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e-Governance in Assam: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Communication, media studies, and other social science disciplines are beginning to focus on Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) and e-governance as promising research areas. ICT and e-governance now play a significant part in people's daily lives and are gradually recognised as key development parameters. The rapid spread of ICT, particularly in developing nations, has attracted the attention of both national and international agencies, who are working to assess its effects and create a roadmap for the successful implementation of ICT and e-governance initiatives. The implementation of ICT initiatives in India has been centred on the growth of rural economies with the promise of increased public participation in governance. Although these initiatives have, to a reasonable extent, increased public involvement in the governance process, they have their drawbacks. The paper analyses the e-governance initiatives taken by the Government of Assam and investigates the issues surrounding ICT and e-governance in Assam.

Keywords: e-Governance, Good Governance, Information & Communication Technologies, Assam, India

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INTRODUCTION

When Governance first emerged in governmental administrative operations, it opened up new avenues for its successful operation. 'Governance' as a notion is not brand-new. It predates human civilization. 'Governance' refers to the decision-making process and the mechanism by which decisions are carried out (or not implemented). The term 'governance' can be applied in various corporate, national, international, and municipal settings. Given that governance are the process of making decisions and the process by which decisions are carried out, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in making decisions and carrying them out, as well as the formal and informal structures that have been put in place to do so. 'governance' and 'good governance' were used interchangeably as tactical tools for rapidly achieving overall development. More suitable than governance is good governance. In other words, good governance refers to the use of new tools and procedures to enhance government operation, and both terms refer to good government.

Social change and development are intimately intertwined and significantly influenced by knowledge. It substantially affects both the economy of the nation and the standard of living. Compared to the Industrial Revolution, the IT revolution is significantly more critical. People now expect more from the government regarding improved service delivery, quicker responses, and transparency in its transactions due to a growing public awareness of their rights. The development of modern technology, including the internet, mobile phones, computers, and other electronic devices, has made life for humans more convenient and comfortable. By making it possible to exchange thoughts, experiences, and daily activities with individuals worldwide in seconds, such devices and services transform the world into a global village. As a result, the groundwork for incorporating ICT (information and communication technology) imperatives into any agenda that moves us closer to achieving good governance was laid. The term 'e-governance' is growing popular. We have heard about e-governance all around the world. Every government has begun to extend its administration from high to low levels to mitigate the many types of socio-economic, science and technology, and other difficulties through extensive use of electronic devices as socio-economic issues become more prevalent daily (ICT). Both developed and emerging economies worldwide use

a wide range of electronic gadgets to make government administration more efficient, open, and responsible.

OBJECTIVES

- To get an understanding of inducing e-governance.
- To analyze e-governance initiatives in India and particularly in Assam.
- To assess the critical issues of e-governance in Assam.

METHODOLOGY

The material for the study has been taken through a review of literature available in the area. The source of data is almost secondary, including books, journal papers, newspapers, government websites and other. The study is purely descriptive and qualitative in nature.

e-GOVERNANCE

The term 'e-governance' is starting to gain popularity. There has been much talk about e-governance recently across the globe. Every government has begun to extend its administration from high to low levels to mitigate various kinds of problems of socio-economic, scientific, and technological problems with an enormous number of electronic devices. It is because socio-economic issues are growing daily (ICT). Most economies worldwide, developed and emerging, are heavily utilizing various electronic technologies to make government operations more practical, transparent, and responsible. The meanings of e-government are related to the application of information and communications technology (ICT) to support governmental operations, make citizens aware, and deliver services to them effectively. E-governance functions as a tool that makes all the services provided by the government readily available and accessible to the citizens. e-Governance is the use of technology in the governance process to carry out facilities for the exchange of evidence, the addition of different state-only transactions, and systems and amenities between G2C, G2B, G2G, B2B, as well as relationships between the various levels of government.

e-Governance goes beyond simple 'electronic' administration. It 'enables' Government, the administration that offers varied and improved services and activities. E-government is about

people: new leadership styles, mindsets, and skill sets. It will change how government employees interact with the Public, conduct business, and engage with others. E-government is a process that needs consistent political commitment, financial support, and participation from the Public, business, and government sectors.

Dr A.P.J Abul Kalam, the former president of India, commented, "Delivery of service to citizens is considered a primary function of the government. In a democratic nation of over one billion people like India, e-governance should enable seamless access to information and a seamless flow of information across the state and central government in the federal set-up. No country has so far implemented an e-governance system for one billion people. It is a big challenge for us."

UNESCO defines e-Governance as the public sector's use of information and communication technologies to improve information and service delivery, encourage citizen participation in the decision-making process and make government more accountable, transparent, and effective. e-Governance involves a new style of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding policy and investment, new ways of accessing education, new ways of listening to citizens and new ways of organizing considered a broader concept than e-Government since it can bring about a change in the way citizen's relate to governments and each other. e-Governance can bring forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of citizens' needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage, enable and empower the citizens.

Technology is crucial to delivering governmental services and has increased public accountability for the government. e-Government develops as a result of electronic services for transportation and as part of ongoing reforms and changes to government that enable collaboration and participatory governance to enhance efficiency and usefulness. This apparatus continues to be a vital tool for achieving goals because it fosters communication and exchanging knowledge crucial for growth. The use of IT, a cutting-edge technological tool, in government operations is critical for the growth of the government and attaining its development objectives. People's expectations have changed recently; they now want their government to provide better services and are more open about how they deliver those

services. Delivering transparent services to the general public is a difficult task for the government, which makes inclusive governance essential. Inclusive governance gives all groups in society equal chances to advance and maintain their well-being. e-Government is crucial to bringing about comprehensive good governance in the nation.

e-GOVERNANCE MODELS

The e-Governance models connote interaction between various stakeholders of the governance system. The models are:

G2G: Government-to-government – This model of governance is to share info between the intra governments; sharing of information between police department of various states; Government document exchange (preparation, approval, distribution, and storage); Most of the finance and budget work done by e-governance.

G2C: Government-to-citizen – This model of e-Governance is to share info between Government and citizens. Payment of online bills such as electricity, water, and telephone bills; Online registration of applications; Copies of land records; Online filing of complaints; Availability of any information.

G2B: Government-to-business – This model helps to share info between the Government and private sector; Collection of taxes; Rejection and approval of patents of companies; Payment of all kinds of bills and penalties; Share all types of pieces of information, rules and data.

G2E: Government-to-employees – This model links the information between Government and employees. Employees can register all kinds of working forms online. All sorts of data submissions (employee records & attendance) from various government offices, all types of rule & regulation and information for employees can be shared by this model. An employee can file all kinds of complaints and dissatisfaction with this model.

e-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES

The decision-makers in India tend to justify adopting and expanding e-governance because it costs less, reduces waste, promotes transparency, eliminates corruption, generates possibilities to resolve rural poverty and inequality, and guarantees a better future for citizens. To put it another way, the Government tends to portray e-governance as the panacea for all ranges of problems confronting India, which is why the Indian Government has set the

target of delivering at least 50 per cent of its services for the Indian Government to meet this objective, it has devised a plan to increase the density of computers in the country by lowering the price of computers and to promote connection by enhancing telecommunications infrastructure based on optical fiber networks.

a) **Initiatives by Central Government-** The Government of India has undertaken significant initiatives to establish institutions to formulate, control, and account deployment of e-Governance, to deliver effective and efficient services. The Central Government has also taken numerous e-governance initiatives to effectively and efficiently deliver services. Some of them are-

- The Information Technology Act (2000) is one of the most significant initiatives the central Government has undertaken. This act aims to regulate cyberspace and define offences and penalties related to information technology (IT). Some examples of these offences and penalties include tampering with computer source documents, breaching confidentiality and privacy, publishing false digital signatures, and so on.
- A bill called the Freedom of Information Act mandates that all public agencies keep information and documents and establish public information officers to help citizens access such material.
- The Ministry of Information Technology (MIT) facilitates e-governance by bolstering knowledge-based businesses, encouraging user coordination, adopting procedures based on international standards, promoting the internet, and introducing it in educational settings.
- In addition, the Government has decided to establish a National Institute of Smart Government to improve capacity-building in e-Governance at all levels of administrative administration.
- Centre for Electronic Governance to promote IT and e-governance in the country, with the goals of identifying the appropriate forms of ICT necessary for better service delivery, conducting training for generating awareness among government officials, and assisting state governments in implementing policies and reforms based on the most effective e-governance practices.
- NeGP National e-Governance Projects (NeGP) make all government services accessible to the common person in his locality through common service delivery outlets. These

projects also ensure the effectiveness, transparency, and dependability of such services at affordable costs to meet the fundamental requirements of the common man. In 2006, the Indian Government pledged approximately 23 crores of rupees for the overall development of the country's five-year plan. In addition, various government ministries and agencies host summits and other awareness-raising events to make a wide range of information accessible to residents via internet links.

- Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG) for providing government services to citizens through mobile. More than 1,570 government services and over 22,000 bill payment services are made available at UMANG.
- E-District Mission Mode Project (MMP): The E-District project has been implemented at district and sub-district levels of all States/UTs, benefitting all citizens by delivering various e-Services such as Certificates (Birth, Caste, Death, Income and Local Resident), Pension (Old Age, Disability and Widow), Electoral, Consumer Court, Revenue Court, Land Record and services of various departments such as Commercial Tax, Agriculture, Labour, Employment Training & Skill Development etc. Presently 4,671 e-services have been launched in 709 districts across India.
- Unified Payment Interface (UPI) is the leading digital payment platform. It is integrated with 330 banks and facilitated over 586 crore monthly transactions worth over Rs 10 lakh crore has been facilitated for the month of June 2022.
- Diksha – It is a national-level educational platform that helps students and teachers to participate, contribute and leverage a common platform to achieve learning goals at scale for the country. As of July 27, 2022, 7,633 courses are available, and more than 15 crore enrolments have been done.
- National Agriculture Market (e-NAM): The Government of India has launched the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Scheme intending to create an online transparent, competitive bidding system to facilitate farmers with remunerative prices for their produce. More than 1.73 crore farmers & 2.26 lakh traders have been registered on the e-NAM platform. Also, 1000 mandis of 18 States and 3 UTs have been integrated with the e-NAM platform.

(b) Initiatives by some state governments:

- Bhoomi Project: Online delivery of Land Records by the state of Karnataka.
- Gyandoot by Madhya Pradesh
- Lokvani Project in Uttar Pradesh
- FRIENDS in Kerala
- e- Mitra Project in Rajasthan
- OLAP: Online Analytical Processing would be developed by Haryana for planning and decision making.
- DISNIC, COURTIS, AIS, CRISP in the state of Punjab.
- LOKMITRA in Himachal Pradesh.
- Raj-SWIFT – State-wide intranet to Facilitate data, Text, and e-mail between the office of CM and all District Collectors by Rajasthan.
- e-Panchyat: in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Sukoon: by Jammu and Kashmir

e-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN ASSAM

Although Assam is a state where industrial development is occurring slowly in the twenty-first century, Assam is nevertheless making every effort to advance technologically. Assam is trying to start e-governance initiatives and carry out ICT projects. Assam quickly recognises that using a computer to log on is preferable to standing in line at a government counter because it saves so much time and is also transparent. The Assam government has implemented many e-governance initiatives that benefit citizens. E-governance goes beyond simply collecting data in digital format; it also needs to transform raw data into informative information needed for planning. Everyone is impacted by e-governance because it promotes engagement, transparency, and user trust. Assam has developed a strategy for adopting IT and providing services to citizens online, among other creative measures to enhance e-governance. The broad goals of launching e-governance projects in Assam are to achieve economic and social development using ICTs and to benefit the state's citizens, to deliver high-quality citizen-focused services, to improve efficiency in revenue mobilisation and public expenditure, as well as to improve overall performance as measured through better policy outcomes, with a focus on streamlining and re-engineering government processes and

routines to obtain quantifiable benefits. In Assam, numerous e-governance initiatives affecting all facets of society are being implemented. The following are some of Assam's most important e-governance initiatives:

- **JANA-SEWA Computerized Public Services Facilitation Counter System** - This is an e-governance initiative taken by the Government of Assam, and the aim of this initiative, JANA-SEWA, is to incorporate features for recording petitions receipt for various citizen services. It provides transparent as well as hassle-free services to citizens on caste certificates, Permanent Residential Certificate, Legal Heir Certificate, Senior Citizen Certificate, Passport, Birth/Death Certificate, Licenses of Touring Cinema, the certified copy of the electoral roll, the certified copy of court's order, Arms license etc.
- **MANAB-SAMPAD Computerized Personnel Information Management System** - This is another e-governance initiative, and this system facilitates the Human Resources" Department of the district administration by providing a department-wise up-to-date maintenance system, querying system and reporting system.
- **GRIHA-LAKSHMI Computerized Public Distribution System** - This system generates various reports which are helpful in decision making, i.e. Fair Price Shops details, Ration Card details, Oil Depot details etc., and this system also facilitates efficient maintenance of information on various essential public commodities such as sugar, petroleum products and some other notified items.
- **ABHIYOG Computerized Public Grievance System** - ABHIYOG is a grievance system that enables citizens to lodge their grievances from any internet cafe, Community Information Centre etc. as well; this system enables the citizens to view the online status of their complaint at any point in time.
- **Public Utility Forms** - This is another e-governance initiative that helps citizens get department-wise application forms for various citizen services, and the application forms are available in PDF format, which is easily downloadable.
- **DAK Mail Management Application**- This is another e-governance initiative the Government of Assam took. This software enables entry of details of dak (post) received and post issued by any district administration office. It monitors actions taken on the post/dak weekly, fortnightly and monthly and enables post/dak-related online query handling.

- **SUGAM e-district:** The SUGAM e-district project facilitates a seamless G2C (Government to Citizen) interaction experience. It aims at an effortless delivery of services to the citizens. This project is a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under the National e-governance Plan (NeGP), and this project is spread over 27 districts of the state, ensuring and enhancing efficiencies in the districts. The objectives of this project are- (a) efficient delivery of services with improved service levels, (b) capacity building of field functionaries, (c) access to efficient, reliable, transparent as well as accountable services, (d) reducing service time as well as costs for the Government and the citizens and (e) enhancing perception and image of the Government.
- **Assam Wide Area Network (ASWAN):** This ICT project has helped the IT Department create an active communication network in Assam covering all districts, sub-divisional offices, circle, and block offices through 304 POPs (Post Office Protocol) in Assam with a minimum of 2 Mbps links. 288 SWAN POPs (Post Office Protocol) have been commissioned in Assam so far, 114 POPs are currently being used by the National Registrar of Citizens (NRC) updation programme, and the e-district project uses 160 POPs of ASWAN.
- **The State Data Center (SDC):** The SDC houses ICT assets of various departments within Assam in an environment that encourages availability, reliability, scalability, security as well as serviceability. Various applications and functionalities envisaged at the SDC include the Citizen Information/Services Portal, Secure Central Data Repository of Assam etc.
- **Common Service Centre (CSC):** The CSCs are the front-end delivery points for Government, private, and social sector services to rural citizens. The CSCs are equipped with internet and other IT infrastructure. The IT department's Arunoday Common Service Centre initiative has envisaged rolling out 4375 CSCs across Assam. Of the 3979 CSCs rolled out to date, 2841 are currently active in Assam.
- **SSDG & State Portal:** In Assam, the State Portal was developed to provide citizens access to government services through a single interface mechanism. The State Portal and the Assam e-district were created under the NeGP (National e-Governance Programme) to provide easy and convenient services to the citizens through remote access, primarily through Common Service Centres/Public Facilitation Centres. The Assam State Portal aims to educate citizens with access to information such as expected service fulfilment times for government services, business processes, applicable rules and legislations etc., to

educate citizens in Assam about their rights and the benefits of schemes offered by the Government etc. The objective of SSDG (State e-governance Service Delivery Gateway) is to simplify the task of making all services offered by the Government accessible to the citizens by acting as a standard-based messaging switch and by providing seamless interoperability and exchange of data across different departments in the Centre, State as well as Local government.

- **E-office:** In Assam, the government is taking several strategic initiatives to bring transparency, effectiveness, and openness in the Governance. Therefore, to transform the government's functioning into a more efficient and effective mode, the e-office module is being introduced. Some of the essential features of this application are- (i) online help is available in the system, (ii) SMS/ Mail based acknowledgements, (iii) providing better manageability with tracking of file movements with just a click of the mouse etc.
- **SWF by e-prastuti:** Another project which the IT Department of Assam initiated is "e-prastuti-Standardisation of Websites." This project is handled by the Web Development Cell of the IT Department of Assam. Over 30 websites for six departments and their sub-organisations have been developed using the SWF (Small Web Format) framework and are already alive. Moreover, development for another 150 websites for 49 departments and their sub-organisations has been going on.
- **Digital Gaon Panchayat**
- A new programme has been initiated to convert feasible panchayats into 'Digital Gaon Panchayats'. Digital Gaon Panchayat aims to provide free WiFi Access to Citizens, Provide Digital literacy training to citizens especially on e-Commerce and e-Services. This project is piloted in Khetri Gaon Panchayat in Dimoria Block of Kamrup Metro District.
- **MIS of Rural Development Programs**
- All three major rural development programs are equipped with vital Information systems. These systems maintain beneficiary data, photographs of beneficiaries and schemes, vouchers, financial data and reporting system with multiple reports etc. These Information systems also provide for the transfer of funds directly into the accounts of beneficiaries using Digital Signatures.

MGNREGA: [NREGASoft](#)

PMAY-G: [AWAASSoft](#)

NSAP: [NSAP MIS](#)

ISSUES FACED BY e-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN ASSAM

Although the story of e-governance implementation in the state of Assam has given opportunities to both rural and urban residents, it is facing several difficulties concerning policy formulation, its use, and public awareness and understanding of ICT hinders the growth and further proliferation of e-governance. Following are some of the issues faced by e-Governance in Assam:

- India is a big, densely populated nation. People from all cultures and languages can be found here. Hence, the government's most significant challenges are creating a unique identification for each person and regularly updating databases and records. Once more, linguistic variations among the populace exacerbate issues.
- Most people reside in village areas and are below the poverty line. Because of poverty, they cannot buy a computer and thus have not harnessed the benefits of e-governance.
- Another obstacle to the successful deployment of e-governance efforts was a lack of education among the populace. The term 'literacy' refers to the capacity for accurate comprehension and the ability to read and write in any language. Most information and apps connected to e-governance applications are written in English. Nevertheless, no one can use e-governance or access it if they do not understand English. Although the government has given its residents the necessary infrastructure, they must rely on some IT professionals to access e-government services due to their limited proficiency in the English language. The goal of e-governance to bring services to citizens' doorsteps cannot be fully achieved in this way.
- By its very name, electronic government alludes to the necessity of the internet for use. The e-Governance program does have the necessary infrastructure, and the users can access computers. Nevertheless, there are few computers available, and individuals in developing nations like India lack computer literacy and access to computers. If the public is unaware of the services offered to them under e-Governance efforts, the availability of the internet alone will not be enough to make the e-Governance service successful.

- Access to public services is unevenly provided to different groups of residents, particularly between urban and rural areas, between educated and illiterate people, and between the wealthy and the poor.
- Every government department is involved in a service provided to the public. The appropriate officials from numerous departments must consent before a person can perform any service. People find it challenging to obtain e-governance services when these departments are not fully integrated, which also consumes time and resources.

CONCLUSION

Hence, e-Governance refers to the maximal use of electronic means in governmental operations for collecting and distributing data and information relating to the day-to-day administration of the population. Government services are provided through ICT. It is hoped that e-Governance will offer a platform for citizens to access government services at their doorstep easily. The use of e-governance makes government straightforward, moral, accountable, responsive, and transparent, which are essential prerequisites for good Governance. This approach makes the entire administrative process convenient, accountable, and effective. Although numerous programs are running in India under the e-governance project, their success rate is not very high for several reasons, including the digital divide between urban and rural areas, poverty, illiteracy, security concerns, and implementation costs. The government is quite concerned about each of these problems and difficulties. By doing so, the previous and current governments made numerous projects to resolve the problems and difficulties. Some of the prospects are mentioned in the twelve five-year plans and are partially realized by every government. To increase public trust in effective democratic e-governance, the government should invest more in this endeavor to make it transparent, practical, safe, and citizen-friendly.

Without question, the Assam administration has made some critical efforts to improve the state's ICT infrastructure and Governance, but the pernicious effects of the digital divide have consistently shown to be a barrier. Even though it is widely acknowledged that ICT and e-governance have changed how public services are provided, increased participation, increased interaction between the government and citizens, and overall governance, the new

perspectives and difficulties faced by such ICT programs have not been sufficiently explored. The government must improve infrastructure for easy access to internet facilities, promote the use of government services, and under the e-Governance program, provide training facilities for government employees about using technology. The government must also establish strict policies against corruption and take strict action to change the bureaucrats' neglectful attitudes towards ordinary people. Sufficient funding must also be made available for improvement.

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