E-GOVERNANCE: POLICY INITIATIVES AND E-PROJECTS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a contribution to the on-going discussion on good governance in a developing country like India with the involvement of technology in the administrative department. Government has launched several e-projects to deliver services to the citizens in a time bound manner. Research in this field is an endeavour to make the citizen aware of services provided by government since our society lacks the digital literacy. Focus is made on the policy initiatives and e-projects for good governance and the issues which arises in implementation on ground level. It summarizes important on-going and upcoming e-projects across the country as a part of Digital India Program. Initiatives like Digital India, National Portal of India has brought about revolutionary changes in the quality of services delivered to the citizens. Digitalization of services has resulted in direct and speedy administration of services and information with reduction in corruption and cheaper services. E-Governance establishes minimum government and maximum governance. One of the purposes of this article is to channel the gap between law and technology; provisions relating to e-governance are highlighted. The roles played by administrative agencies, judiciary and legislature are crucial in creating a nexus between law and technology.

Key Words – *Good governance, e-governance, e-projects, Digital India, digitalization,*

INTRODUCTION

Good governance plays an important role in the development of a nation. The society is changing with the rapid advancement in the technological fields. Therefore the mechanism of governance needs to be in accordance with the society to foster its need effectively. The digital governance brings transformation in the existing forms of governance as they change the nature of government-citizen link and brings in different mechanism to deliver the governance. The "e" stands for electronic in e-governance. Thus e-governance utilizes ICT (Information and Communications Technology) to connect with the government agencies at National, State and local levels. Governance safeguards the rights of people and ensures equal access to public services. And therefore e-Governance aims to provide services to each and every citizen without any discrimination.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) define e-governance as:

'*e-governance is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies 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. E-Governance can bring forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of citizen needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage, enable and empower the citizen.*'[1]

According to European Council e-governance means:

'*...the use of electronic technologies in three areas of public action: 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)*' [2]

The growth of e-governance in India is not the same as that of other developed countries, but in recent years strong efforts have been made for its progress. E-governance delivers a sound strategy to strengthen the governance in India. It is playing a significant role in India's GDP.

'Various manifestations of e-governance initiatives will be in terms of the government delivering services to citizens of transacting business, offering general information, or conducting interactions with the general public and business using IT tools such as:

- E-mail
- Internet web sites
- SMS connectivity
- Intranet development and usage'[3]

The importance of these gears and ICT as a tool has been universally accepted. This has resulted in change of mechanism of services in both public and private sectors. The growth of new technologies has improved the teaching techniques as well.

Types of E-Governance: E-Governance facilitates interaction between different components of governance. Therefore, e-governance is divided into four types of interactions, as described under:

(a) Government to Government (G2G): It refers to the interaction between different government institutions, departments and agencies. Online communication eases the flow of data among the departments and agencies of government which enhances the effectiveness of processes. It provides secure communication between domestic or foreign governments.

Northeast Gang Information System (NEGIS) - Northeast States uses this system to share information about street gangs and their activities. The system inter-relates all the Police Departments that are participating for the smooth flow of gathered intelligence to other agencies and States.

(b) Government to Citizen (G2C): This service accomplishes the key objective of e-governance. This facilitates the citizens to access the information conveniently, any time and through different mediums like computer, mobile or wireless devices.

National Government Services Portal - 'This is the Government Services Portal of India, developed with an objective to enable a single window access to services being provided by the various Indian Government entities. This Portal is initiative under the Indian Portal project. Designed and developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC), Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India.'[4]

Direct services are available to the citizens through various web portals. Initiatives under this project are -

- e-district (Himachal Pradesh): 'Various G2C services such as certificates of Birth, caste, marriage, income, character etc. can be availed online.'[5] This reduces the burden on government offices and saves time and energy.

- Online services for voters are available (NVSP): National Voters' Services Portal. This facilitates the people in online registration for voter card, correction of entries, migration etc. People can trace the application status. It can be accessed through www.nvsp.in

- Land Records and Circle Rates: It provides authorized information about circle rates of lands and government records.

- e-service Book Personnel MIS : 'Citizens and Department officials can access administrative orders regarding HR appointments, transfers, cancellation, promotions etc.'[6]

- e-seva Project (Andhra Pradesh): Services are provided to consumers online by linking them directly to the government departments and access of information at the time of delivery.

(c) Government to Business (G2B): Companies are conducting business in e-commerce manner to reduce their costs and improve their efficiency and communications. This interaction contains the transaction and exchange regarding licenses, policies, sale of government goods to private sector etc.

- Goods and Services Tax: This portal provides information and updates about the G.S.T services. This is widely known as GSTN Portal, it facilitates the taxpayers in G.S.T registration, refund filling, cancellations, and intimating notices by departments etc.

- Udyog Aadhaar: 'It is a national portal for registration of micro, small and medium enterprises.'[7]

- e-Classification and Approval of Hotels: Tourism plays a vital role in economy and hotels contributes highly in travelling experiences. Therefore, 'the Ministry of Tourism has formulated a voluntary scheme for classification of operational hotels into following categories- 5 Star Deluxe, 5 Star, 4 Star, 3 Star, 2 Star & 1 Star.'[8]

(d) Government to Employee (G2E): Government through this medium aims to connect with the employees directly. It tells them about the employment opportunities, pay structures, guidelines and regulations, employee welfare schemes and notifies them about their legal rights.

NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN

e-governance has evolved from computerization of government institutions, departments and agencies. Efforts have been made to improve public services and bring transparency and accountability in administration. Government of India launched the National E-Governance Plan (NeGP) across the nation. The aim of NeGP is to 'make all government services available to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets, and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realise the basic needs of the common man'[9]

Records (which include medical, professional, criminal, educational and other statics) are being digitized for easy access from anywhere, and anytime.

- **Mission Mode Projects (MMPs)**

  Government of India launched 27 MMPs and 8 components at the time of launch in 2006. Currently there are a total of 44 Mission Mode Projects encompassing 15 Central MMPs, 17 State MMPs and 12 Integrated MMPs.

  # National Portal of India has been launched as a Mission Mode Project under the National E-Governance Plan.

  a) **Central MMPs**

    - *Banking*: It has improved operation and reduced time and makes the online transactions simpler and secure. 'The Banking MMP covers the following services:

       - Electronic Central Registry under Sarfaesi Act, 2002

       - One India One Account for public sector banks

       - Electronic Mass Payment System' [10]

    - *UID- Aadhaar (Unique Identification)*: This project was launched to provide unique identification to each resident using the technology of biometrics. It is the most commonly used ID for all platforms.

'Till now, more than 120 Crores enrolments have been done across the country.'[11]

- *Passport Seva Project*: This facility is improving the passport services in the country. More than 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) and 24*7 National Call Centres in 17 regional languages are in operation. Online payment facility is available for application fees and other dues. Government has launched mPassportSeva app for smartphones which are available on Android, Windows and iOS.

- *Pensions*: This is an initiative to provide online facilities to pensioners and retired persons to avail the pension online. It was launched in 2007. Pension is transferred directly to their linked accounts and they get notified on every activity. Government has launched 'bhavishya.nic.in' portal for online tracking of pension and retirement benefits.

- *e-office*: This is an initiative to modernize the government offices, departments and institutions with the help of ICT. This has improved the efficiency, accountability and brought transparency. Status of files and applications can be checked online.

b) **State MMPs**

- *Agriculture*: NeGP Agriculture is comprised of 12 clusters of services and 80 components. The Central & State Data Centres and Disaster Recovery sites have been setup for more than 7 states.

- *e-municipality*: They have been designed by States as per the guidelines of municipality MMP. Projects are funded by the Finance Commission. They are improving the municipality works within Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

- *e-health*: It is undertaken by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. It aims to develop a Health information system. Medical records are uploaded online and can be accessed from anywhere. ICT is used for management and sharing of knowledge among hospitals, drugs and medicines supply and exchange of medical records.

- *Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and System (CCTNS)*: Its objective is to create a system for improving the policing standards and connecting the police stations with the help of ICT. Quick and easy flow of intelligence would improve the law and order situations.

c) Integrated MMPs

- *e-courts*: 'Web-based judicial services are being provided in all states. Out of total 14,249 courts approved for computerization, more than 14,000 have been computerized.'[12] It uses ICT as a tool to improve the condition of Indian Judiciary.

- *Social Benefits*: This was launched under the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment. 'For more effective results, this portal provides services like-

  -Registration of NGO's

  -Online Submission of Projects

  -Approval of NGO's by State Governments.'[13] Monthly Reports are submitted to PMO regularly in the form of Fortnightly report.

DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME

Government of India approved the Digital India Programme on July 02, 2015. 'It promises to transform India into a digitally empowered society by focusing on digital literacy, digital resources and collaborative digital platform.'[14] This programme is divided into different phases for its effective implementation. Under this initiative citizens would be provided with 'digital lockers' on a public cloud (under the cloud storage technology) to store the documents issued by the Government. In upcoming years a drastic change is expected to take place with the advent of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, predictive analysis, cloud based services etc. This would reduce the burden on offices and the paper work. Government has launched smartphone apps under Digital India programme in different sectors like banking, education, health, transport, tourism etc. Digital India aims to connect rural areas with high speed internet to deliver the Government projects in far remote areas.

'It helps in globalization as it connects one individual to the whole world through their phone or computer, it will avoid maintaining of documents, it will avoid maintaining of documents at paper length as all will be saved and delivered through

the internet at all level like schools, colleges, offices etc.' [15] Over the years it has gained popularity among the weaker sections of the society. This initiative has reduced the role of intermediaries, curbed corruption and made direct benefit schemes. Digital India is connecting everything around us, from clean energy to better healthcare, innovative teaching, safer transportation and secure transactions.

- *e-kranti Scheme*: It is the electronic delivery of services. The mission is " to ensure a Government wide transformation by delivering government services electronically to the citizens through integrated and interoperable systems via multiple modes, ensuring efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs.'[16]

  "The main objective is to redefine NeGP with transformational and outcome oriented e-governance initiative; to enhance portfolio of citizen centric services."[17]

- *Digital Villages*: Government is aiming to provide free internet to all the villages linked through Common Service Services (CSCs) for 3 months. Villages connected to BharatNet are provided internet through Wi-Fi free of charge till March, 2020. The Digital India has planned to set up one Digital Village in every district of the country.

- *BharatNet*: It is a Centre-State Joint plan, funded by Universal Service Obligation (USOF). It aims to improve the telecom sector in far remote areas to boost the e-health, e-education, e-banking and other schemes. BharatNet received Rs.6000 Crores in Union Budget 2020 to enhance broadband connectivity in rural areas (while also allowing private sectors to install Data Parks). Fibre to the Home Connections (FTTH) through BharatNet would link more than 1, 00,000 Gram Panchayats between 2020-2021.

- **m governance**

  With the digital revolution, more than 300 million people have smartphones in India and this figure is expected to rise in coming years. Therefore seeing the potential of smartphones with the help of ICT, Government launched various programmes to connect to the people directly via mobile phones. It is playing a major role in rural transformation where technological infrastructure is weak. Information or advisories are directly transmitted to the citizens via SMS in regional languages. This helps in controlling the fake

news or rumours. Mobile based services have improved the mechanism of every sector. Government sends ticket conformations via SMS and they are used as e-tickets. Private sectors have launched several apps on mobile platform for online bookings of Movies, sport events, food delivery services, online teaching apps etc. Government has launched the following applications under Digital India Programme:

- UMANG, PMO India, BHIM- Making India Cashless, online RTI filling, mPassportSeva, mParivahan etc.

Amalgamation of mobile and services via applications are providing services in a more efficient manner; it has reduced wastage, corruption and cost of services. 'Government has taken setup institutions for making policies, control and account deployment of m-governance which will provide effective and efficient services.'[18]

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Government has tried to make effective legal framework to govern the use and exploitation of Information and Communication Technology(ICT) to create an equilibrium among the agencies, citizens and organizations involved can operate and evolve fairly and safety. It is important to maintain a balance between law and technology. Law, Cyberspace, electronic commerce are linked to each other. Legal instability impacts the economy in a broader way; this brings damage to the foreign and domestic investment. Investors are concerned with the decision making process carried out by the regulatory authorities and judicial bodies. Also, security and privacy concerns (Data Protection) are big factors for departments, agencies, investors and citizens. Legal Initiatives have been taken by the government to deal with e-commerce. Cyber laws are being updated to make them more relevant. The rules and regulations for cyber security and e-commerce depend upon the social, economic and constitutional situation of the country.

- **Information Technology Act, 2000**

  This Act provides a strong base to e-governance and e-commerce. This Act gives legal recognition to internet transactions, enforceability to e-contracts and acknowledgment to e-mails. 'Section 4 of the Act provides legal recognition to the electronic records whereas Section 5 gives recognition to

electronic signatures.'[19] Cyber laws would create confidence in the public regarding the protection of their online data.

- **The Aadhaar Act, 2016**

   The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) established in 2008 with the objective to provide a unique identity (Aadhaar) to every resident of the country. It is the largest Biometric system in the world. The Aadhaar number establishes the identity of a person and in this way receives direct benefits from the government without the involvement of any middle man. This has stopped the black marketing in many sectors. Government has made use of Aadhaar Card mandatory in many sectors to bring transparency. But the Apex Court has struck down Section 57 of the Act as unconstitutional. Therefore, company or private sectors cannot make Aadhaar Card mandatory. Aadhaar is used to avail the facilities of welfare schemes and government subsidies.

CONCLUSION

The concepts of e-governance and m-governance have advanced a lot in India. It displays the amount of pellucidity and answerability devised on the part of government and at the same time it is also a machinery to make participation of public in the policy making by empowering them the access through the medium of Information and Communication Technology. The assimilation of internet and telecommunication services has expanded in India in the last few years. It is transforming the lives of people, bridging the regional gaps by providing online translation tools, making services faster and cheaper. It seems like the motto of government 'minimum government and maximum governance' is on the right track. A change in governance is necessary to support the new social patterns developing with the advancement of technology. Therefore, for successful implementation of policies the executive must engage with the citizens through dialogue and feedbacks. Digital India, if implemented properly would transform India into a digital society.

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