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# E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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**Abstract-** Governments all over the world have been using ICTs such as internet, websites, computers and mobile phones to provide various government services in an efficient, equitable and transparent manner with less corruption. The purpose of this paper is to examine the challenges encountered in e-government as well as the potential opportunities available in the context of Indian society. The study reveal India is still lagging behind in utilizing information and communication technologies for delivering government services online.

**Keywords-** E-governance, service-delivery, India

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## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To provide an overview of e-governance.
2. To examine the rationale and scope of e-governance
3. To map e-governance initiatives in India.
4. To evaluate the major challenges and future prospects of e-governance in India
5. To make analyze and provide concluding remarks.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is divided into five sections based on secondary data received from various sources. The present paper describes various sections according to the above mentioned objectives.

## SECTION - I

### I. INTRODUCTION

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. E-Governance 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 various arms of government resulting in 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 resultant benefits are less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and cost reductions (World Bank).

According to World Bank (2007) "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, and/or cost reductions'.

This definition visualizes the use of the electronic medium in the exercise of authority in the management of a country's affairs along with articulation of citizens' interests leading to greater transparency and efficiency. While the Council of Europe has taken e-Governance to mean the use of electronic technologies in three areas of public action, viz:

- Relations between the public authorities and civil society
- Functioning of the public authorities at all stages of the democratic process (electronic democracy)
- The provision of public services (electronic public services)

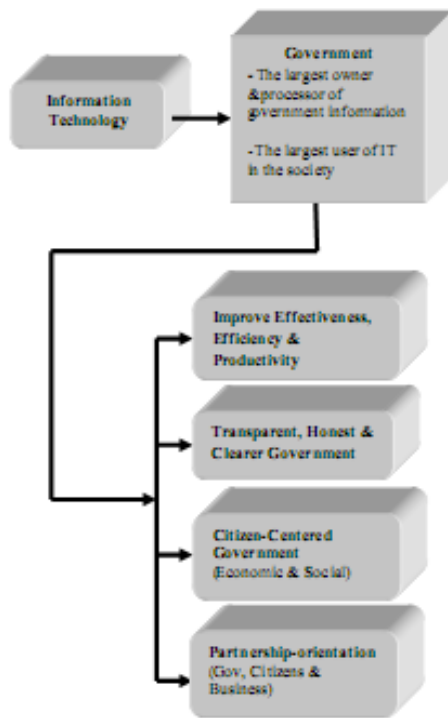
In this light, the focus is on making use of electronic technologies with a view to encouraging better interaction between government and citizens, promoting democracy and providing public services.

## SECTION - II

### II. E-GOVERNANCE AND ITS BENEFITS

E-Government offers a number of potential benefits to citizens. E-Government can also result in huge cost savings (Tapscott: 1996) to governments and citizens alike, increase transparency (Mukhopadhyaya: 2002) and reduce corruption (Wescott: 2003) increase public accountability, weaken authoritarian tendencies and strengthen civil society and

democracy (Norris: 2001). It gives citizens more control on how and when they interact with the government. Similar to the previously mentioned common rationales, the top policy-makers in India tend to justify the adoption and expansion of e-governance on the grounds that it costs less, reduces waste, promotes transparency, eliminates corruption, generates possibilities to resolve rural poverty and inequality, and guarantees a better future for citizens (Schware: 2000).



(Source: www.unpan.org)  
**Figure 1.1: Role of IT in Government**

The accessibility of government services also increases since, despite government’s mammoth infrastructure, there are always a limited number of personnel interacting directly with the citizens and waiting times, even on the phone, can be long. The electronic delivery of government services, especially the availability of different forms and the option of electronically submitting them, provides a considerable saving of time and money for individuals. Technology now makes it possible to personalise a website to a point where delivery of services could be tailored to meet the specific needs of an individual, thereby increasing the satisfaction of citizens from government services. The online delivery of government services could, therefore, tremendously increase accessibility and bring significant time and cost savings to citizens. It also helps in increasing the reach of government both geographically and demographically. Therefore, e-Government could virtually revolutionise the provision of government services especially in developing countries. The figure 1.1 summarises major benefits of e-governance.

**Scope of E-Governance Interactions**

On the basis of the interactions among three main actors, i.e. government, business and citizens there can be five different correlated areas of e-government as shown in the figure 1.2.

**Figure 1.2: Scope and form of e-governance interactions**

	Government	Business	Citizens
Government	G2G/G2E	G2B	G2C
Business	G2B		
Citizens	C2G		

**Government to Government (G2G)**

In this form, 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 exists within the sphere of government at both horizontal (between different government agencies and departments) and vertical (between and or amongst the tiers of government: national, state and local government agencies). This form of interaction fosters efficiency, performance and output in public business.

**Government to Citizens (G2C)**

An interface is created between the government and citizens that 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, from where to interact with the government and how to interact with the government. This form of interaction is the basis of governance in the sense of citizens’ involvement in decision making. It engenders greater citizens’ participation in governance and makes the government more responsive.

**Government to Business (G2B)**

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 processes and revenue collection. They can also be promotional and facilitative, such as in trade, tourism and investment.

**Government to Employees (G2E)**

Government is one of the main employers of labour in India and as such engages in a two-way interaction with its employees on a regular basis. Use of ICT tools helps in making these interactions fast and efficient on the one hand and increasing satisfaction levels of employees on the other.

**SECTION - III****III. E-GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW**

A number of areas had been taken up in the Eleventh Plan for e-governance. These included reforms in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and 27 areas for introduction of e-technology and reforms. The experience in the Railways earlier for reservation and in refund of customs duty by the Department of Customs have been very positive. By the end of Eleventh Plan, 60,000 common service centres are in place to provide delivery of public services across the country. It is also planned now to expand the optical fibre network and expand broadband connectivity to each panchayat levels. This would help in providing all services which are available at the panchayat level through e-mode to the citizens.

Following areas have governance delivery in electronic form:

- Automation of Central Excise and Service Tax (ACES), which Aims at improving taxpayer services, transparency, accountability and efficiency in the indirect tax administration in India, initiated in the year 2009.
- To modernize the Central Government offices through introduction of ICT, E-OFFICE, is aimed at increasing the usage of work flow and rule based file routing, quick search and retrieval of files and office orders, digital signatures for authentication, forms and reporting components, since 2008.
- MCA21 was introduced as a service-oriented approach in the design and delivery of Government services, in 2006.
- Digitization of land records, has been introduced to facilitate easy maintenance and updates in land databases.

**SECTION - IV****IV. CHALLENGES OF E-GOVERNANCE IN INDIA**

Many challenges are faced by e-government as scholars such as Gupta and Sharma (2012), Norris (2001) among others have highlighted them. The

main challenges being faced by India are discussed in the following text.

1. Social and Cultural Problems: India is a large country with approximately 70% of the populace living in rural areas. Illiteracy is about 30% of the population (Census: 2011) and even it is higher in case of rural area and less developed states such as Bihar, Orissa and UP among others. Secondly, the dominance of English on internet is main constraint as in the case of India more than 80% percent of the population does not speak English (Census: 2011). Due to such overwhelming dominance of English over computers and internet are quite useless in Indian villages. Thirdly, administrative culture is not conducive for such measures. The figures indicate that significant digital divide is prevailing between rich and poor areas in the country (Economic Survey: 2013). In fact, bureaucrats are averse to such innovation due to change in power relations equation (Jain: 2000; Maheswari: 2000). It can therefore imply that those with power or interests to protect in India might not see any benefits to e-government or might want to sabotage it. West (2004) argues that the cultural norms and patterns of individual behaviour affect the manner in which technology is used by citizens and policy makers of a country.

2. Infrastructural and Technical Constraints: Internet diffusion is still very low in India. According to ITU (2011) there are about 120 million Internet users in a country of 1.2 billion inhabitants — this is merely 10% of the population while it is 27% for Asia region. Further, Rural teledensity is merely 33% (ITU: 2011) in comparison of 80% for urban, notwithstanding, nearly 70% population live in rural areas. Also, there are only around 15 million fixed broadband subscriptions in India that is merely 1.23% of the total population of the country (ITU: 2012). According to the Economist (2010) India is placed at the bottom block - 58 out of total 70 countries on 'digital economy rankings' (previously known as 'e-readiness ranking'). The telecommunications infrastructure is still inaccessible to all parts of India. The government has tried to invest in infrastructure to support e-government and ICT. There are still a lot of problems regarding infrastructure such as obsolete equipment, infrastructure in few better developed metros and big cities.

3. Economic Constraints: Towns and cities make more than two thirds of the Indian GDP, even though less than a third of the population live in them (Economic Survey, 2011). According to World Bank (2010) nearly 68.8% people in India live on merely \$2 a day. The cost of subscribing to a telephone line, PC and so on is on the neck of an average citizen. The same is true with procuring Internet access in India where barely all the internet service providers are located outside the interior of the country.

Ordinary citizens find it very difficult to access the internet in an environment where broadband development is very low and the facilities for its installation very expensive. Computers and Internet access are two vital facilities required for any e-government engagements, but when such facilities are lacking, as is the case with India, it remains to be seen how e-government can be adopted by the people who need it.

4. Privacy and security concerns: Security and privacy of information is another serious technical challenge and is a well documented issue for e-government implementation all around the world (Layton, 2007). Participants feel that using websites to transfer their personal information (such as name, picture, and date of birth, ID number, and credit card details), sharing information with public agencies online or electronically is not safe. They are afraid that e-services websites are not secure enough to protect their private information from being misused or distorted by hackers. For e-government activities, service continuity is critical not only for the availability and delivery of services, but also to build citizen confidence and trust.

#### Future Prospects of E-governance in India

Vision and Objectives of the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) as:-

- a. To deliver all Government services in electronic mode so as to make the Government process transparent, citizen centric, efficient and easily accessible.
- b. To break information silos and create shareable resources for all Government entities
- c. To deliver both informational and transactional government services over mobiles and promote innovation in mobile governance
- d. To build Shared Service Platforms to accelerate the adoption of E-Governance and reduce the “cycle time” of E-Governance project implementation
- e. To strengthen and improve sustainability of the existing projects through innovative business models and through continuous infusion of advanced technology
- f. To promote ethical use of technology and data and to create a safe and secure E-Governance cyber world
- g. To create an ecosystem that promotes innovation in ICT for Governance and for applications that can benefit the citizens

#### Targets of the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17)

- a. A National Institute for E-Governance (NIG) would be setup as an autonomous State of the Art National Institute. NIG will also train at least 50 employees from Central Government per year on Project Management Certification.
- b. An E-Governance Innovation and R&D Fund will be created to give adequate impetus to innovation in E-Governance and M-Governance.

- c. Electronic Delivery of Services (EDS) Bill will be implemented.
- d. Shared Services Platforms for e-Payment, GIS, call centre, etc. will be created.
- e. At least one person per family in 50% of the families will be targeted to provide basic IT training in the XII Plan period.
- f. Cyber Security will be a major focus area during the Twelfth Five Year Plan Period.
- g. Training on Basic IT Skills will be introduced systematically for the existing and all new entrants into Government service.

## SECTION - V

### V. CONCLUSION

E-governance heralds unparalleled reforms in the processes and structures of governance. It offers scores of benefits to the government and its citizens and various other stakeholders. In India, issues of weak governance, poverty, and bureaucratic corruption among others could be arrested with successful application of e-governance. The electronically propelled reforms, therefore, are capable of engendering greater citizens' involvement in policy formulation, responsive governance and administration, besides, ushering global best practices that cultural and contextual compatible. Further, E-Government is a channel through which the government interacts with its citizens (e-Citizens and e-Services), improves public service delivery and processes (e-Administration), and builds external interactions (e-Society).

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