

## Article No.8

# E- GOVERNANCE AND ITS CHALLENGES INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN E-GOVERNANCE POLICY IN INDIA

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**Abstract:** E-Governance is an attempt of the government to not only connect with the citizens of India and business enterprises to provide online facilities but also to reach at all levels and inclusively grow by using the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It is an attempt to enhance the range and quality of information and services, improve the functioning of the government by streamlining the communication of the government both internally as well as externally by using the information technology services. According to the Vision Statement of National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), the ultimate objective is to “*Make all Government services accessible 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*”. There are four principal stages to a full-fledged implementation of E-Governance in India: Information and Cataloguing, Transaction, Vertical or Intra-Departmental Integration and Horizontal Integration which is being considered as the most challenging. India is currently on the third stage while rapidly approaching towards the fourth. E-Governance being a huge step faces many challenges and barriers in its way. In a country like India where women upliftment has been the prime focus of every scheme and every election, the pertinent question arises is whether women have been actually benefited from the policy of E-governance. Illiteracy, reproductive and productive roles, lack of financial independence and deeply rooted cultural and religious taboos among women are important barrier to E-Governance in India. It has been said that India is moving towards achieving e-governance but leaving alone the flattering terms and utopian dreams about the scheme, has this policy been actually inclusive? Have women been able to derive equal benefits from the government schemes as their male counterparts? Are women in rural India really aware of this e-governance initiative? Along with the thorough study of issues and challenges to E-Governance, this submission also strives to give a vivid picture of ground realities and what women in India understand and perceive of this initiative and analyse how it has helped them bring closer to the government.

**Key Words:** E-Governance, Women, Challenges

## Introduction

*“IT+IT= IT*

*Indian Talent + Information Technology = India Tomorrow “*

Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the Nasscom India Leadership Forum (NILF) 2014. Expressing E-governance as the most effective tool of IT industry Modi said “E-governance can bring minimum government and maximum governance.”

E-Governance is an attempt of the government to not only connect with the citizens of India and business enterprises to provide online facilities but also to reach at all levels and inclusively grow by using the Information and Communication Technology (ICT). E-governance is no more and no less than governance in an electronic environment. It is both governance of that environment and governance within that environment, using electronic tools (Zussman, 2002). Use of IT in government facilities is an efficient, speedy and transparent process for disseminating information to the public and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities. The Vision Statement of National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) states that the ultimate objective is to *“Make all Government services accessible 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”*.

There has been a cut throat competition in every sphere and the country's administration system has proved to be the best competitive tool. India being a developing country has been an early adopter of the E-governance. The emergence of E-governance dates back to the early seventies but it was only limited to the defence, economic monitoring, planning and deployment of IT to manage data intensive functions related to elections, census, tax administration, etc. During the eighties the National Informatics Center (NIC) made a significant development by trying to connect all the district headquarters through computers. The early nineties witnessed the enhancement of IT technologies by the Information and Communication Technologies and its extension to the rural areas with the help of the NGOs as well as the private sector. Since then there has been developments galore. India has been able to provide a groundwork for E-governance with the help of the international donor agencies like G-8, UNDP and World Bank.

In 2001, Layne and Lee proposed a model of E-governance. This was derived from the observations on the evolving E-governance in the United States. It consisted of four stages to a full-fledged implementation of E-governance: Information and Cataloguing, Transaction, Vertical or Intra-Departmental Integration and Horizontal Integration. Information or Cataloguing and Transaction have already been achieved by India. Currently India stands on the path to achieving the third stage and is rapidly approaching towards the fourth.

The shift from material to knowledge-based resources has opened up vast opportunities for developing India. It has accelerated the pace of development manifold. However reaching a huge and heterogeneous democracy as India with a population of 1,210,193,422 (Census 2011) remains an uphill task. Thus the government faces many challenges and barriers in its way. Due to patriarchal nature of the Indian society the biggest challenge has been the inclusion of women in the E-governance. The deeply rooted gender biased equations in the society have constrained the mobility and access of the women to E-governance schemes. Poverty may be a gender neutral attribute but certain gender specific antecedents impede women's access to it. Out of 637 million women in India, only 65.46% of the women are literate. 34.54% of the women are still illiterate. The socially and culturally backward norms have made women a weaker section. This has affected the economy of India.

## **E-Governance: The Basic Structure**

Based on technical, organizational and managerial feasibilities, E-governance was constructed on four pillars. These were also called Layne and Lee stages of E-governance:

- Cataloguing or Information
- Transaction
- Vertical Integration
- Horizontal Integration

These four stages were arranged keeping in mind the complexities and different levels of integration.

*Cataloguing or Information* is the first stage which focusses on establishing online presence for the government. Efforts are made on cataloguing information and presenting it on the web. This stage offers the least amount of functionality. This stage merely offers an online presence with a basic view of the website. India has already crossed this stage. However there are several challenges posed in managing the sites at this stage as the technology at this stage is relatively simple. Timely maintenance and upgrading the information is an important issue. Privacy is also a critical issue at this stage as it is possible to dig up online activities. Handling the queries and emails of the general public is an important task at hand.

*Transaction* is the second stage which is a two way communication process. Here the citizens shift to an active role from a passive one. Online transaction offers room for improvement and efficiency for both the citizens and the government than simply cataloguing the information. This stage brings out the revolutionary character of E-governance by taking the citizen-government interaction to a whole new level. It gives a sense of empowerment and responsibility to the citizens and the government respectively. In this stage transactions such as making railway or flight reservations, filling forms, applying for aadhar cards, renewing licenses, paying taxes, etc can be done by just a click of a button while sitting at home 24\*7. Issue of transaction fulfilment is the most critical at this stage. Apart from this, confidentiality and security issues must be of primary importance.

The third stage is of *Vertical Integration* or *Intra- Departmental Assimilation*. India is currently on the third stage of E-governance. The objective of vertical integration is to seamlessly integrate the central and local systems for cross-referencing and checking. With each transaction with an administration, the transaction information moves upward or downward to the appropriate counterparts.

The fourth and final stage is the *Horizontal Integration*. It is the stage where all the functional areas are inter-connected and communicate with each other with ease. For instance, a person may want information regarding jobs. He may also be looking for medical assistance. A citizen may want assistance on more than one service. Thus horizontal integration takes care of that issue. Horizontal integration is the connecting of different functional service branches of government. It is a system in which transaction in one area or agency leads to an automatic update in other functional areas. The biggest issue this stage faces is the problem of heterogeneous database

across different functions and agencies. Apart from being a technical challenge it is also a managerial challenge. Managing such a vast database is the most critical issue.

### ***E-Governance Initiatives***

Following is the list of all the E-governance initiatives undertaken by the government in different states of India. These initiatives are on different stages of E-Governance.

| <b><i>E-Governance Project/ Scheme</i></b>   | <b><i>State/ Union Territory</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Automatic Vehicle Tracking System, Computerization of website of RCS office, Electronic clearance system, Management Information System of Education, Delhi Slum Computer Kiosks etc   | Delhi                                |
| E-Seva, CARD (Computer- aided Administration of Registration Department), VOICE, MPHS, FAST, E- Cops, AP online – one – Stop-Shop on the Internet, Saukaryam, Online Transaction Processing, E-Immunization Rural Health Call Center and Site Suitability for Water Harvesting, Professional E-Pension | Andhra Pradesh                       |
| Sales Tax Administration Management Information, E-Khajana   | Bihar                                |
| Chhattisgarh InfoTech Promotion Society, Treasury Office, E-Linking Project  | Chhattisgarh                         |
| Dharani Project  | Goa                                  |
| Nai Disha, Result through Binocular  | Haryana                              |
| Mahiti Shakti, Dairy Information System Kiosk (DISK), Request for Government Documents Online, Form Book Online, G R book Online, Census Online, Tender Notice   | Gujarat                              |
| Bhoomi, Kaveri, Khazane  | Karnataka                            |
| E-Srinkhla, RDNet, Fast Reliable Instant Efficient Network for the Disbursement of Services (FRIENDS)  | Kerala                               |
| Vahan, Tender Notice   | Jharkhand                            |
| SETU, Koshvani, Warana Wired Villages, Telemedicine Project (Pune), Online Complaint Management System Mumbai  | Maharashtra                          |
| Gyandoot, Gram Sampark, Smart Card in Transportation Department, Computerization MP State Agricultural Marketing Board (Mandi Board), Headstart etc.   | Madhya Pradesh                       |
| E-Shishu, Common service centres (CSCs) in Panchayats  | Orissa                               |
| SUWIDHA(Single User Window Disposal Help Line for Applicants), SUBS (Suwidha Backend Services), AGMARKNET(Agriculture Marketing Network), ALIS(Arms License Information System), TISP(Treasuries Information System of Punjab), SSIS(Social Security Information System),                              | Punjab                               |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| WEBPASS(District Passport Application Collection Centre)   |   |
| Rasi Maiyama-Kanchipuram, Application Forms Related to Public Utility, Tender Notice & Display   | Tamil Nadu  |
| Lokvani, E-Suvidha, Bhulekh(Land Records), Koshvaani, Treasury Computerization, PRERNA(Property Evaluation and Registration Application), Bouquets of services offered by Transport Department                                 | Uttar Pradesh   |
| Jan Mitra, Raj SWIFT, Lokmitra, RajNIDHI, Aarakshi - Online FIR, Professional E-Delivery of Tax Payers by Income Tax   | Rajasthan   |
| Kisan Soochna Kutirs (KSKs), Village Information Centres (VICs), Computerization of Land Record Department, Automation of Transport Department   | Uttarakhand   |
| Vehicle Registration, Land Records, Birth and Death Registrations, Employment Exchanges, Payment of Excise Duty, Sales Tax and Local Tax, Electronic Bill Payment of Water and Electricity, Computerization of Health Records, | West Bengal   |
| Community Information Centre. Forms available on the Meghalaya website under schemes related to social welfare, Food Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Housing Transport etc.   | Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram & Nagaland |
| ASHA   | Assam   |

### **E-Governance: Challenges**

The basic aim of E-governance is to bring about transparency between the government and the citizens through the use of internet. But in India, which is a developing country, the literacy rate being very low, the communication process via means of internet gets extremely difficult. E-readiness is defined as the ability to use ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in order to develop the country's economy and welfare. Currently India stands at 69<sup>th</sup> rank with a score of 3.89 out of 10. This score is extremely low and thus poses as a major challenge. Appropriate security mechanisms is an important technical consideration as the information collected by the government is politically sensitive. Certain other issues of technical, social, legal nature needs to be resolved.

- *Technical Issues*

As E-governance is entirely built on ICT which is of technical nature, the first and foremost step is to construct a relevant IT infrastructure. As the technology is of dynamic nature, the hardware as well as the software may get incompatible with time. Thus upgrading the technology is a primary concern.

Following table shows the usage of ICT in India and other developed countries. The figures are in percentage out of 100.

| <i>COUNTRY</i>   | <i>TELELINES</i> | <i>PERSONAL COMPUTER</i> | <i>% OF POPULATION</i> |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Australia</i> | 52.41            | 46.46                    | 52.5                   |
| <i>Canada</i>    | 67.65            | 39.02                    | 46.5                   |
| <i>India</i>     | 3.20             | 0.45                     | 1.2                    |
| <i>UK</i>        | 67.65            | 33.78                    | 55.3                   |
| <i>USA</i>       | 69.97            | 58.52                    | 62.1                   |

- *Privacy Issues*

Privacy of life and confidentiality of the personal data are highly valued when it comes to the establishment of the website. A breach of their privacy may result in loss of trust which in turn may affect the economy.

- *Security Issues*

It is another serious technical challenge. Citizens are afraid to use E-service website due to security reasons. They feel the website are not secure enough to protect their private information from being misused or distorted by hacker.

- *Literacy Issues*

Literacy is not only the ability to merely read and write but also the competence or knowledge in a specific subject. The literacy rate in India is very low. 74.04% of citizens are literate. Thus this comes across as a huge obstacle in the implementation of E-governance.

- *Low IT Literacy Issues*

India has a low literacy rate and even out of the people who are literate not many have a knowledge of Information Technology.

- *Language Barrier*

India is a country inhabited by people of different culture and religion. They speak and understand different languages. But the E-governance websites and applications are based in English which is not understood by all. Thus it becomes a challenge for the government to communicate with all the citizens.

- *Infrastructure*

Lack of necessary infrastructure, for example electricity, internet, and technology to support the E-governance website is necessary. This basic infrastructure is not strong enough in India.

- *Population*

India is currently second most populated country in the world after China. The population of India is 1,210,193,442 (Census 2011). Thus reaching out to all the citizens is an uphill task.



- *Social and Cultural Issues*

Out of 121 million population (Census 2011), 70% of the population still belongs to rural areas. 30% of the total population is still illiterate and this is even higher in case of rural and less developed areas. Bihar, Orissa and U.P. rank the lowest in literacy level. Due to the overwhelming dominance of the internet this rural population finds itself difficult to interact and connect with the government, thus falling back in the technological spheres.

- *Economic Constraints*

According to the World Bank survey (2010), approximately 68.8% of the population in India survive on \$2 a day. Thus getting a telephone or internet is a far-fetched dream. Internet access is still very expensive in India. Most of the E-governance initiatives go unnoticed.

In developing country like India, cost remains a serious obstacle in implementation of E-governance. Thus the maintenance of these applications i.e. the hardware and software becomes an issue.

- *Unawareness*

Expensive access to the internet, below poverty line and high illiteracy rate, people are unaware of the E-governance initiatives. Only the privileged section of the society has full access to these facilities

- *Attitude of Government Departments*

In India, the efficiency of the government services is still considered very poor in comparison to the private sector. The government initiatives are slow in implementation. Any effort or change made in the system is met with resistance.

- *Legal Issues*

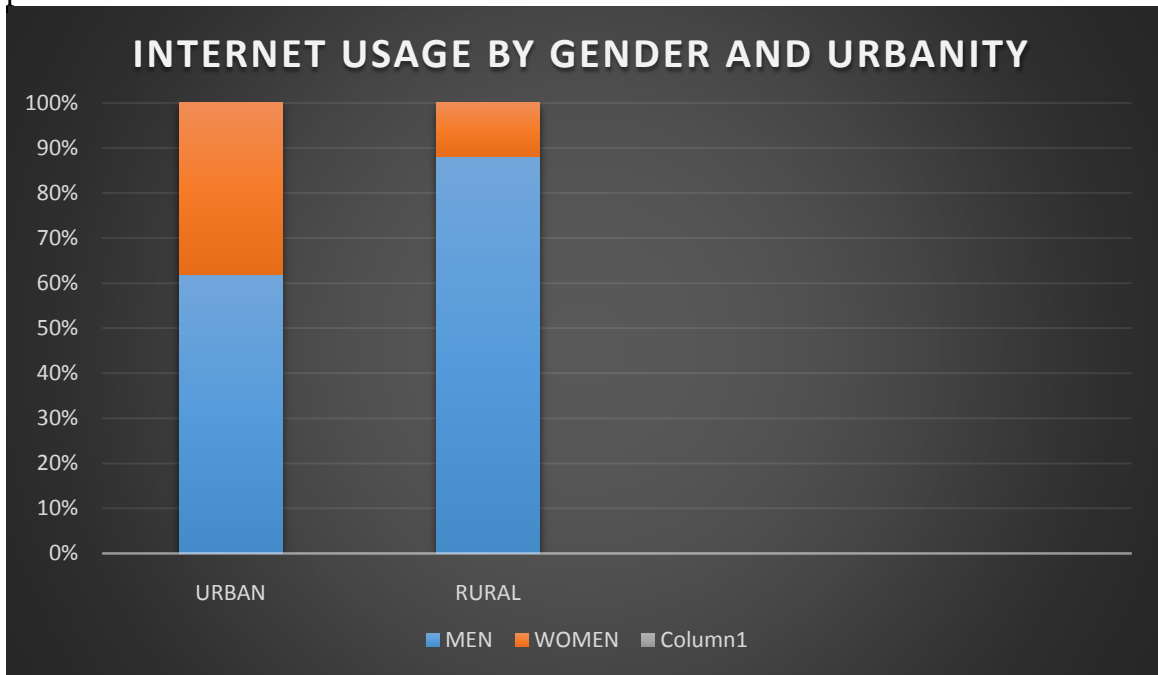
Legal issues are closely related to security and privacy. They strengthen each other. So in order to make the security and privacy measures more particularly empowering, it is important to enforce legal measures.

## **Women: A Major Challenge**

For centuries women have been deprived of their rights of equal participation in the social and economic activities of the nation. The concept of gender equality has become a common concern especially in India. Due to patriarchal character of the society women have not been able to derive equal benefits from various government initiatives. The female population being approximately 637 million (Census 2011) out of which only 65.5% are literate. Even though India promises digital inclusion and digital opportunities, rural India still remains under the grip of digital divide. Therefore the real challenge that lies before the government is encouraging women participation and inclusion in the E-governance initiatives. Patriarchy has restricted the mobility of the women. Due to this, women are made to depend on their male counterparts. They are not allowed to step out of their house or make multiple trips to far off offices or chase officials to get their work done. Such chores automatically fall under the responsibilities of the males. This

has become a part of their culture in rural areas. Women are subject to household chores only. For this purpose they are deprived of their right to education, let alone the basic knowledge of Information Technology. Being a rural setup, poverty also plays a major role in this scenario. Therefore the E-governance initiatives which are meant to benefit women, fail to have any significant impact on their lives. According to the Intel Women and Web Study 2013, a woman in India is 27% less likely to have internet access than a man. GSMA development Fund and Cherie Blair Foundation has revealed that “only 28% of Indian women own a mobile phone in comparison with 40% of men”.

The following table gives information on the gender distribution of internet users in India as of October 2015, sorted by urbanity. During this period of time, 88 percent of rural Indian internet users were male.



Chhattisgarh was formed a separate state in the year 2000. Nevertheless 79% of the state’s population is rural. The state ranks second last in the list of all the Indian states for tele-density (Report of Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Government of India: 2004). The families are male dominated therefore he is considered as the bread earner. Women are restricted to the household affairs. Information and Communication Technology are mostly used by the men. This is due to low literacy rate among women. The scenario in the other states is very similar to Chhattisgarh. Here people feel the need to address more important problems like domestic violence, poverty, water scarcity, etc than assigning importance to E-governance.

### WOMEN AND ICT

There are five key areas of E-Governance where women gender equality can be fostered.

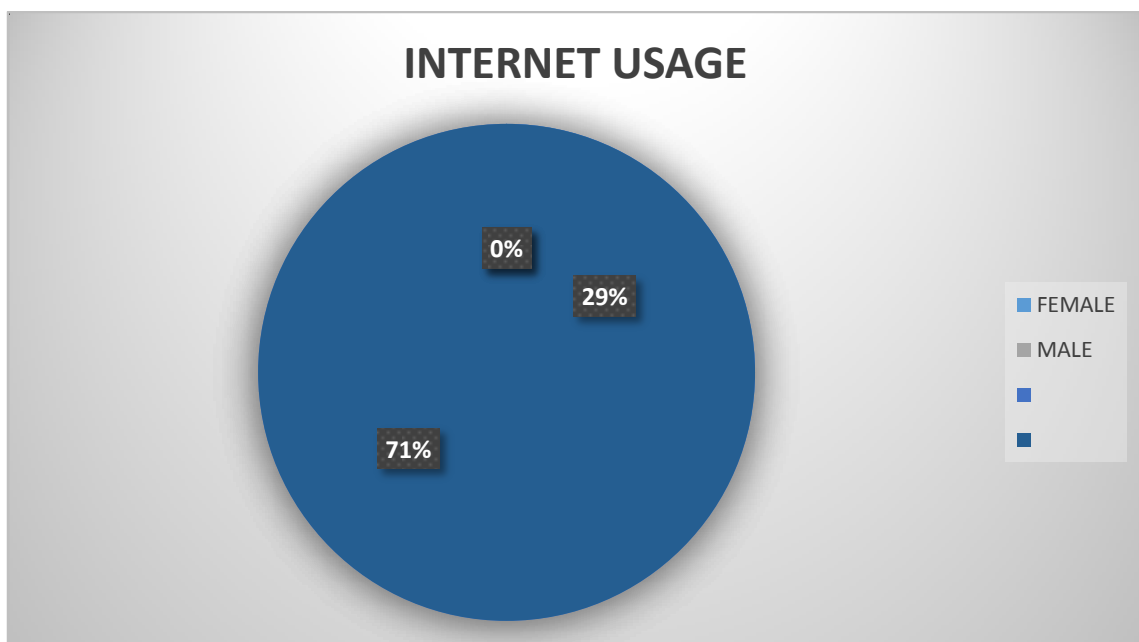
- Design of E-Governance policies and strategies.



- Delivery of basic E-services.
- E-Participation of citizens and more specifically of marginalized groups, women and youth
- Access to ICTs
- Access to public information via ICTs

The first and foremost step is to ascertain how responsive government services are to the needs of men and women is the gender analysis. This should be done before the budgets and the resource allocation. One of the aims of E-Governance is to encourage the participation of men and women in decision making process via both ICT networks and networking with government. But without the access to ICT it is impossible to bring out the full capacity of the E-Governance initiatives. The gender differences affect the opportunities in connectivity and access. For example, in India the women IT literacy is a barrier. Therefore additional investment is needed in order to educate and train women so that they may have access to ICT and benefit from the E-Governance initiatives. Similarly they have limited access to internet cafés and other similar venues. Extra funds are needed to form societies and communities which stand up for the rights of the women.

The following pie chart gives information on the gender distribution of internet users in India as of October 2015. During this period of time, 29 percent of Indian internet users were female. The majority of internet users were male.



## Conclusion

In general, the very purpose behind a government scheme or a government initiative is to elevate the quality of life of the citizens. While E-Governance is not an elixir yet it offers men and women a chance to get past the social evils of gender inequality. It provides a platform, a path to foster growth and development in the country. However its transformative potentials have been hindered by various issues in the form of challenges which are being dealt with by the

government. Overcoming these barriers might take time as the government needs to tackle the issues which are deeply rooted in the Indian society. Apart from the technical, economic, socio-cultural, literacy and other issues, the issues related to the women's mobility acts as a barrier to the access to E-Governance initiatives. These constraints should be examined carefully. For the successful implementation of these E-Governance initiatives, it is necessary that the Standards, Infrastructure, Legislations, Strategy are in the correct place.

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