E-Governance In West Bengal: Benefits And Challenges

Sukanta Dey
Department of Political Science, Malda Women's College, West Bengal, India

Abstract:
E-government also known as electronic govt. refers to the use of ICT such as the internet, computer, mobile phone, etc. to provide better and faster govt. services to the citizen efficiently and transparently with less corruption. West Bengal, a state in India has made significant progress in E-government to provide govt. services to its citizen on time. Although in the state of West Bengal where the literacy level is not very high and many people are living below the poverty line and are not even aware of the benefits of e-governance, so there exist several challenges to implementing e-governance. The purpose of this paper is to examine the various e-government initiatives of West Bengal govt., benefits, and challenges of e-governance in West Bengal.
Key Words: E-governance, Benefits, Challenges, West Bengal.

I.   Introduction
        Presently the challenge of any Government is to meet the growing need and requirements of its citizen. With the raising awareness of the citizen and better experience with private – the demand for better service on the part of the govt. became more important. In these circumstances, every govt. is using

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to meet the growing need and provide better service to the citizen.

        E-Governance generally means the use of ICT in Govt. functioning to create responsive, moral, accountable, transparent, and cost-effectiveness in govt. service delivery system. According to World Bank (2007) "E-Government" refers to the use by government agencies of information technology (Such as wide area networks, the internet, and mobile computing) that can transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends like better delivery of government services to the citizens, improved interaction with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient govt. management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and cost reduction.
         West Bengal, like many other states in India, has implemented various e-governance projects to make government service faster and more transparent. It has successfully implemented various e-government projects in Grampanchayet, Municipalities, District collectorate offices, and many more. The main objective is to transform itself citizen a friendly and information-based society in a transparent manner.
        In this paper, I have focused mainly on the benefits of e-governance, major e-government initiatives, and challenges of e-governance in West Bengal.

Benefits of E-Governance: E-Governance offers many potential benefits:

Increased Efficiency: E-Governance initiatives such as online portals and applications help to streamline government processes, reduce paperwork, and increase the speed of service delivery.

Transparency: The E-Governance initiative can make government processes more transparent by providing citizens with easy access to information related to government services, policies, and procedures.

Cost-effective: E-Governance can reduce the cost of delivering government services by eliminating the need for physical infrastructure and reducing administrative costs.

Improved Accessibility: E-governance initiatives can make government services more accessible to citizens, especially those who live in rural areas.

Better citizen engagement: E-governance can help improve citizen engagement by providing citizens with more convenient and accessible ways to interact with the government. This can include the use of online platforms for citizen feedback, public consultations, etc.

Major E-govt. initiatives by Govt. of West Bengal: The government of West Bengal has taken many initiatives for e-governance to provide better and faster government service to the citizen. These are –
1. **West Bengal E-District Mission:** The main objective of this mission is to provide govt. service to the citizen through an online system. The service may be availed through the internet by using a Smartphone or by visiting CSP.
2. **Crime and criminal tracking network system (CCTNS):** This project is sponsored by the Ministry of Home Affairs and aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the police dept. across the country.
3. **Centralized e- office:** This initiative has been taken mainly for government employees. Portals like HRMS (Human Resources Management System), IFMS (Integrated Financial Management System), and E-Pension have provided many benefits to employees.
4. **E-Municipality:** The Ministry of Urban and Municipal Affairs has taken the initiative for residents of the municipality to provide e-service. for this the department has provided a portal for getting facilities like paying municipal taxes, applying for a license, and other services.
5. **E-Panchayet**: Presently all the Grampanchayet in West Bengal have been connected through an internet facility and most of the services are provided through govt. portal.
    Besides these, there are some other projects like the e-land record, Smart card, Computerization of court cases, etc. These services are provided online.

Challenges of E-Governance in West Bengal: The government of West Bengal has necessarily implemented many e- govt. projects for better governance but still there are many challenges of e-government. These are –
1. **Social and Cultural challenge:** West Bengal is one of the most highly populated states in India and most of the people live in rural areas (68.13%). As per the latest census, the literacy rate in West Bengal is 76.26%. Besides, West Bengal is a state where we find much diversity in culture, language, and religion. Therefore, this is a huge challenge for the implementation of e-governance in West Bengal.
2. **Lack of Integrated Service:** Most of the e-govt. services that are offered by the state are not integrated. Lack of co-operation is the major reason. Therefore, the information that resides has very little importance to another department.
3. **Lack of Awareness:** Most people especially those living in rural areas are not aware of the benefit of e-government services. Therefore, this is another challenge to the implementation of e-governance in West Bengal.
4. **Infrastructural and Technical Constraints:** This is another major problem of e-governance. Internet service is still inaccessible in remote areas. There is a problem like obsolete equipment, and infrastructure in urban areas not in rural areas, etc.
5. **Security and Privacy:** The security issue is another major challenge of e-governance. Any information provided by the citizen should be ensured by the government. Otherwise, any person may misuse valuable data and information.
6. **User-friendliness of Govt. Websites:** Government websites must be user-friendly so that everybody can access the service.
7. **Cost:** The cost to access the internet is another challenge of the implementation of e-Government in West Bengal. As most of the people are living in rural areas and their per capita income is very low so it is very difficult to spend a huge amount for access to e-govt. services.
8. **Digital divide:** One of the biggest challenges of e-governance is the digital divide. Not all citizens have access to the internet or the necessary technology to use e-governance services, which can create a divide between those who can access e-governance services and those who cannot access them.

II.   Conclusion
    E-Governance initiatives in West Bengal have the potential to transform the government system because it not only provides information about various activities of the government; it also involves citizens participating in govt. decision-making process. However, there are still some challenges regarding the implementation of e-governance such as the digital divide between urban and rural, cost, illiteracy, security, etc. The government should address these issues and take more initiative to make it transparent, convenient, and more people-friendly to enhance people's confidence in good democratic e-governance.

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