



A STUDY OF E- GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN INDIA: MAJOR CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of internet, there can be noticed a revolutionary change in all spheres of human life. It has helped in connecting the world together and the same is true in case of human relations. It has revolutionized the means of lives of the human kind. It has transformed the work culture throughout the world. People living in one part of the earth can work for companies established in some other part of the world with the help of internet. ‘Nine to five office jobs’ have transformed into ‘work from home culture’. The same stands true regarding the use of internet in the government sector which has facilitated the governments throughout the world to reach out to the common masses more quickly, efficiently and effectively. It has enabled the governments to fulfill their goals at different levels. It has also ensured transparency in the working of both government and non-government offices. In other words, this transformation is known as E-governance which has revolutionized the working of the governments; improved the service delivery and builds up a trust for the government amongst the general masses. The effectiveness of E-governance is unquestionable, but there are several challenges which have proved to be impediments in the path of realization of the desired goal. This paper, therefore, deals with the major challenges before E-governance initiatives in India and the future prospects of E-governance in India.

KEY WORDS: E-Governance, Information and Communication Technologies, Digital India

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF E-GOVERNANCE

E-governance generally means “Electronic Governance” which refers to the utilization of information and communication technologies at different levels of governance. It can also be understood as distribution of information and services of the government to the citizens, business fraternity or at intra-governmental level through internet or various other digital sources. It helps the government to reach out to citizen and provide them all the services with ease. It also saves time during delivery of information regarding government schemes and initiatives to the general masses and especially people living in the remote areas. This reduces the dependency of people over the bureaucracy for each and every work, which thereby improves the productivity and increase the ease of doing business at a minimal cost. With the increase in transparency it has also reduced the chances of corruption.

There are different definitions of E-governance which can make us understand the meaning and importance of E-governance, which must be considered while undertaking this work.



E-governance is the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the government functioning in order to bring about Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent (SMART) Governance. In simple terms e-governance can be defined as providing citizens the choice to avail or access the government information and services round the clock from anywhere.¹

E-governance should be thought of as the process of making governance adequate to the knowledge society that is emerging worldwide. It also concerns the definition and the implementation of actions that can help a social system to evolve towards a knowledge-based economy and society.²

The World Bank defines e-Governance “as the use of information and communication technologies by government agencies to transform relation between citizen, business, and other arms of the government. It involves information technology enabled initiatives that are used for improving (i) The interaction between government and citizens or government and business i.e. e-Services. (ii) The internal governmental operations i.e. e-Administration. (iii) External interactions i.e. e-Society. E-Governance is a kind of window of opportunity facilitating a much faster, interaction between the government and its people”.³ It has also been referred to as I-Governance i.e. integrated governance as it integrates people, process, information and technology in achievement of government objectives.⁴

United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) also defines e-governance as “the public sectors use of Information and Communication Technology with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective”.⁵

E-government is actually a narrower discipline dealing with the development of online services to the citizens. It is an institutional approach that deals with particular government services such as e-tax, e-transportation or e-health.⁶

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The history of E-Governance in India can be traced back to the 1970s when the Government of India established the Department of Technology in 1970. The National Informatics Center (NIC) was the establishment in 1977. This was the first important step towards the commencement of E-Governance in India. In the year 1987, with the launch of NICNET, a satellite-based national computer network, gave a big impetus to E-governance. After this, the

¹ Thadaboina, V. (2013) E-Governance and Rural Development: Experience and Future Prospects in India, BRPC, New Delhi, p. 154

² Piaggese, D. et al. (2011) Global Strategy and Practice of E-Governance Examples from around the World, Information Science Reference, Hershey, p. 478

³ Dogra, B. et al. (2008) Application of IT and Management in Economic Growth, Deep and Deep Publication, New Delhi, p. 506.

⁴ Sharma, V. (2015) Information Technology Law and Practice, Universal Law Publishing, New Delhi, p. 39

⁵ Misuraca, G. (2007) E-Governance in Africa, From Theory to Action: A Handbook on ICTs for Local Governance, Africa World Press, New Jersey, p. 28

⁶ Sheridan, W. and Rieley, T.B. (2008) “Comparing E-Government vs. E-Governance” in Vishakha Munshi (ed.), E-Government in Developed Nations An Insight, ICFAI University Press, Dehradun, p. 51



National Information System of the National Informatics Center (DISNIC) was launched which installed computers in all regional offices and provided free of charge hardware and software. In 1990, the NICNET was expanded with state headquarters at all regional centers. Measures taken by the Government of India in the sphere of E-governance proved to be very helpful in transformation of governance in India.

On July 2nd, 2015, Indian government has started the Digital India initiative with major emphasis focusing on building the digital infrastructure throughout the nation as a utility for all people, guaranteeing improved governance and on-demand services, and digitally empowering individuals.

E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN INDIA

The importance of E-governance measures are quite evident that people can gather information regarding government programmes and policies and also access services provided by the government even from remotest areas of the country. It has helped us to make our democratic system more effective, efficient and participative. Through E-governance platforms, anyone can provide feedback to the government and transparency can also be ensured by means of it.

Since 1990, Indian government has started using a wide range of communication technologies and programs such as E-Governance, telecommunications and telemedicine, E-Commerce, and social media platforms to encourage online institutions to provide economic and other benefits to different communities throughout the country.

The Government has introduced the various initiatives for the citizen for the benefits of people with respect to the E-Governance program such as computerization of land record, on line delivery of land record in Karnataka named as Bhumi Project, Soochanalayas named as Gyandoot, Lokvani Project, FRIENDS Re-engineered and Enterprises Enabled Software Project in Kerala, E-Mitra and E-Seva projects in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh respectively.

The Agricultural Marketing Information System Network (AGMARKNET) is a NICNET-based network that connects all valuable agricultural Products, wholesale markets, agricultural marketing boards within a state, and regional offices of the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (DMI), among others, across the country to exchange market-price information.⁷

The BHUNAKSHA tool is yet another initiative of NIC to meet all of the fundamental revenue functionary requirements at the Tehsil level in relation to management of land. It is an online application that uses open source technology to simplify digitized section maps.⁸ The NIC has also developed a Co-operative Core Banking Solution which accommodates the requirements of all State Cooperative Banks (SCBs), District Central Co-operative Banks (DCCBs), and Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies (PACS). PACS deals directly with the rural (agricultural) borrowers give those loans and collect repayments of loans given and also undertake distribution and marketing functions.”⁹ Similarly E-Granthalaya is a Digital Platform developed by NIC, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India for Government Libraries for Automation of in-house activities as well as member services and Networking for resource sharing.¹⁰

⁷ See <https://agmarknet.gov.in/>

⁸ See <https://bhunaksha.nic.in/bhunaksha/index.jsp>

⁹ See <https://www.cooperation.gov.in/about-primary-agriculture-cooperative-credit-societies-pacs>

¹⁰ See <https://egranthalaya.nic.in/>



The Core Accounting Solutions (CAS)¹¹; E-procurement¹²; NREGAsoft; Instant Money Order service; E-Post Office; Online Scholarship Management System (OSMS) and many other e-initiatives have been taken by the Indian governments from time to time which has changed the way of governance and brought the government and the people more close.

After going through a brief introduction of some of the major e-initiative in the country we come to know that the government is seriously making efforts for ensuring the popularization of E-governance in the country. But there are certain challenges before the proper implementation of E-governance in India. Therefore, a brief discussion of the major challenges is necessary.

CHALLENGES BEFORE E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

The implementation of E-governance depends upon several factors such as literate and well educated people with basic knowledge of internet; strong technical infrastructure throughout the country; reform work culture and promotion of use of internet in the offices; technical training of staff of government offices; a secure infrastructure for online transactions; keeping the people aware of their right and the proper use of internet, etc. In case, the factors mentioned are not properly taken of, these will pose severe challenges before the implementation of E-governance in the country.

Certain major challenges before the implementation of E-governance in India can be understood in terms of the following points. Firstly, Illiteracy and lack of proper education throughout the country is a well-known and major problem before the implementation of E-governance in the country. A person having no education cannot operate a gadget properly and will not be able to use internet for official purposes. Even if, he uses a gadget, that will be only for the purpose of entertainment and there will be chances of misuse of internet and that gadget by that person.

Secondly, even the educated people with no knowledge of any particular language; say English or Hindi, in which the operating system of gadgets work will also not be able to use it. Although, now a day, the problem of language has been resolved to much extent, but then also language is a concern among people of old age or remote areas.

Thirdly, there can be seen a lack of proper infrastructural facilities in the government offices regarding such as lack of computer system, stable internet connectivity, stable electricity, regular maintenance of the system, etc. which hampers the growth of E-governance in the country.

Fourthly, the training of the officials regarding the proper use of computer system, software and internet is also a big challenge. Lack of proper training makes it difficult for the staff to correctly use the system which in turn affects the service delivery to the common masses.

Fifthly, the attitude of the government officials towards the use of technology is also not very positive. They prefer offline work or 'register culture' over online maintenance of records due to the fear of losing important data. In many offices, there is no proper anti-virus installed, or there is no annual maintenance of the computers and software which makes the use of internet and computer unreliable. This demotivates the staff to use the means of E-governance to reach out to the people.

¹¹ See <https://elekha.nic.in/>

¹² See <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app?page=FrontEndTendersByOrganisation&service=page>



Sixthly, the lack of any proper mechanism to stop online fraud and fishing is also a big challenge before the implementation of E-governance initiatives in the country. Many cases of online fraud can be seen throughout the country which demotivates the general masses to use digital or online mode of transaction. Certain legal mechanism to resolve the digital problems must be ensured in order to gain the faith of the people towards digital transactions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above challenges discussed in this paper present the major reasons why E-governance initiatives are not showing the desired fruits till date. But this does not mean that India is lagging behind in the implementation of E-initiatives. Several programs and e-initiative have been successfully implemented by the government since three to four decades and still the government is striving in this direction. This paper tries to reveal the ground level difficulties in the implementation of E- governance initiatives, so that the government can focus on these points and ensure a better future of E-governance in India.