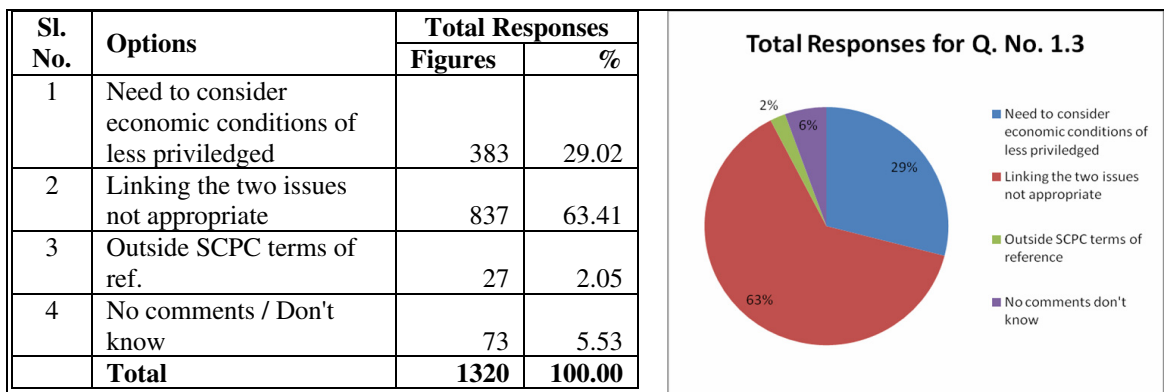


Figure 6: Question 1.3, Annex to the Report of the SCPC, 2008

Question-3: Employees in the Secretariat and analogous establishments are entitled to higher pay scales than the corresponding field functionaries. Are these factors valid even today particularly in the context of decentralization and devolution of administrative powers? Is this discrimination between field and secretariat functionaries even justified today?

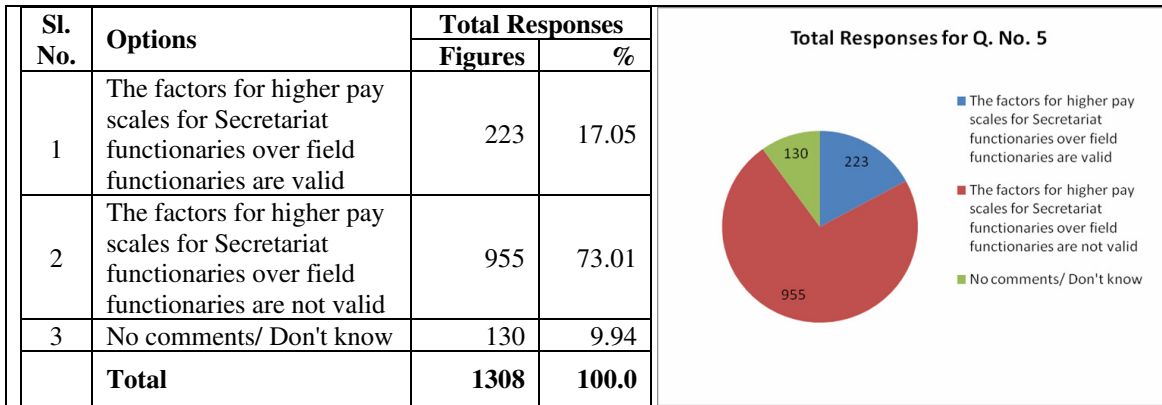


Figure 7: Question 5, Annex to the Report of the SCPC, 2008

Question-4: Is there any need to revise the pay scales periodically especially when 100% neutralization for inflation is available in form of dearness allowance?

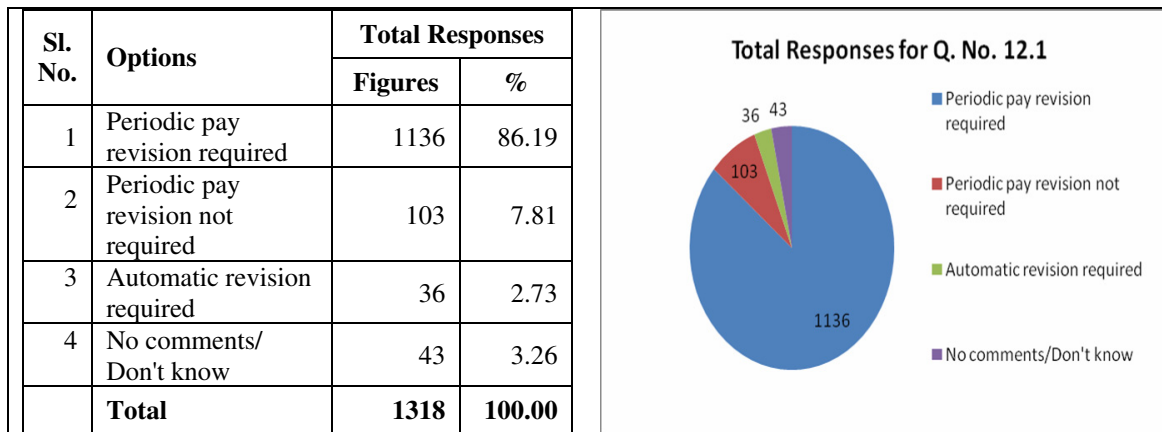


Figure 8: Question 12.1, Annex to the Report of the SCPC, 2008

All the questions indicated above are for illustrative purposes and detailed analysis of the responses received to all 37 questions can also be viewed at (Annex to the Sixth Central Pay Commission Report 2008).

6. Outcome of the Initiative

6.1 Commission's & Government of India's Perspective

Simplified & transparent Process:

- The entire process of obtaining responses to the questionnaire was simplified with enhanced transparency.

Maximum Reach

- Achieved wider reach of the initiative under the umbrella of the **National Portal of India**, which had more than 20 million hits per month during the publishing of the online questionnaire (The web-statistics application from Web Trends Ver. 7.0b configured to access the traffic analysis of NPI – <http://webstat.nic.in>).
- Larger spectrum of audience.
- Automated models and broader category wise analysis simply at the click of a mouse.
- By making this initiative online, the Commission could save on man-hours and also share the responses to the questionnaire and the findings with the general public and stakeholders.
- Immediate dissemination of report and implementation notifications to all stakeholders with limited cost and savings on publication of the same.

This feedback was analyzed and used by the Commission as inputs towards its decision making process. The Recommendations of the Commission were submitted in March 2008, which was well in time according to the Terms of Reference (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008). It is an important step forward towards more participative structures and stakeholder feedback for decision-making.

6.2 Stakeholder's Perspective

Trusted Platform for Discussion:

- Got a forum to interact with the Commission and put their viewpoint to the Commission.
- Greater transparency in the process and access to suggestions received by the Commission
- Developed faith with the Commission as it goes public.
- Single point source of information on the day-to-day activities of the Commission.
- A number of blog sites have also come up on the issue run by the stakeholders viz. <http://sixpaycommission.blogspot.com>, <http://confederationhq.blogspot.com>, etc.
- Easy access to the Report, Government Orders and Circulars, which can be obtained instantly on a click of mouse.

Transparent Transaction of Information:

- The responses have been made accessible on the portal with search-enabled facilities so that the general public can view the responses.
- Media reports based on these responses have also been appearing helping in perception formation.

6.3 National Portal's Perspective

Vision towards e-Governance:

- It moved a step ahead towards achieving one of its mandates i.e. Stakeholders Involvement in the process of governance.

Valuable Experience:

- The web space received around 30 million hits during the period in which the questionnaire was open for the public i.e. 10 million hits exclusively for the 6th CPC page. (The web-statistics application from Web Trends Ver. 7.0b configured to access the traffic analysis of NPI)
- More than 64 million hits during March'08, a time when the 6th CPC report on recommendations was published.
- More than 96 million hits during September'08, a time when the Office Memorandum and Gazette Notifications were published for implementation of the 6th CPC.
- Gained experience to successfully execute any such challenge in the future.
- Motivation for genesis of an exclusive upcoming Sub-Portal branded as “*Public Participation Corner*” under the umbrella of the National Portal of India.

7. Participatory form of Governance

The widespread application of ICT enabled governance models encourages direct participatory forms. Now such governance models can become a reality because information residing within the government domain can easily be made available to the citizens themselves through ICT. Institutionalizing involvement of people in ICT enabled governance mechanisms is of significant importance in contrast with traditional forms of governance. The mode of governance transforms from "representative" to "individual based" and from "passive" to "pro-active". The diagram below depicts the overall approach, which has been evolved as a result of this exercise to involve maximum participation of stakeholders and further **institutionalization** of the same. This participation of stakeholders in the process design with co sharing of inputs and their institutional integration into the decision framework can be based on a 'cooperative model' of consultation and co-production with development of alternate institutionalized practices and routines using e governance as a basic facilitating tool. (Sixth Central Pay Commission, 2008).

e-Consulting & e-Collaboration for policy formulation, decision making, evaluation and service delivery

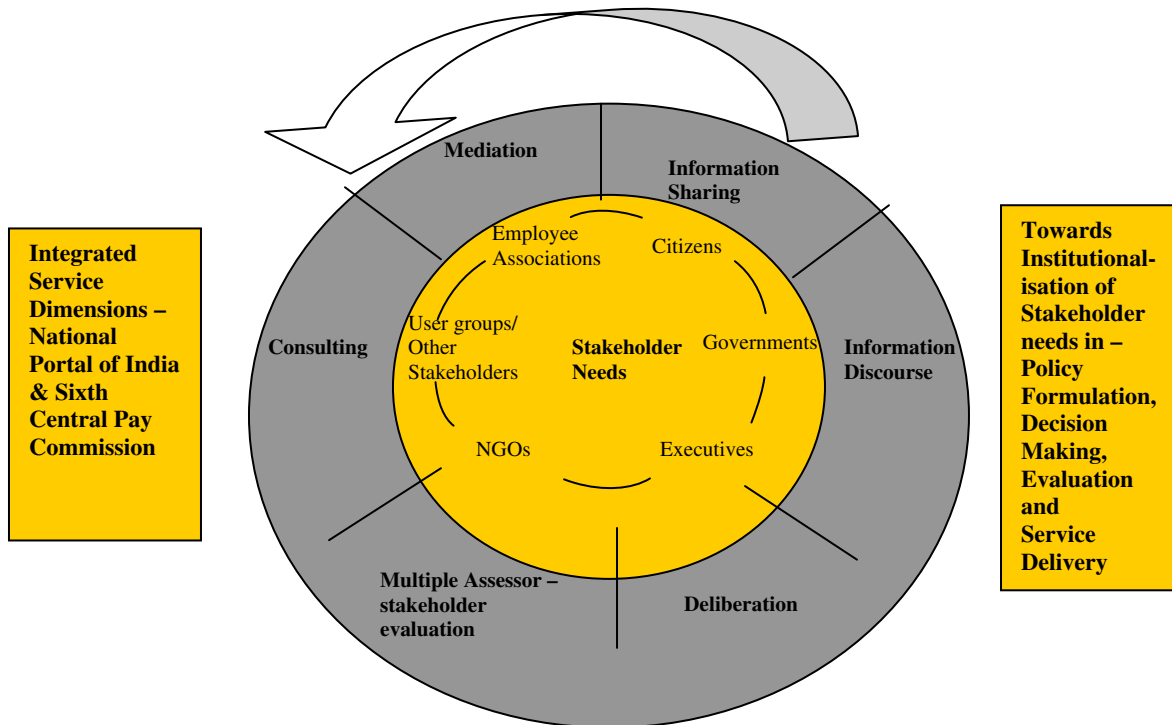


Figure 9: Model of National Portal of India and 6th CPC – Initiative

8. Concluding Remarks

It is imperative to realize that good governance and institutionalization of stakeholder participation is critical for any nation institutionalizing e-Governance. Harnessing the potential of ICT is the enabler to make rapid improvements in connecting to all the stakeholders, cost optimization, improving the quality of service to the citizens and above all in making the vision of e-Governance a reality for leading the country on the path of “Good Governance”. The potential of e governance. To realize a quality standard in e-Governance the participation of stakeholders needs to be at maximum. The whole system and the processes

should be such that people from different cross-sections of society have an equal opportunity and equal access to participate in the process of Good Governance. Only then will the widely anticipated change for good reasons follow. National Portal of India with Sixth Central Pay Commission realized an association in order to encourage participation by stakeholders to provide feedback inputs towards the Sixth Pay Commission's recommendations. This was a small step forward demonstrating the immense potentialities of such participatory initiatives through the National Portal. Through facilitating institutionalization of stakeholder participation, e-Governance can be a powerful tool in improving a nation's quality of life, promoting the larger goals of society and transforming the way government functions making it more effective and responsive to its citizens. In accordance with the same the SCPC Report projected the need to institutionalize stakeholder participation to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness in service delivery. The same was also a point of discussion during the presentation at the International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance organised by United Nations University, Macau. The stressed action points on institutionalize of stakeholder participation to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness in service delivery was incorporated in their overall recommendations.

Acknowledgements: It is indeed a pleasure to be associated with the Sixth Central Pay Commission and our sincere thanks to them for allowing us to place the initiative, taken by the Commission, to make it a pilot case for the NPI's mandate on Stakeholder Involvement in the process of governance. Further, the views endorsed in this paper are purely those of the authors in their personal capacity and nowhere reflect the views of the organizations/departments namely National Portal of India and Sixth Central Pay Commission.

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