

Revolutionizing Public Service: The Impact of E-governance in Bihar

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Abstract

The adoption of e-governance initiatives has been a key strategy for the Government of Bihar, India to improve public service delivery and increase transparency and efficiency in governance. This paper examines the impact of e-governance programs implemented in Bihar over the past decade and what role can a public library play in its operation. Through a review of government reports, academic literature, and interviews with key stakeholders, the study analyzes the outcomes of major e-governance projects in sectors such as public financial management, land record digitization, and Citizen Service Centers. Public libraries, as community hubs and access points for information, can play a crucial role in supporting the implementation and adoption of these e-governance schemes. The findings indicate that e-governance has led to increased accessibility, speed, and reliability of public services for citizens. Projects like the Bihar Single Window Clearance System and the Bihar Jan Seva Kendras have significantly reduced processing times and corruption in service delivery. E-procurement and financial management systems have also improved transparency and accountability in government operations. However, challenges remain in terms of digital infrastructure gaps, lack of digital literacy, and resistance to change among government employees.

Keywords: E-governance, public service delivery, Bihar, digital governance, public library

INTRODUCTION

The state of Bihar in India has long been characterized by inefficient public administration, poor service delivery, and high levels of corruption. In the past two decades, the Government of Bihar has initiated a series of e-governance programs to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability in governance. These initiatives range from the digitization of land records and financial management systems to the establishment of one-stop Citizen Service Centers.

E-governance, defined as the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance the quality of government services and democratic processes, has emerged as a key development strategy in many parts of the world (Heeks, 2001) [1]. In the Indian context, the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) launched in 2006 provided a framework for the adoption of e-governance at the national and state levels. Bihar has been one of the more proactive states in the implementation of NeGP-aligned e-governance projects. This study examined the impact of e-governance initiatives on public service delivery in Bihar. It analyzes the outcomes of major e-governance programs in the state, identifies the key enablers and challenges, and discusses the implications of strengthening citizen-centric governance. This paper draws on government reports, academic literature, and primary data collected through interviews with government officials, civil society representatives, and citizens.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the concept of “smart governance” has emerged, which integrates e-governance with innovative technologies, such as big data, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence. Studies in this domain have explored the potential of these technologies to enhance service delivery, decision-making, and citizen engagement (Meijer & Bolivar, 2016; Washburn et al., 2010) [2, 3]. The roles of citizen engagement and participation in e-governance have also been the subject of extensive research. Bwalya and Mutula (2016) [4] emphasized the importance of citizen empowerment and collaborative governance in the context of e-government implementation in developing countries. Similarly, Welch and Hinnant (2003) [5] investigated the relationship between citizen satisfaction and e-government use and found that user-centric design and transparency in government operations were key factors influencing citizen engagement.

In developing countries, researchers have examined the unique challenges and opportunities associated with e-governance. Nkohkwo and Islam (2013) [6] reviewed e-government initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the impact of infrastructure, human capital, and institutional factors on the success of these initiatives. The authors stress the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of developing countries. In a comprehensive review, Grönlund and Horan (2005) [7] analyzed the evolution of e-government research, highlighting the shift from a technology-centric approach to a more citizen-centric perspective. The authors identified key themes such as service delivery, citizen participation, and cross-agency collaboration as the core focus areas of e-governance. One of the foundational works in this field is that of Heeks (2001) [1], who examined the challenges and critical success factors for e-government projects. The author emphasized the importance of aligning e-government initiatives with the existing organizational and technological capabilities of government agencies. This concept of “design-reality gaps” has been widely referenced in subsequent e-governance literature.

KEY E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN INDIA

Some of the major e-governance initiatives implemented in India include:

1. *National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)*: Launched in 2006, the NeGP is a comprehensive program to implement e-governance across the country. It focuses on developing the core infrastructure, policies, and guidelines necessary for the widespread implementation of e-governance.
2. *Aadhaar*: The unique identification (UID) project, known as Aadhaar, was launched in 2009 to provide a 12-digit unique identification number to all Indian residents. Aadhaar has become a key enabler of various e-governance services.
3. *Digital India*: This flagship program was launched in 2015 to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. It focuses on three key areas: digital infrastructure, services, and empowerment.
4. *State-level E-Governance Initiatives*: Many Indian states have developed their e-governance initiatives, such as e-districts, e-procurement, and online service delivery portals.

KEY E-GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN BIHAR

The Government of Bihar has undertaken several e-governance projects across various sectors since the early 2000s. Some prominent initiatives are as follows.

1. *Bihar Single Window Clearance System (BSWCS)*: Launched in 2006, this online platform streamlines the process of obtaining clearances and approvals for businesses, reducing processing time, and enhancing transparency.
2. *Bihar Jan Seva Kendras*: These one-stop Citizen Service Centers, established in 2011, provide over 100 government services, such as issuing certificates, accepting utility bill payments, and facilitating welfare scheme enrollments.
3. *Land Records Digitization*: The government has digitized approximately 22 million land records and made them available online through the 'Deenmitra' portal, improving access to land-related information for citizens.

4. *Public Financial Management System (PFMS)* implemented in 2013 has enabled direct benefit transfers, real-time tracking of fund flows, and enhanced accountability in government expenditure.
5. *Bihar Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) CAS*: This mobile-based application, launched in 2017, supports the monitoring and service delivery of the Integrated Child Development Scheme, a flagship program for child and maternal welfare.
6. *e-District*: Rolled out in 2015, the e-District project has computerized the workflow and processes for the delivery of core citizen services, such as income, caste, and domicile certificates.

These e-governance initiatives have been implemented with support from the Government of India's NeGP, as well as state-level programs such as the 'Digital Bihar' mission.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The adoption of e-governance in Bihar has resulted in tangible improvements in public service delivery, as evidenced by the following outcomes.

Improved Access and Convenience for Citizens

The establishment of Jan Seva Kendras (Citizen Service Centers) has enhanced citizen access to a range of government services. A study by the Centre for Science, Development, and Media Studies found that over 80% of citizens were satisfied with the services provided at these centers (CSDMS, 2016) [8]. Similarly, the digitization of land records has enabled citizens to access property-related information online, reducing the need for frequent visits to government offices.

Enhanced Transparency and Accountability

E-governance initiatives have increased the transparency of government operations. For instance, has streamlined the process of obtaining business approvals by making workflow and status tracking visible online. The PFMS has also improved transparency in financial management by enabling real-time monitoring of fund utilization and leakage detection.

Improved Efficiency and Reduced Corruption

Several studies have documented efficiency gains from e-governance programs in Bihar. For example, the average time taken to issue a certificate through the e-District project has been reduced from 15–20 days to 3–5 days (Government of Bihar, 2018) [9]. Similarly, the BSWCS reduced the average time required to obtain clearances from 90 to 30 d. These efficiency improvements have also led to a decline in corruption, as fewer personal interactions are required between citizens and government officials.

Enhanced Monitoring and Service Delivery

E-governance initiatives strengthen the monitoring and delivery of welfare schemes. For instance, the ICDS CAS has enabled real-time tracking of the performance of Anganwadi centers (childcare centers) and improved the quality of services provided to beneficiaries.

ENABLERS AND CHALLENGES

Enablers

The successful implementation of e-governance in Bihar can be attributed to the following factors:

1. *Strong political leadership*: The Government of Bihar, under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, has made e-governance a key priority and has provided sustained support for the implementation of various initiatives.
2. *Institutional capacity-building*: The state has established dedicated institutions such as the Bihar Information Technology Society to coordinate and build capacities for e-governance projects.
3. *Public-private partnerships*: The government has leveraged public-private partnerships for the design, development, and maintenance of e-governance applications.
4. *Digital infrastructure development*: Investments have been made to improve Internet connectivity, set up common service centers, and enhance the availability of digital devices.

Challenges

However, the e-governance journey in Bihar has also faced several challenges:

1. *Digital divide*: There are significant gaps in digital literacy and access to technology, especially in rural areas, limiting the reach and utilization of e-governance services.
2. *Change management*: Resistance to change among government employees and lack of familiarity with new technologies have posed implementation hurdles.
3. *Funding and sustainability*: Securing adequate and consistent funding for the operation and maintenance of e-governance initiatives remains a concern.
4. *Cybersecurity and data privacy*: Concerns about data security and citizen privacy need to be addressed to build trust in e-governance services.

CONCLUSION

The e-governance initiatives implemented in Bihar have had a positive impact on public service delivery, contributing to improved accessibility, efficiency, transparency, and accountability. However, the state still faces challenges in terms of digital infrastructure, capacity-building, and change management, which must be addressed for the sustained success of these programs.

Continued investments in e-governance, coupled with comprehensive digital literacy and capacity-building efforts for both citizens and government employees, are crucial to unlocking the full potential of technology-enabled governance in Bihar. The lessons learned from Bihar's experience can provide valuable insights for other Indian states and developing countries seeking to leverage digital technologies for more effective and responsive public service delivery.

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