



# **E-Governance in India: From Policy to Reality. a Case Study of Chhattisgarh Online Information System for Citizen Empowerment (CHOICE) Project of Chhattisgarh State of India**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*IT enabled e-governance in India seeks to achieve a more equitable, efficient, transparent, speedy, and corruption free service delivery system. But in the Indian context the challenge for e-governance is how to reduce the gap between the rich and poor towards a more inclusive governance system, benefiting particularly the poor in backward regions as in Chhattisgarh State, India.*

*Keywords: citizen access; digital divide; electronic democracy; electronic governance; empowerment; IT in public administration*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of electronic governance (e-governance) covers the use of electronic technologies in crucial areas of public action in a democracy, particularly those affecting relations and interaction between public authorities and citizens in the provision and access of public services. It entails the incorporation of digital technology in the exercise of power which could be described as 'electronic democracy' and electronic public service delivery system. Thus, e-governance strengthens democratic institutions and processes in that it seeks to involve the public on a more regular basis in

political choices so that their needs and priorities are respected and better addressed. This has led to electronic government (e-government), which has also led to the modernization of public administration while bringing it closer to civil society through the use of information and communication technologies. In order that e-governance becomes a reality, e-government must ensure that it involves the largest possible number of citizens through a participatory interaction and to this end employs information communication technologies. E-governance through information technology (IT) enabled services thus involves the re engineering and

digitizing government processes, minimizing direct contacts between the government and citizens and institutionalizing transparency and accountability in public administration.

### **Theme and Purpose of the Study**

This study aims at assessing some e-governance schemes and mechanisms adopted for improving public service delivery in India from the perspective of the citizen. It explores the gap between the stated objectives of the ICT policies and their outcome. The study seeks to examine whether e-governance schemes and mechanisms adopted in public administration in India have improved service delivery systems for the citizens in a backward region. Have e-governance mechanisms and processes improved citizen access and brought the administration and citizen closer? Have the shortcomings of the earlier manual service delivery system been overcome? Are all citizens able to benefit from e-governance processes and mechanisms? These are some of the questions which this study attempts to address with the help of a sample survey of the working of some e-governance mechanisms grouped under Chhattisgarh online information system for citizen empowerment (CHOICE) in the Chhattisgarh state, which is one of the most backward regions in India.

The purpose of this study is to not merely take stock of the progress of the working of the e-governance processes and mechanisms which are expected to improve public delivery systems in Chhattisgarh State of India. The aim is also to share the lessons learnt with policy makers as well as with the development scholars in the field and to indicate further policy initiatives and correctives needed. The findings in this study are based on a sample survey of the working of the schemes grouped under CHOICE in Chhattisgarh State.

### **Methodology**

The study is focused on one of the flagship projects of e-governance in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh called the Chhattisgarh online information system for citizen empowerment (CHOICE). So far it has been implemented only

in the state capital, Raipur. Hence, the study is focused on Raipur and the sample survey pertains to that area. The study and the findings of the survey are based on both primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources included information collected directly from the citizens accessing services through both the operative modes, e-services, as well as the traditional/manual systems. The secondary sources included information collected from the official government records, official Web sites, and records available at the CHOICE centres, CHOICE center agents, and other written and documented sources.

### **Design of the Survey, Sampling Method, and Size**

The sample survey was carried out over 3 months during October to December 2006. The survey comprised unstructured interviews with three groups of citizens who visited the specific CHOICE centres for accessing the e-services. This was complemented by focused group discussions with some of the citizens accessing e-services. A total of nine group discussions were held in 3 of the 14 CHOICE centres involving 57 persons in all. Three group discussions were held separately in the government offices involving 22 participants in all.

Out of 14 CHOICE centers, 3 CHOICE centers were selected to collect information directly from the citizens visiting these centres. The three centres were chosen on the basis of the number of citizens availing the services during the 3 months duration. Thus, the three CHOICE centres chosen were: one with the maximum number of citizens, one with the minimum number of citizens, and one with the average number of citizens.

It was found that generally the centres located in crowded places, particularly those being run by persons already running cyber cafes or computer centres with a ready customer base, had more customers. Attempts were also made to ascertain whether the location, nature of public dealing, or anything else related to a CHOICE centre had any impact on the numbers availing the services, or on the quality of ser-

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