

An Initiative of E-Governance and its impact on Rural Development in India

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Abstract

E-Governance has a wider scope which enlightened the importance of Electronic Governance by utilizing electronic means in Administration. Electronic Governance has been widely working and utilizing in all administrative transparency. Every system should needs administrative stability and efficiency. This electronic means covers better response from the system to run effective governance. By this way this article digs out basic necessity of e-governance in Indian Rural Areas. Rural Development is another important topic of the study here. This term mainly focuses on positive changes in all village level administration. Village administration is the grass-root administration in Indian administrative system. To develop administrative system in Indian rural areas, it is necessary to implement e-governance initiative in rural development. Hence, this study involved its scope in two areas such as E-Governance and Rural Development.

Keywords: E-Governance, Administration, Transparency, Efficiency, Rural Development, Village Administration, Grass-root Administration

Introduction

E-Governance has a wider scope which enlightened the importance of Electronic Governance by utilizing electronic means in Administration. E-governance has been playing an increasingly significant role in promoting rural development and successful implementation of various welfare policies taken for the rural mass. Good policymaking or rural development policy management often requires the sharing of information between the rural people and the administration to improve collaboration, up-to-date information, analysis and monitoring the different rural developmental projects. E-government is a broad term that describes the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet and mobile devices by government bodies that have the capability of transforming relationships with people, enterprises and other governmental divisions. The motto behind e-governance is to provide SMART (Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsible and Transparent) government to the common people. E-governance not only includes electronic interaction and exchange of information between the citizen and government but also the exchange of information between the governments (i.e. government to government). The ultimate goal of any government is to provide services to the citizens for the betterment of society through the smooth conduction of administrative operations which makes e-governance more user-centric. It was started many years ago in the most advanced countries of the world like the USA, UK, China, etc. to maintain accountability and efficiency in governance and successful implementation of developmental projects. But in developing countries like, it is still in a primary stage. In the era of globalization, the use of Information and Communication

Technologies (ICT) has brought a significant change in aspects of life all over the world. It can provide better service to its citizens in the far-flung areas of the country by taking advantage of information and communication technologies. Since 1990s, there has been a significant growth of various e-governance and ICT initiatives in India which are used for the development of rural areas of the country. The introduction of E-governance system in the administration has helped the rural people to get better information about the market which helps to increase their earnings. Indian farmers are mainly benefitted from radio, television and mobile phone or the internet which are available in recent days. Such developments have facilitated innumerable services and information to every citizen where the cost of accessing information has been one of the biggest hurdles for the poor countrymen. Through ICT, several e-governance initiatives have been adopted by the government of India which has ultimately proved themselves as a major contributor to rural development.

Rural e-Governance Dimensions in India

Rural e-Governance can be measured through the following dimensions,

1. ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Infrastructure

It plays a foundational role in the rollout of e-Governance services. The success of ICT and e-governance projects lies in the availability of infrastructure by the Government for public accessibility. These can be measured through the presence of optical fiber backbone, telecom towers, 5G network availability, number of households with mobile connections or personal computers, amount of data consumed, availability of tele-centres and kiosks etc.

2. Access to e-Governance services

Availability of the number of e-Governance services for rural areas and the ease of access of such services is an indicator to the success of the digital services. Better accessibility would lower the cost of availing such services.

3. Mobile First

It is a practice of starting the development with respect to the mobile user or a mobile device first. It favors lightweight and low-bandwidth design that can be responsive based on-screen size and available capabilities. Rural users are more likely to have Smartphone than laptops / desktops to access e-governance services.

4. E-Literacy and awareness

In this dimension, level of education complemented by basic awareness of IT (Information Technology) skills, awareness of the several e-Governance initiatives and services available.

5. Usage behavior

Here, Pattern of usage in terms of consumption or utilization of the services, behavioral change in the rural society in seeking the e-governance services such as e-Health, online education, skills enhancement etc.

6. Localized content

Here, again availability of localized content from rural areas for e-commerce, tourism, consumption of content by non-local and external players such as industries. This requires and can be facilitated by each rural unit having their own distinct & configurable website, managed by Village Secretary, such as being created in India for each Gram Panchayat (i.e. Rural Local elected Government comprising set of villages) as a part of National Panchayat Portal sponsored by Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

7. Employment and productivity

Generation of alternate source of income through employment locally or remotely, improvement in productivity through information available, innovations at the grass root level

8. Grievance redressal

In this, ease with which grievance can be raised and resolved.

9. Participatory governance

Feedback and regular participation in improving governance shift in policy (devolution of fund, function & functionaries to rural local Government) and implementation by reciprocating to the actual needs of the locality. If devolution is of fair degree, the governance & services of local people is likely to be met by local Government unit and dependence on ICT is considerably reduced since geography gets shirked within a village so is gap between ruler/provider and ruled/consumer. Therefore, participatory & decentralized governance is indirectly reducing ICT intervention from certain perspective in local-to-local context.

10. Inclusion

Inclusive growth by reducing the social and economic inequalities, access to e-governance services by socially backward and marginalized communities, all genders, language, region, disability, age groups or other status. It would encompass financial, business, and regulatory inclusion. This is to ensure that E-Governance measures ensure balanced transformation of Information ecology of the rural unit with maximum gains.

E-Governance Projects in Rural Areas of India

1. E-choupal

India has witnessed massive industrialization in the past decade but still, agriculture plays an important role in the economy of the nation. At every stage of selling their products to the consumers, the exploitation made by the intermediaries to the illiterate farmers is very much common in rural India. Such intermediaries or agents add their profit margin and try to hinder the market information to the farmer. To eradicate such problems among the rural farmers, the International Business Division of Indian Tobacco Company (ITC-IBD) initiated a step called e-Choupal (which means a village meeting place) which gives immense benefit to the farmer. Under this initiative, various e-Choupals were set up in around 6500 villages by 2012 and each e-Choupal was equipped with a PC, internet connection, printer, and Uninterrupted Power Supplies (UPS).

2. Kissan Call Centers

Most of the farmers in India are illiterate and they have no idea about the modern technologies that are used in the agricultural sector. So they have to face lots of problems and many questions remained unsolved in their minds. To remove all these problems the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture started Kissan Call Centers on April 2002. These call centers are established specially to respond to the queries made by the farmers in their respective languages. Therefore it changes the language of conversation every 50 km. As most of the villagers are not concern about the use of technology in their agricultural sector, these initiatives are taken to create awareness among the farmers. The farmers are benefitted from these because by using Toll-free numbers they able to collect various information without any cost.

3. Jagriti E-Sewa

Jagriti e-Sewa is very much suitable to all the people in a developing nation like India because it helps to

establish various Information and Communication initiatives in the rural and semi-urban areas of India which is people-oriented. It makes all kinds of information and data easily available to all through ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and e-governance initiatives at the minimum costs. In this project often old computers are used and providing information to the people with the help of Dial-up telephone lines. Generally, it takes less time in performing any kind of change like language and others. It is seen that these kinds of projects are often established at the centre of the village or other renowned places of the village so that they can cover a minimum of 25,000-30,000 villagers.

4. Gyandoot

To make direct communication between the administration and the rural mass Madhya Pradesh government has launched Gyandoot project at Dhar district in January 2000. Under this project, the Civil Servants of the state often consulted with various Gram Panchayats which help them to understand the problems, hopes and aspirations of the rural mass. The trained unemployed youth of the district started a rural internet system “Soochnalaya”, which is implementing all the programs under the Gyandoot projects. It is very beneficial because of its economic and helpful nature to the rural poor people. They provide various services and information about agriculture, education, health, market and user fees and issues related to women, etc. They further serve in making an application for the services provided by the district headquarter for ownership of land.

5. Tata Kishan Kendra (TKK)

In some agriculture-based states of Northern India like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, TATA Chemical Limited established Tata Kishan Kendra (TKK) with a holistic idea to provide some basic information to the Farmers. With the help of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) TKK collects basic information about soil, groundwater, and weather etc. which are considered very much essential for the crops. It also informs about the socio-economic, administrative and physical set-up like roads, buildings, rivers, availability of electricity connection etc. in the forms of digital maps to the clients. It also helps the farmers by taking the images of insects through satellites which enhances the productivity of the rural farmers. Thus, the rural farmers are immensely benefitted from the Tata Kishan Kendra.

Other E-Governance Initiatives in India which are also applied to Rural People

1. Digital India Mission

It was launched in 2015 to digitally empower the nation. The creation of a digital infrastructure that is both secure and stable, the digital delivery of government services, and achieving universal digital literacy are its main components.

2. Digi-Locker

It assists citizens in storing important documents in a digital format, such as degree certificates, PAN numbers, and mark sheets. This makes it easier to share documents and reduces the need for physical documents.

3. Mobile Seva

It aims to provide government services via tablets and mobile phones. Over 200 live applications are available in the m-App store, and they can be used to access a variety of government services.

4. myGov.in

It is a platform for national citizen engagement where people can share ideas and get involved in policy and governance issues.

5. UMANG

It is a unified mobile application that gives users access to services offered by the federal and state governments, such as Aadhar, Digital Locker, PAN, and 6. Employee Provident Fund services, among other things.

6. Computerization of Land Records

It ensures that landowners get digital and updated copies of documents relating to their property.

Impact of E-Governance on People

Some of the important impacts of the system of E-Governance on people can be summarized below,

- **Access to Services:** Citizens can now access a wide array of government services online, reducing the need for physical visits to government offices. This has been especially beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital services helped maintain social distancing.
- **Transparency:** E-governance has enhanced transparency in government processes. Citizens can track the status of their applications and payments, reducing corruption and inefficiencies.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Initiatives have facilitated the direct transfer of subsidies and benefits to citizens' bank accounts, reducing leakages and ensuring that welfare schemes reach their intended beneficiaries.
- **Convenience:** E-governance services are available 24/7, providing convenience to citizens who can access them at their convenience, eliminating the need to take time off work for government-related tasks.

Some of the main Challenges faced by the system of E-Governance in Indian Rural Areas

E-governance initiative in India was introduced for the enhancement of the communication system between citizens and administration. But the government of India has been facing lots of problems in implementing these techniques and methods. A few of the problems or challenges faced by the government are listed below;

1. Illiteracy rate in Rural Areas

The government of India has taken various schemes and projects to enhance the literacy rate in rural India but it is still far away from the urban literacy rate. Most people don't know the use of Information and Communication Technology tools and thus the rural people aren't able to enjoy the fruits of government schemes like AGMARKNET, Bhoomi, etc. which requires enough technological knowledge from the beneficiaries.

2. Different Languages

Indian society is following multicultural thought and also a multi-ethnic with diverse society where each ethnic group of people has their own culture and languages. It is seen that most of the rural people in India only speak their native language and they are not familiar with other languages except the mother tongue. But all the e-governance applications use English as the base language which is not understood by the majority of the rural people. Thus, they are often deprived of getting proper information about the government and its various development schemes. This is major challenges facing by majority of rural people in India.

3. Lack of Awareness

Most of the rural people aren't at all concerned about the use of ICT tools and e-governance applications established by the government for the welfare of the rural areas to enhance communication networks

between the people and the administration. Although, Government has taken various initiatives by broadcasting their projects on radio, TV and putting banners, etc. to create awareness among the people, the rural people are less benefitted from all these programs only because of its lack of cognizance.

4. Hesitation to change

Rural Indian people aren't interested to accept any kind of changes in their day-to-day lives which prove the reluctant nature of the rural mass. Introduction of e-governance application in the administration has changed the functioning procedure of official works from manual to computerize based. But interestingly, it isn't welcomed by the employees as well as the general public because they have great hesitation in the minds to learn new things for which they need to invest more time and effort.

5. Infrastructure & Running Cost

Successful implementation of e-governance programs in rural areas requires the assertive IT infrastructures which are lagging in most of the villages in India. Most of the remote villages of India are still not connected with the electrical system. In those villages watching TV, using the internet remained a dream for the common people because of which rural people are not at all concerned about the govt. welfare programs. In the absence of rural IT infrastructure, the people have to move to the nearby town because of which they have to pay a huge amount of money to access information through e-governance applications. Thus, it can be said that poor IT infrastructure and heavy running costs remained an important confrontation in the process of successfully implement rural development programs through e-governance initiatives.

Summary:

E-governance is a tool to accomplish the goals of good governance. It is the most important phenomenon in present-day societies because it is trying to reduce the digital divide among the people in developing nations like India. There are various projects which were already started by the government of India like ICT (Information and Communication Technology), E-Governance, and Digital India. The tool of E-Governance is helping in strengthening social networking sites, rural empowerment, and people's participation in the administration etc. E-Governance is the need of the hour so that basic facilities can be provided to rural people at the cheapest rate. The Government should provide adequate technological resources to the Panchayati Raj Institution so that they can play a meaningful role in rural development. So, in a nutshell, it can be concluded that increasing digital literacy with the help of technological advancements are leading and will lead rural development India into a new milestone. As if the Information and Communication Technologies application in E-Governance is successful it provides a one-stop solution to problems that have risen by the rural community.

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