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‘E-GOVERNANCE AS A TOOL OF COMBATING CORRUPTION: A STUDY OF DIGITAL GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN INDIA’

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ABSTRACT

E-governance is a tool that helps make the government more transparent and accountable. It uses technology to make things better and more efficient. This is especially important when it comes to stopping corruption. By using computers and the internet the government can reduce the power of officials and make things happen faster. This research paper looks at how e-governance helps stop corruption in India.

The study looks at how digital governance initiatives help control corruption. It examines programs like Digital India, systems for buying things and ways for people to complain about problems. It also looks at how technology helps enforce laws that stop corruption like the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act.

This paper uses a straightforward approach to see if e-governance really works. It finds that e-governance has benefits, such as more public participation, better record keeping and real-time monitoring. This makes the government more accountable. However there are also challenges like people not knowing how to use computers concerns about cybersecurity and not enough infrastructure. These things can get in the way of e- initiatives.

The study says that e-governance is not the solution to corruption but it is a very important tool. To make it work we need to implement it have strong laws use the latest technology and make sure citizens are aware of what is going on. This can help create a government that's transparent and accountable, in India.

Keywords: E-Governance, Corruption, Anti-Corruption Laws, Transparency, Accountability, Digital India, Good Governance, Prevention of Corruption Act.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a problem in India. It affects how the government works the economy and how people trust the government. Corruption means that the law is not applied fairly democratic values are weakened and it is hard to get services from the government. In India corruption has been linked to bureaucracy lack of transparency and not enough accountability.

The government wants to stop corruption. One way to do this is by using technology to make governance better. This is called e-governance. E-governance uses platforms and electronic services to provide public services share information and help the government interact with citizens, businesses and other groups. By reducing involvement increasing transparency and creating digital records e-governance can help prevent and detect corrupt practices.

India has started e-governance projects under programs like Digital India. These include portals for public services, e-procurement systems, digital payment systems and electronic platforms for grievance redressal. These projects aim to promote transparency, efficiency, accountability and citizen participation in governance. Technology has reduced opportunities for bribery, favoritism and misuse of power.

Anti-corruption laws are important. They only work if there are mechanisms to implement and enforce them. E-governance helps by enabling real-time monitoring improving access to information maintaining records and facilitating public oversight. It supports laws like the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 the Right to Information Act, 2005 and the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 which aim to strengthen integrity and accountability in administration.

This research paper looks at the role of e-governance in supporting -corruption laws and reducing corruption in India. It examines the framework, for corruption control explores major e-governance initiatives evaluates their effectiveness and identifies challenges that hinder their implementation. The study seeks to understand how technological innovations can contribute to accountable and citizen-centric governance systems¹.

¹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index* (latest edition).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN E GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION

E-governance and anti-corruption are closely connected. They work together to make the government more transparent and accountable. Corruption happens when there is much power and not enough oversight. E-governance uses technology to make government processes better and to get citizens involved.

One way e-governance helps stop corruption is by reducing the need for people to meet with government officials in person. This can lead to bribery and unfair treatment. With platforms people can do things online and do not have to talk to officials as much. This makes it harder for corruption to happen.

E-governance also makes government information available to everyone. This means people can see what the government is doing and hold them accountable. The government puts information online so people can easily find it.

Another good thing, about e-governance is that it creates a record of everything that happens. This makes it harder for people to cheat or do things that're not fair. It also helps investigators find out if someone has done something.

The government can also buy things online which is called e-procurement. This makes the process fairer. Reduces the chance of corruption. Everyone can see what is happening. It is harder for people to cheat.

E-governance also helps people get involved in the government. They can complain online. Track what is happening with their complaint. This helps people trust the government more. In India they have done things to reduce corruption. They have made it possible for people to file taxes online and get benefits directly. They have also created a system for people to complain online. These things have helped reduce corruption and make the government more transparent. So e-governance is a tool to help stop corruption. It makes the government more transparent and accountable. It also helps people get involved and trust the government. Technology alone cannot stop corruption. It can help a lot when it is used with good laws and rules.²

² Transparency International. (2024). *Corruption and Good Governance Reports*.

MAJOR E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN INDIA

1. Digital India Programme

The Digital India Programme is one of the projects started by the Government of India. It wants to make India a country where everyone has access to technology and knowledge. This programme was started in 2015. The main goals of the Digital India Programme are to make sure that every citizen has access to technology to make government services available to people when they need them and to empower citizens through digital technology.

The Digital India Programme helps people get government services online teaches them about technology and makes sure that government offices use digital technology instead of paper. This has helped reduce corruption because everything is done online and people can see what is happening.

2. National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)

The National e-Governance Plan was started to provide government services to people through the internet. This plan included projects such as income tax, passport services, municipal services, land records, banking and commercial taxes. The main goal of the NeGP was to make government offices work efficiently and be more transparent.

The National E-Governance Plan or NeGP was made up of projects that covered many areas like land records and income tax and passports and banking and municipalities and rural development. This plan made things easier by cutting down on paperwork and reducing the need for people to get involved. It allowed people to do things electronically. The NeGP helped stop people from being corrupt. It made the government work better. The NeGP was very important for the governments later plans to use technology like the Digital India programme and it played a big role in changing the way the government works in India. The NeGP was a part of this change and it helped make things better for people, in India by improving the NeGP and its services.

3. Common Service Centres (CSCs)

Common Service Centres are places where people can go to use technology to access government and private services. These centers are usually in remote areas. At these centers people can do things like register for Aadhaar pay utility bills use banking services and get health advice from doctors over the internet.

These centers help people in areas get government services without having to go through

intermediaries, which reduces the chance of corruption. The Digital India Programme and Common Service Centres are both working towards the goal of making Digital India a reality.

4. Aadhaar and Digital Identity System

Aadhaar is an identity system that gives every person in India a special number. This system has changed the way government services are delivered. It helps the government send money directly to peoples bank accounts gives subsidies to the people and makes sure that only real people get benefits.

Aadhaar has made it easier for the government to send benefits to people. It has also reduced corruption by making sure that benefits only go to the people who are supposed to get them. The Digital India Programme and Aadhaar are both parts of the governments plan to make India a digitally empowered society.

5. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)

The Direct Benefit Transfer system was started to send government subsidies and benefits to peoples bank accounts. This system has benefits, such as eliminating middlemen reducing corruption and preventing fraud.

The DBT system is used for government schemes, including pensions, scholarships and subsidies for cooking gas. It has made it easier for people to get the benefits they are supposed to get. The Digital India Programme and DBT are both helping to make government services more efficient and transparent.

The government is using Aadhaar to link bank accounts of people who get benefits. They are using digital payment systems. This way Direct Benefit Transfer or DBT makes sure that the people who are supposed to get the benefits actually get them on time and everything is clear. DBT has really helped stop people from getting benefits they are not supposed to get. It has also stopped fake claims. It has made the system more efficient and accountable when it comes to giving out services. So DBT is a help, in making things transparent making the government work better and stopping corruption in India.

6. E-Procurement System

The e-Procurement system is a platform where government offices can buy things. This system makes the process of buying things transparent. It also reduces the chance of corruption.

The e-Procurement system includes everything from publishing tenders to awarding contracts. It is a part of the governments plan to reduce corruption and make government offices work

more efficiently. The Digital India Programme and e-Procurement system are both working towards the goal.

7. Government e-Marketplace (GeM)

The Government e-Marketplace is a platform where government offices can buy goods and services. This platform makes the process of buying things transparent and fair.

The Government e-Marketplace has features, such as online bidding and real-time monitoring. It has made it easier for government offices to buy things and has reduced corruption. The Digital India Programme and Government e-Marketplace are. Important parts of the governments plan to make India a digitally empowered society.³

8. Online Passport Seva Project

The Online Passport Seva Project is a platform where people can apply for passports and other travel documents. This platform has made it easier for people to apply for passports and has reduced the time it takes to get a passport.

People can use this platform to apply for passports, schedule appointments and track the status of their applications. It has reduced the chance of corruption. Has made the process of getting a passport more transparent. The Digital India Programme and Online Passport Seva Project are both working towards the goal.⁴

9. Income Tax e-Filing System

The Income Tax e-Filing system is a platform where people can file their tax returns and pay their taxes. This platform has made it easier for people to file their taxes and has reduced the chance of corruption.

People can use this platform to file their tax returns track their refunds and access their tax records. It has made the process of filing taxes more efficient and transparent. The Digital India Programme and Income Tax e-Filing system are both parts of the governments plan to make India a digitally empowered society.⁵

10. DigiLocker

DigiLocker is a platform where people can store and access their important documents. This

³ Government of India, *Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Mission*, Cabinet Secretariat.

⁴ Passport seva portal , Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

⁵ Income tax e- filing portal, Government of india

platform has made it easier for people to access their documents and has reduced the chance of corruption. People can use DigiLocker to store and access documents such, as driving licenses, educational certificates and identity documents. It has made the process of accessing documents efficient and transparent. The Digital India Programme and DigiLocker are both working towards the goal of making India a digitally empowered society. The Digital India Programme is helping to make DigiLocker a success.⁶

BENEFITS OF E- GOVERNANCE IN CONTROLLING CPORRUPTION

E-governance is critical for anti-corruption legislation because it promotes transparency, accountability and efficiency in handling government affairs. E-governance refers to the use of ICT by the government to deliver services, share information and communicate with the public. By relying on ICT rather than human intervention, e-government has become one of the most powerful ways to fight against corruption.

1) Transparency in the operations of Government

E-Government's primary benefit is the ability to provide open and readily available information about the workings of government, such as online portals or through digital systems. The ability of citizens to track the status of their applications, licenses, tenders, and government spend in real-time has dramatically reduced the secrecy surrounding government processes and reduced opportunities for corrupt practices, such as bribery and misuse of power.

2) Tendency to reduce Human Discretion

Because traditional administrations involve an in-person exchange between official and citizen, the potential for corrupt activity is exponentially higher. Many of the operations of government that are manual and require human input can now be automated through e-governance, e.g. filing taxes, registering land, applying for passports, and procurement processes. The implementation of these automated processes has greatly reduced the discretionary authority of officials which has subsequently limited the ability of officials' to be corrupt.

3. Responsibility of Government Officials

E-government records that are kept in a digital format permit proof of all transactions made by government officials. Therefore, there is an audit trail for every activity performed by

⁶ Digilocker, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

government officials. This allows governments to be held accountable for their actions, and agencies that deal with corruption can quickly identify corrupt practices. These same records also help to streamline investigations conducted by anti-corruption agencies.

4. Quick & Effective Service Delivery

One of the primary sources of corruption is that citizens have to pay bribes to government officials in order to receive faster service. By providing an online way to access government services, e-government allows for the timely provision of services without requiring intermediaries, thus reducing the incidence of bribery.

5. Reduction In Contact Between Citizens And Government Officials

Because most services provided by the government can be accessed via the internet, there will be a decrease in face-to-face contact between citizens and government officials. Therefore, the possibility of citizens providing or requesting bribes diminishes greatly. This results in a more equitable and impartial delivery of services provided by the government.

6. Increased Citizen Engagement

By providing grievance reporting portals, feedback opportunities, and websites containing public information, e-government encourages greater participation of citizens in government. Citizens may report corruption, file complaints, or report on government officials who fail to follow the law. By promoting citizen engagement, governments will be held accountable for their actions, making it less likely that corruption will occur.

7. Effective Monitoring and Surveillance

Enabling continuous monitoring of financial transfers and monitoring public projects to find and correct any irregularities quickly.

8. Promotion of Good Governance

E-governance promotes the principles of good governance such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and rule of law. It strengthens public trust in government institutions and supports the effective implementation of anti-corruption laws.

In conclusion, e-governance has resulted in a digital transformation of government services; thus providing increased transparency and accountability allowing less opportunity for corruption and enabling government service delivery to be more efficient. Although there are

challenges such as digital illiteracy or cyber security that need to be addressed, but with the effective implementation of e-governance will continue to enhance the fight against corruption while fostering a clean and effective system of governance in society.⁷

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF E-GOVNRNANCE IN CONTROLLING CORRUPTION

E-governance is an excellent tool for diminishing corruption; however, e-governance has numerous limitations and challenges that are affecting its implementation and thereby its effectiveness. The various challenges related to e-governance need to be overcome in order to promote successful anti-corruption governance.

1. Digital Divide

One of the primary barriers that e-governance faces is the digital divide created between urban areas and rural areas. Numerous people in rural areas do not have access to the Internet, to computers and to digital infrastructure. Many citizens cannot effectively utilise the available online government services as a result of illiteracy and a lack of technical knowledge.

2. Cybersecurity Risks

E-governance systems are susceptible to being exposed to cyber-attacks, hacking, data theft and online fraud. If appropriate measures regarding cybersecurity are not implemented, there can be an abuse of the sensitive government and citizen data that is stored electronically. Weak security systems in e-governance will create a lack of trust in the use of digital governance.

3. Lack of Technical Infrastructure

In order for e-governance to be effectively implemented, it is necessary to have a reliable technological infrastructure, including dependable Internet connectivity, the use of servers and the use of updated software systems. When there is a shortage of appropriate infrastructure in many developing areas, the ability to efficiently offer various types of online services is compromised.

4. Resistance to Change

Some government officials and employees may resist the adoption of e-governance as a result

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Public Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures*.

of their fear of being more accountable and transparent. Some government officials that have benefited from corrupt practices will either purposely or according to other government practices avoid or delay the implementation of e-governance projects.

5. Implementation Costs

Establishing and sustaining e-governance systems require great financial outlay. The Government must pay for the hardware/software, training, ongoing maintenance and cybersecurity associated with e-governance. Developing nations may face financial challenges to implement large scale e-governance.

6. Digital Literacy

A large number of citizens do not know how to use computers, do not know how e-governance works and are unfamiliar with online processes. In particular seniors and those from low socio-economic backgrounds may find e-governance services difficult to access. As a result many of the anticorruption strategies will not be effective.

7. Technological Failures

Technical failures such as server down time, software bugs and system crashes can affect the delivery of e-governance services. These types of failures can result in delays and service interruptions, which may lead to reduced public confidence in e-governance.

8. Privacy and Data Protection Issues

E-governance systems involve a collection of a large volume of personal data from individuals and a storage of that data in centralised systems. Poor data protection legislation and limited or ineffective privacy protection represent a risk of misuse of someone's personal information by unauthorised persons.

9. Forms of Electronic Corruption

Digital and electronic corruption can still take place even if e-governance has reduced traditional forms of corruption. This includes manipulating an electronic record, conducting cyber fraud, and misuse of electronic systems by individuals skilled in technology.

CONCLUSION

E-governance has the ability to control corruption in a more proactive manner because it will improve accountability and transparency. These include digital illiteracy, cybersecurity concerns, lack of digital infrastructure, and reluctance to adapt. Hence, it is important for governments to develop digital infrastructure, provide cybersecurity, foster digital literacy, and establish proper legal structures in order to achieve full benefits from e-governance in fighting corruption⁸.

The study shows that digital governance has helped to make the government work better and people trust the government more. Things like automated processes and online transactions have made it harder for corruption to happen because everything is out in the open and can be tracked. Digital records and real-time monitoring have also helped.

There are still some problems. Some people do not have access to the internet and computers which is known as the divide. There are also concerns about cybersecurity and people not knowing how to use computers and the internet. The government needs to work on these issues. So while digital governance is not the way to stop corruption it is a very good way to prevent it when the government is strong and people are aware of what is going on. We need to keep putting money into infrastructure and making sure people have access to the internet and know how to use it. This will help to make digital governance work better.

In the end digital governance is a step towards making the government in India more transparent and accountable to the people. This will help to reduce corruption and make the government stronger. Digital governance is very important, for India. Will help the country to have a better government.

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