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Good Governance and Public Service Delivery in India

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Abstract

Good governance is fundamental to effective, equitable, transparent, and citizen-centred public service delivery in India. This paper examines the conceptual foundations, institutional mechanisms, administrative structures, and reform initiatives associated with good governance and public service delivery. It focuses on key principles including accountability, transparency, participation, responsiveness, equity, efficiency, and inclusiveness. The study analyses India's multi-tier administrative system and the roles of Union, State, and local governments in delivering essential services such as health, education, sanitation, water supply, housing, welfare, and social protection. Particular attention is given to decentralization, citizen participation, grievance redressal, social audits, performance monitoring, the Right to Information, e-governance, and digital service delivery. The paper also highlights governance innovations, public-private partnerships, and state-level initiatives aimed at improving service quality and accessibility. Despite significant institutional and technological developments, challenges such as inadequate resources, administrative capacity gaps, corruption, regional disparities, digital exclusion, and implementation weaknesses continue to affect service delivery. The study emphasizes the need for institutional reforms, capacity building, effective intergovernmental coordination, digital inclusion, and stronger citizen participation to achieve universal, equitable, efficient, and responsive public services. Ultimately, citizen-centric administration supported by accountable institutions, appropriate technology, and inclusive governance is essential for strengthening public trust and improving development outcomes in India.

Keywords: *Good Governance; Public Service Delivery; Accountability; Transparency; Citizen Participation; E-Governance; Digital Governance; Decentralization; Administrative Reforms; Grievance Redressal; Social Audit; Public Administration; Citizen-Centric Governance; Inclusive Development; India.*

Introduction

The Government of India has adopted a commitment to good governance as a key driver of public service delivery. The country has established a formal framework to clarify the notion of governance by articulating the key principles of accountability, transparency, and participation. This framework has also influenced the manner in which governance is interpreted and understood in various Indian states. In the Indian context, theory and practice in governance have converged progressively. India has a structured and comprehensive administrative architecture through which public services are delivered. All public services are provided under the comprehensive framework of the Central Public Services Act and other statutory provisions. Public servant selection and service rules are specified in the Constitution of India and governed by various legislations passed by the Parliament (Singh, 2008). Well-defined hierarchical structures exist in all departments and institutions of governance located at the Union, State, and local levels. Services delivered by other government and quasi-government institutions are also governed through public administration principles and the delivery of services at various levels. Services are routed through five different channels articulated in the framework of "Public Service Delivery", and the types of services delivered to citizens are defined in the "Citizen's Charter". A number of digital platforms and initiatives have been introduced to simplify public service delivery.

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A multi-modal service delivery approach mandated under the "Digital India Programme" has been formally adopted, enabling the integration of governance and e-governance to realise an integrated framework for public service delivery. These formal decisions have led to the convergence of governance practices across Indian states (D. Abasilim et al., 2017).

The Conceptual Foundations of Good Governance

The conceptualization of governance has evolved from a focus on the structure of government to consideration for the processes by which public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights, with an emphasis on consensus-oriented approaches. Consequently, good governance can be associated with service delivery, wherein governance relates to the processes by which input for public service delivery is procured, service is provided, and service delivery is monitored. Moreover, particular attention must be directed towards the constituents of the delivery framework to ascertain whether it is demand driven, inclusive, efficient, and people centred. Indeed, a good governance framework for public service delivery must revolve around the following components: a clearly defined and simplified administrative architecture; streamlined service delivery mechanisms that facilitate timely access to the services; smooth intergovernmental coordination supported by active involvement of all relevant stakeholders; and the requisite policy reforms and institutional arrangements for effective performance of the service delivery framework.
Governance is often viewed within the broad principles of accountability, transparency, participation, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, consensus orientation, and strategic vision. At the constituent level, the contours of governance reflect the quality of public service delivery, encompassing the processes of preparation of citizens' charters, budgetary policies, redressal of grievances by citizens' service boards, measurement of performance indicators, conduct of social audits, and assessment of citizen satisfaction through perception surveys. Good governance thus becomes synonymous with good delivery of public services and holds the potential to fulfil the aspirations of citizens in a democracy.

1. Definitions and Dimensions

The precise meaning and understanding of good governance have emerged only over the past two decades, since governance became an important international issue in the context of globalization. Despite the frequent usage of the term, a precise definition has eluded even experts in the area. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels." Governance encompasses the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. The UNDP Governance Practice defines good governance as "the exercise of power in a manner that is legitimate, effective, efficient, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the people." However, the United Nations Development Report (1997) notes that the imposition of such definitions, especially by outside agencies, has drawn criticism because, in many developing countries, the words "good" and "governance" have not always been constituted together. Furthermore, governance operates at various levels—global, regional, national and local—and development theories and practices deem that the structure, mentality and practices of governance at all levels must be transformed into responsive, accountable, transparent and participatory agencies in order to support and sustain human development. In macroeconomic terms, governance primarily means ensuring a responsible state to create a conducive economic environment, while in society it represents all those aspects that could strengthen state-society relations, guarantee and strengthen fundamental rights, reduce the risk of abuse of political power, and ensure that "people are free from hunger, secure from disease, able to work and live with dignity, live in social harmony, welfare and well-being, are educated, have a voice and can get justice." William Easterly notes that economic growth is heavily dependent on good (or "better") governance, as defined by growth-oriented institutions and policies formulated and executed by proper incentive structures.

2. Accountability, Transparency, and Participation

Accountability, transparency, and participation are central characteristics of good governance. Accountability refers to the obligation of governments to give an account of their actions and accept responsibility, especially when they fail to deliver services. Public servants should be subject to a range of arrangements for accountability, both internal and external; such arrangements should apply throughout the delivery chain. Mechanisms for external accountability, notably of police, the defence force, and extra-parliamentary bodies such as the election and audit commissions, should be independent, adequately resourced, and effective. Responsiveness to the people demands a high level of openness, or transparency, in government processes. Fuller accessibility of information and disclosure in matters of public interest, not only after decisions have been made but also during the decision-making process, act as important safeguards against arbitrariness in government actions. Participation is essential to good governance. It has both instrumental and intrinsic value. People who feel excluded from their governments are less likely to respect the law, pay taxes, accept decisions, or contribute to collective activities. Citizen participation extends beyond voting in elections; it includes the ability of men and women to express their interests and have their voices heard either directly or through legitimate independent organizations. Such participation is essential not only for representatives to remain in touch with the wishes of the electorate, but also in electing representatives and institutions at local and subnational government levels. The media are a

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powerful catalyst for citizen participation. Governments can encourage participation by the public in consultations on policies and programs before decisions are made.

Public Service Delivery: Mechanisms and Challenges

The institutional architecture for the delivery of services to citizens is complex and multi-layered. It necessitates coordination across several departments of the Union, State, and local governments, through a combination of different implementation mechanisms. The structure provides for direct implementation by the State governments, autonomous public academic and research institutions or organizations created by law, non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, public sector undertakings, or through public–private partnerships. Public facilities such as schools, hospitals, dispensaries, community health care centres, and mid-day meals in schools are administered mainly by State governments, while access to basic services such as roads, electricity, drinking water, and sanitation primarily involves management by local service delivery institutions. Moreover, in some cases citizens interact directly with the Union government at the level of the States, such as in the case of pensions for senior citizens, the disabilities sector and scholarship schemes. There are also Union ministries that set standards and provide funds but do not directly deliver public services, while in others citizens directly purchase goods and services, such as telephones, gas connections, and passenger services in railways and airlines.
Strengthening the processes involved in service delivery can help improve access to basic services, especially for vulnerable and marginalized sections of society. Digital technologies have enabled more effective delivery of services by reducing leakages, fraud, and duplication, and making processes more efficient and transparent. Mechanisms have been established to facilitate intergovernmental coordination and engagement with citizens and their organizations in the planning, delivery, and monitoring of services. Nevertheless, access to essential health, education, and nutrition services remains severely constrained, and the quality of infrastructure continues to be inadequate in several areas. Resource constraints are reflected in rising fiscal liabilities even as capital expenditures remain low. While distinct milestones for service delivery at the Union and State levels have been articulated in policy documents, the performance of agencies responsible for service delivery remains inconsistent.

1. Administrative Architecture in India

Public service delivery in India operates through a multi-tiered administrative system, with multiple actors. At the Union level, the Ministry of Home Affairs is the nodal ministry for delivering services to citizens and performs the function of coordinating the work of various ministries, especially that of the State Governments/Union Territories. Service delivery in certain domains, such as law and order, internal security, disaster management, and infrastructure development across areas appears to be the responsibility of the Central Government, whereas that of services such as health, education, housing, and agricultural extension, which fall within the purview of the State Governments, is implemented through the respective line departments. Structural arrangements have been created across ministries for the effective monitoring and supervision of the service delivery systems. The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances has been set up for improving the public delivery process in all areas and many of the core ministries have established special cells for the redress of public grievances. In the Union Territories, there is a designated nodal officer at the level of the Secretary. At the state level, State Administrative Reforms Commissions have been set up to facilitate the implementation of remedial measures for better public service delivery. The growing expectations and aspirations of citizens underscore the demand for a more transparent and accountable public administration that delivers services effectively by resorting to innovative and sound administrative management practices. To achieve this goal, the public administration machinery at all levels requires continuous reinforcement in terms of broadening areas of intervention and enhancing capacities at every stage of the decision-making process together with effective management at the implementation stage. Similarly, at the local level, public service delivery is being strengthened through the implementation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which devolve power and authority to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to enable them to function as the third tier of an active federal structure of governance, as well as the more recent State Panchayati Raj Acts that promote meaningful devolution of functions and services.

2. Service Delivery Frameworks and Digital Governance

A robust and coherent arrangement for effective service delivery is essential if citizens are to obtain the services guaranteed to them. These services must be accessible in terms of time, space, and cost; assured of quality; and provided within defined and reasonable periods. Attributes such as predictability and certainty of receipt are crucial in achieving high-quality service delivery. A responsive and responsible arrangement for redressing grievances adds to the effectiveness of service delivery. These requirements span the entire governing machinery and demand concerted action.
In addition, the enormous potential of information and communication technology (ICT) and e-governance needs to be harnessed. E-governance initiatives help in improving the quality of service delivery, enhancing transparency, and reducing corruption by minimizing public interfaces in operations. Internet-based service delivery and other ICT-based initiatives deserve to be scaled up and replicated across the country. Wherever achievable, services need to be made available online. The portals of central and state governments should be integrated for one-stop access by citizens to

services/benefits offered by various departments or ministries. Besides, internal back-end mechanization of major services should be undertaken.

3. Intergovernmental Coordination and Stakeholder Engagement

Coordination across various tiers of government and extensive engagement with stakeholders in service design and delivery help in ensuring citizen-centric governance. Public service delivery in India has become increasingly decentralized. The majority of public services are now the responsibility of State Governments. Local Governments are becoming the primary providers of basic services. The responsibilities of the Union Government primarily include the provision of social assistance to persons below the poverty line, building of infrastructure for defence and promotion of high economic growth, mainly through specialist agencies, and facilitating the States in their responsibilities. However, these roles are not clearly defined, leading to duplication and overlaps. A well-coordinated and collaborative implementation would better serve these goals and minimise the gaps and overlaps in service delivery. The actual delivery of demand-driven services and works, such as housing, is best done by the local governments. The new Right to Information Act and similar laws in many States have created an avenue for a greater involvement of people in public service delivery systems. Another institutional device being adopted is social audit, under which the beneficiaries assess and evaluate the performance of programmes. In addition to the above initiatives, greater involvement of non-governmental organisations and the private sector in public service delivery is being advocated. The Public Private Partnership programmes in the areas of education, health and other social sectors are now gaining momentum. Citizens' charters in various departments and other agencies, are envisaged as an important part of this effort, reducing the apprehensions of citizens and improving their accessibility to government services.

Policy Reforms and Institutional Arrangements

Good-governance reform requires changes in official attitudes and commitment to fundamental principles and objectives, such as social equity in policies, rules, norms, and resource allocation. Service Delivery Reforms focus on three axes: improving the Civil Service as an instrument for development, reforming policy-making and administrative processes, and introducing legislation, regulations, and rules governing the Service Delivery System. The elements constitute a systemic approach to reforming governance (Singh, 2008). The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) is the backbone of the country's administrative framework. Reforms have been undertaken to strengthen civil service capacities to make policies more responsive, equitable, transparent, accountable, participatory, and development-oriented. Policies and priorities for good governance have been articulated in the first phase of life in a proactive manner through the Ambedkar Programme. The policy framework has had a major impact on the course of governance initiatives in the states.
The Indian Parliament enacted the Right to Information Act, 2005, to enhance transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of public authorities in the governance framework. The Act provides citizens with the right to access information from public authorities to promote transparency in the working of each level of government, state, and local as already enshrined in Article 19. Reform, decentralization, and better information technologies cannot solve the problem of ordinary citizens not having the same rights as the privileged. Social injustice arises from the under-developed status of very large sections of Indian society. The Sustainable Development Goals regard participation, empowerment, and overcoming inequalities and injustices as essential parts of whole development.

1. Reforms in Civil Services and Public Administration

The sixties and seventies heralded a slew of Committees and Commissions that reviewed the working of Administration and Constitutional provisions governing it. One pivotal recommendation that emerged was the need to review the Mandate for the Civil Service and the Administrative structure established post-Independence. The Sarkaria Commission in its report (Chakraborty, 2014) observed that be it early emphasis on Rural-Reconstruction with attendant Multi-Department Specialised Agencies or on poverty alleviation, the problem of fragmentation and lack of integration persisted as the core of the Administrative reform agenda. Despite Early attempts to address the fragmented approach through an Integrated Community Development Scheme in 1952, and later a multi-tiered, multi-Actor, Delivery system under the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (1983) fragmentation continued to be the overriding feature. Analysis of existing Development Initiatives pointed to the fact that any addition to the number of agencies, departments, or authoritative instruments leads to an increase in the number of decisions required and consequently decision-making traffic increases not decreases. With respect to the administrative and civil services in Manipur, structural simplification centered around the reduction of the number of service categories has been prescribed even while retaining the elements of Specialisation, functional distinctiveness, and the adequacy of the overall cadre-strength.
The 'Administration' team of a Comprehensive High Commission at the Centre proposed specific guidelines to restructure Manipur's civil service. These reflected the three norms of Simplicity, Focus and Synchrony. The proposal recommended the Creation of a Unified State Administrative Service as Cadre of Entry for all Administrative Officers. The minimum uniform Qualifying Service for Promotion in the training Cycle was prescribed at three years. Further the spirit of the Organisation should be one that furthers the Freedom of fictional actors and encourages Comprehensiveness holistically supported by a 'Publishing Culture'. The proposal also centralised 1– to–1 or many–to–many processes and designed a unique 'Continuous Format' in the topic spectrum where topic 1 may comprise of a single dash or field. Drafting standards

also focused on maintaining Comprehensiveness rather than radical brevity, recognizing that excess brevity leads to misunderstanding and asthenia.

2. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks for Service Delivery

Well-defined legal frameworks have the potential to improve the quality of public service delivery and the interaction of citizens with government organisations. The Constitution of India provides a broad foundation for the country's considerable legal and regulatory framework, which is foundational for good governance and public and social service delivery (Singh, 2008). The Constitution upholds the rule of law, equality before the law, right to a fair and public hearing, freedom of speech, protection from discrimination, and the right of individuals to approach the courts of India for redress of grievances on matters involving the violation of these rights. These provisions are the embodiment of strong values espoused by governance bodies across the world and point to a democratic outlook. Legislation related to service delivery across various sectors supports accountability, transparency, and participation in governance. These laws govern the rights of citizens regarding service delivery, detail the duties of service providers, and provide mechanisms for grievance redressal for citizens dissatisfied with the quality of service. Legislative frameworks associated with service delivery include the National and State Rural Employment Guarantee Acts, the Right to Information Act, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the State Food Security Act, and the Acts pertaining to the Public Distribution System, among others (Jeet Singh, 2008).

3. Decentralization and Local Governance

Effective decentralization empowers local governments to function autonomously, increase accountability and participation, and enhance economic efficiency, thereby improving service delivery outcomes. India has undertaken major decentralization efforts, with panchayati raj institutions for rural local governance, urban municipalities for urban governance, and the District Planning Committee framework for district planning. Evidence indicates that devolving fiscal powers to local governments improves service delivery, although implementation challenges remain. The fifty-third Amendment to the Constitution of India mandated the establishment of panchayati raj institutions in all states with a three-tier structure at the village, block, and district levels. The provision of a directly elected chairperson at both the intermediate and district levels increases the degree of political accountability at these levels. The seventy-fourth Amendment mandated the establishment of urban local bodies in all cities. These serve as participative institutions close to citizens, capable of providing a range of civic services in a transparent manner, responding better to local needs, and ensuring accountability and probity in service delivery. They are aided through financial, technological, and skill support for capacity building, with greater fiscal devolution and pooling of resources for larger urban agglomerations.

Performance, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Good governance is supported through performance, monitoring, and evaluation (M, M, & E), which are essential for accountability and transparency and to achieve tangible results. A variety of M, M, & E frameworks is in place in India to monitor and evaluate the quality of governance and public service delivery in particular. At minimum, the frameworks seek to assess inputs, outputs, and outcomes (both immediate and final). Performance audits, evaluation, and corruption risk mitigation frameworks orient M, M, & E in the governance system. Citizen feedback, grievance redressal, and social audit are additional critical components of the governance-monitoring system (Tshefu, 2017).

The intensity with which these components are pursued varies depending on the nature of the service and government priorities. For instance, the focus on performance and evaluation is pronounced in the health and nutrition sector and also in education and skill development. The large-scale provision of welfare entitlements and benefits by a variety of state and central ministries and their considerable financial implications have increased attention to corruption risk mitigation across all sectors (Jeet Singh, 2008).

1. Indicators of Governance and Service Quality

Despite numerous initiatives and elaborate governmental structures, public service delivery in India remains poor. This persists even with extensive reforms to improve service delivery, enhance service quality, and introduce citizen-centric governance. The quality of public expenditure has deteriorated owing to growing patronage politics and rent-seeking, with systematic bias likely affecting allocations and the quality of delivery (Singh, 2008). The central government and the Tenth Finance Commission sought to increase state government accountability by linking transfers to local government performance, attempting to strengthen local capacity through targeted transfers channeled via states. However, basic services like health care, education, water, and sanitation remain primarily local responsibilities, yet with limited fiscal and administrative capacity. Diverse indicators track the quality of public service delivery in areas of critical relevance to citizens and extensively monitored through independent assessments as well as citizen feedback, thereby facilitating government responses and enhanced quality in adverse cases. These indicators include outcome measures, input measures, and citizen-stated responses. Outcome indicators signal the efficacy of service delivery; for instance, service provision is inadequate if citizens incur high expenditure on services that the government nominally provides. Health-sector indicators may highlight deficiencies; important elements include infant mortality rates and life expectancy, which reflect the effectiveness of health and nutrition interventions. Input measures track determinants of service quality,

such as corruption, absenteeism, and the integrity of delivery. Citizen-stated responses evaluate dissatisfaction and identify public and private options available to citizens; switching to private services or a negative voting propensity serve as key examples.

2. Audit, Evaluation, and Corruption Risk Mitigation

Public service delivery in India involves a complex interplay of administrative measures and accountability practices that encompass the establishment of controls and performance indicators, programme evaluations, social audits, citizen charters, and the right to information (Afridi & Iversen, 2014). Audit and evaluation frameworks support good governance by identifying and mitigating corruption risks across various public service sectors (Chakraborty, 2014). The statutory Auditor General and the National Evaluation Office champion the principles of accountability and transparency by scrutinizing expenditures and programme impacts. Specific measures to enhance audit and evaluation and to mitigate corruption risk are outlined below.

3. Citizen Feedback, Grievance Redressal, and Social Audit

Citizen Feedback, Grievance Redressal, and Social Audit

The approaches taken by the State to engage with citizens reflect a commitment to institutionalize a participative governance framework and encourage citizen-centric service delivery. A range of participatory initiatives have been rolled out around the principles of citizen feedback and grievance redressal. The Ministry of Public Grievances has led the development of an online feedback mechanism for citizens to share experiences related to public services and to respond to specific surveys focused either on feedback or suggestions to improve service delivery. This mechanism is complemented by the Centralized Public Grievance Redressal System (CPGRS), established to ensure a timely and effective response to public grievances. The national governance plan includes the establishment of a "nationwide service delivery grievance redressal mechanism" (Jeet Singh, 2008) to handle cases not covered by the CPGRS. Some States have taken steps to operationalize social audits to provide an independent appraisal of implementation while also helping to establish reform and compliance standards. As some citizens' complaints may reflect situations where services are delivered but are not useful, either because the scheme is irrelevant to the citizen's needs or the service is substandard, the governance plan would benefit from accompanying guidance on assessing the relevance and adequacy of public services.

Sectoral Perspectives on Public Service Delivery

Sustainable development encompasses economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. India ranks low on empirical indicators measuring sustainable development and has lagged in achieving health-related sustainable development goals, as further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite impressive economic growth, malnutrition, infant mortality, and maternal mortality rates exceed those of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. Water supply and sanitation provision remain inadequate, with rural household access near 50% of the requirement. Urban housing provision remains inadequate. Education provision also faces serious shortcomings. In health care, public spending is low compared to the global average, particularly at the local level, leading to a high dependence on private sector. Serious disparities exist across different regions of the country (Singh, 2008).In terms of health care, maternal mortality, infant mortality, and total fertility rates remain much higher than in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. The health care system has weak health management information systems; deficiencies are serious in education, nutrition, and maternal and child health; the availability of generic medicines is inadequate; long queues and unavailability of doctors are frequently cited reasons for using private medical services; and the hospitalisation rate is low compared to the regional average. Direct public financing in health care has been stuck at a mere 1% of GDP for over three decades, while the current expenditure at the local body level continues to be around a mere 5% of the total. Public delivery of education has improved in some aspects, but severe shortcomings remain. For early childhood education, only 30% attend anganwadi services, and over 50% of children drop out before reaching the fifth grade. The shortage of teaching staff, especially teachers possessing the requisite qualifications, is a leading problem in the elementary education system. Higher educational attainment is highly skewed, with much greater access for men than women. Adult literacy rates continue to be low compared to neighbouring countries of comparable income. The percentage of schools with toilet facilities for girls is only one-third even after many years of the Total Sanitation Campaign.

1. Health and Nutrition

Although economic growth is a powerful driver of improvements in health indicators, India has experienced declines in child mortality rates and rises in life expectancy typical of middle-income countries without a corresponding rise in per capita GDP. Consequently, India is differentiated from many developing countries by such health indicators. These patterns reflect the market and state failures that have plagued the provision of nutritious food and healthcare inputs. The market dynamics contributing to these failures arise from the credence nature of many health-related goods, services requiring involvement from at least the supplier and the beneficiary. The ability to assess quality prior to consumption is limited, yet differentiation is possible after experience. Additionally, information asymmetry restricts knowledge of supplier capabilities. The multifaceted nature of health-related goods and services compounds overall quality assessment challenges (Singh, 2008).Increasing poverty, soaring food prices, and declining agricultural production have instigated widespread food insecurity. In the health sector, the ability of the poor to access services reflects broader market

failures. Even those receiving free services or benefiting from subsidized services provided at a proximal location face numerous hurdles that impede timely access. Supply-side constraints—particularly the inability to make relatively low investments to secure employment and the lack of availability of specified services—are frequently cited as the primary reasons for poor healthcare access. Instead of exploring these potential reasons, however, understanding how social accountability initiatives have assisted in fostering grass-roots monitoring of health service delivery efforts remains crucial (Feruglio & Nisbett, 2018).

2. Education and Skill Development

The importance of skill development on education is recognised in Indian policies as being an instrument for economic growth and enhancement of sustainable livelihood. At the time of independence in 1947 the lower providing any vocational training was seen as considerable hindrance hindering the growth of the economy and policies towards rehabilitation of rehabilitating the displaced in the region of Punjab as 1947 was taken from acquiring vocational skills. The government formed a committee under the leadership of Dr. K.L. Shrimali to operationalise vocationalisation of education. Certain measures like redistribution educational funds, installation of broadcasting radios, setting up of night schools, to base the instruction language on the basis of the geographical areas and allotment of teacher books on the basis of need to advocacy were taken. The system of vocational education was to incorporate the knowledge of a specific skill required for maintaining the Standard of living. Examples of professions where skills were required were polytechnic for interior designing, accountant for maintaining accounts, art-folk like drama and dancing etc. The relation of social-religion development literacy, education, vocationalisation of students, training of trainers, state discrimination level, intitution process of vocational education and social chapter setting the basis for tech schools were some of the work done. Providing equal skill development (Okada, 2013) , on-the-job skill development, designing curriculum according to industry needs, recruiting the trainers from the industry, changing the mods of training, and incentives to the skilled youth after completion of training etc.

3. Welfare and Social Protection

Welfare and social protection systems are facing challenges analogous to those confronting police systems, namely, limited capacity to engage with every citizen's legitimate demands. Delivering welfare and social protection is highly domain-specific and personal, limiting the feasibility of standardization. Current strategies aim to augment the service reach through simplification and monetization of the interaction, yet these approaches may not adequately serve disadvantaged or marginalized groups that require individualized attention. The quest for an inclusive and progressive e-governance strategy must remain steadfastly citizen-centric, favouring the propositions of joined-up government and structured interdepartmental consultation (Jeet Singh, 2008).

Labour welfare and social security provisions in India are minimal even compared to those in industrially advanced countries. Only about 16 per cent of the workforce in the organized sector benefits from these provisions; the unorganized sector, which constitutes 84 per cent of the total, remains largely uncovered. Government measures have failed to extend benefits to even a modest portion of the unorganized-sector workforce. Implementing a comprehensive programme with the active involvement of government, employers, workers, trade unions, NGOs, and other social organizations is essential to enabling people in the unorganized sector to work and live with dignity (B Ravindra, 2016).

4. Urban Infrastructure and Housing

Urban infrastructure refers to road transportation, drainage, electricity, water supply, sewage treatment, refuse disposal, and related geographical, commercial, and institutional services. Housing quality depends on infrastructure availability, which poses challenges for low-income groups. Data from the 2001 Census reveals the gross level of urban housing shortage in India, where cities from various sizes face simultaneous high demand for housing. An overwhelming portion of urban areas has demonstrated shortfalls in adequate sanitation, drinking water, maintenance, and drainage facilities. Against this backdrop, access to basic urban infrastructure remains low, with implications for urban housing achievement, especially for the less privileged (Kolawole Opeyemi et al., 2014). The basic services needed for effective government performance cover infrastructure, public health, education, land use planning, and housing (Pal et al., 2015).

Digital Governance and Inclusive Access

E-Governance and Technology-Enabled Service Delivery. Successful governance hinges on effective communication, enabling the flow of information, ideas, and services among citizens and the government. Information and communication technology (ICT) is a powerful enabler for the efficient delivery of public services by bridging the gap between citizens and government. Not only does it aid in improving the reach and quality of services, it also optimises the government's processes and workforce deployment. Advances in digital communication technology have altered the business model for the delivery of all services—state-level, national, and even global—by postponing the requirement of physical presence at service outlets. Digital service delivery is focused on operational efficiency, service quality, customer convenience, and cost advantage. The widespread increase in mobile phone penetration has led to a multitude of e-governance applications, covering service portals for corporate affairs, land records, e-challans, online income tax filings, customs clearance, railway ticket reservations, passport services, and citizens' information services. Under the mission of the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), a collaborative effort involving the Union and state governments and their

agencies, many such applications have been designed, developed, and deployed. The Available-Government-Services (e-Sampark) portal offers citizens information regarding the various government services available for delivery and the mechanism for availing those services. At the same time, information asymmetries still persist among different sections of society, leading to an unequal distribution of the benefits arising from innovative government initiatives. Hence, the issue of digital exclusion needs to be urgently addressed. In addition, concerns related to data governance (including data privacy, data integrity, data access, and data security) have acquired a new dimension in the context of digital service delivery. These aspects require careful consideration in ensuring that the benefits of e-governance extend equally to all citizens.

1. E-Governance Platforms and Service Portals

E-Governance is receiving increased attention in both public and private sectors throughout the globe, including in developing countries. E-governance is viewed as a tool that can facilitate better governance in the public sector by helping to make government activities accessible to all citizens. E-governance includes particular governance principles and practices that aim to strengthen public trust in governments and administrations in order to achieve the basic goals of better governance (G. Rahim et al., 2017). In India, the e-governance mission already shows positive signs. India's initial focus in e-governance was to strengthen the mechanisms that underpin government transparency, knowing that the right to information is regarded as a fundamental right of citizens (Jeet Singh, 2008). Transparency is instrumental in reducing corruption, hence improving service delivery. Efforts are also underway to transform government-citizen interaction by easing access to grievance redress mechanisms, thereby allowing citizens to engage with governments when experiencing poor public service delivery. The two-way character of these measures permits an assessment of the quality of governance and a means to respond.

2. Digital Inclusion and Addressing the Digital Divide

Two decades into the digital era, the challenge of closing the digital divide remains a key priority for various institutions, agencies, and organizations worldwide. The World Development Report 2008: Creating Opportunities for the Next Generation emphasized the importance of digital inclusion through access to technology, digital skills development, and addressing the inequalities in distribution of devices, both in developed and developing countries, since digital possessions are grown exponentially alongside data numbers and have a positive effect on positive life quality (Jeet Singh, 2008). The spread of e-Government and e-Governance initiatives across mature economies and emerging markets, respectively, has added a new dimension to the debate on the existing digital divide. E-Government can be seen as a key component in closing the digital divide since, on one hand, a country cannot effectively deliver e-Government services without attaining a decent level of Internet connectivity, while on the other hand, e-Government services, which can be accessed remotely and asynchronously via the web from home, office, or Internet cafés, can assist governments in promoting and increasing accessibility of local ICT facilities to a wider audience (Pimenidis et al., 2011).

3. Data Governance, Privacy, and Security

The Indian government has adopted a multifaceted approach to e-governance, recognizing that timely and accessible services not only help meet citizens' challenges but also enhance accountability and transparency. E-governance thus accommodates two citizens' needs: "having easy and prompt access to essential, essential and people-centric services" and "being able to voice grievances against service deliver." Additionally, e-governance enables "citizen-centric monitoring of performance." In general, e-governance is expected to lead to "improved service delivery, efficient monitoring and control, enhanced accountability and transparency and wider participation by citizens" (Fraunholz & Unnithan, 2006). Digital channelling of fundamentals rights of the citizen, the right to information, grapples with the issue of data privacy. E-governance is inspired by the mandate enshrined in the Indian Constitution (Jeet Singh, 2008). Automated services are relatively unsophisticated compared to the human interface in other sectors, particularly in financial transactions. Anonymization kernel of e-governance provide critical paradigm to access essential services designed around citizen privacy. One of the citizens centric services monitor citizens flow to the Common Service delivery point filling a gap in demand prediction model using social media data.

Governance Innovations and Case Studies

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, during his tenure as the Prime Minister of India from 1998 to 2004, laid the foundation for various performance-linked governance initiatives that aimed at transforming the process of governance in India. The Prime Minister's initiative on performance monitoring, popularly referred to as the "PRIME" initiative (meaning Proactive Governance and Timely Implementation), is an overarching performance-linked governance system that monitors the process and state of implementation of various important governance programs and initiatives undertaken by the Government of India. PRIME was initiated with a two-fold goal: (1) to promote proactive and effective governance which addresses the larger socio-economic aspirations of the citizens in a timely and effective manner and (2) to enhance the pace of implementation of the electoral manifesto commitments and the Government's priority programmes. The PRIME initiative is based on the principles of participative governance, which envisage a partnership between the Government and citizens of the country for ensuring the desired outcomes from the various government initiatives and programmes. Such a partnership is envisaged through participative approaches supplemented by technology, outreach, campaigns, and

information dissemination. Self-governance or decentralization, through the establishment of the Panchayati Raj institutions and the Municipalities, is a constitutional mandate that has long been envisaged in the Indian Constitution. Several efforts have been made to strengthen the States and the local bodies so that they can work effectively. To facilitate and assess the functioning of the local self-governments, various innovative initiatives have been launched by the Prime Minister's Office in the country. The Rural Development Programme of the Government of India envisages a District Level Performance Assessment to monitor the progress of various schemes and the physical and financial performance of activities taken up by the District Panchayat. Such gender disaggregated information is compiled for enabling decisions and policy formulation to empower women. The information is collected at the block level and fed into a Software developed at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. "States As Partners" is another innovative initiative to facilitate the development of an efficient link between the Government of India and the various State Governments.

Several State Governments have also undertaken innovative initiatives that can serve as models and inspire other States in the country. The Government of Haryana has launched a programme which aims at making the Government and the Administration accessible and accountable to the citizens. In the Civil Services sector, some specific policies and projects have been undertaken for improving the governance systems and this has enabled the delivery of citizen-centric services. The Government of Tamil Nadu has recognized the importance of Public-Private Partnerships in the upliftment of the people of the State and has made a conscious effort to involve the Private Sector in the area of Public Services. The State Government invites the Private players to take up various projects in the localities of their choice. The Government of Rajasthan has taken significant strides in the area of Citizen Facilitation and Government Effectiveness.

Nongovernmental organizations and citizen groups have also been playing a vital role in bringing good governance to the grassroots level. Their involvement in the areas of rural development, education, labor welfare, health education, human rights, women empowerment, youth development, etc. have been very effective. Organizations like the Nehru Yuva Kendra and the National Service Scheme have proved to be effective in catalyzing youths' invaluable contribution to the Nation.

1. Performance-Linked Governance Initiatives

Several initiatives led by the federal government aim at correlating the performance of states and the Union Territory of Delhi with the flow of financial assistance and devolution of functions, powers, and services to local urban authorities. The results so far indicate that such performance-linked initiatives may work better if there are broad intergovernmental consensus and synergies across multiple sectors for an institutional mechanism to combine physical infrastructure development with necessary capacitating actions, especially for solid waste management. The Swachh Bharat Mission is a case in point.

At the Union level, specific performance-based systems have evolved in several sectors. For example, in the case of drinking water supply and sanitation, a system combining the assessment of a minimum level of protection against floods and the availability of drinking water supply with the allocation of resources has been recently put in place. Similarly, in the drinking water sector, the allocation of resources is linked to the effective management of existing systems in terms of sustainability and efficiency. The central government has initiated an innovative approach for the decision-making process regarding financial assistance for infrastructure development in states prone to disasters. For disaster-prone states such as Odisha and Uttarakhand, a project prepared by the state government at the district level as a comprehensive plan for disaster recovery has been identified by the National Disaster Management Authority. The aid is graded based on the relative risk factors associated with each project. Thus, disaster risk management becomes an integral part of all major infrastructure development activities in these states.

2. State-Level Experiments and Best Practices

Several states in India have experimented with governance innovations and new approaches to public service delivery that are worthy of consideration. The Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, implemented by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, is a pioneering programme for self-employment among the rural poor that is based on the promotion of self-help groups. Meanwhile, the system of compulsorily reserving 30 percent of the seats in all local bodies for women, introduced in Karnataka, has served to empower women socially and economically and to improve gender equality. Inspired in part by this experience, several other states have also adopted provisions for such reservations, and there have been demands for similar arrangements for women in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas. Under the MID DAY MEAL SCHEME implemented by the Government of Tamil Nadu, school children are provided a hot meal of rice and dal at the school premises. Participation by the community in managing and implementing the scheme has ensured its success. Another commendable aspect of this scheme is the provision made for children during the summer vacation by supplying dry rations for one month. Revival of this practice will help improve the nutritional status of children in the state. The PREMATERNITY DAY KIT SCHEME for poor women in Tamil Nadu has won recognition for being the first initiative in the country to provide a prematernity kit at the time of admission for delivery in a government institution. Consisting of essential items like a lungi, sari, soap, talcum powder, a bathing towel, sanitary napkins, and oil, the kit is given free to pregnant women below the poverty line.

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3. Public-Private and Public-Nongovernmental Partnerships

Collaboration between the government, the private sector, and civil society organizations can enhance the quality of public goods and services and facilitate greater access for marginalized sections of society. While true partnership with equity and mutual benefit remains an ideal, and power asymmetries often distort contractual relations, project execution, and financial risk exposure, many innovative experiments emerge. Some partnerships address project viability through agreement-bundling or noncommercial cross-subsidization, while others leverage private-enterprise competencies, finance, media outreach, and technology for public purposes. Actual or proposed examples abound in health, education, sanitation, housing, tourism, police, and transport.The World Bank's pilot program on public-private partnerships in infrastructure development is being expanded, with dedicated institutions being created. Independent regulatory authorities have been set up or planned for electricity, telecommunications, and hitherto state-owned industries that sports franchises, private television, stipendiary journalism, and new entertainment and service industries. India's Ministry of Urban Development has initiated a major program to encourage cities to privatize sanitation, solid waste management, and public transport services. These privado-public mandates are complicated by upper- and down-market recessionary pricing and offer potential for multifaceted, potentially detrimental influences on quality control, regenerative recycling, and equitable access by lower-income groups.

Challenges and Future Prospects

Public service delivery in India has witnessed rapid development over the past few decades owing to several initiatives taken by governments at all levels. Despite these initiatives, gaps in implementation continue to plague policies meant to improve service delivery (Jeet Singh, 2008). The devolution of governance responsibilities to local levels has called for efforts to strengthen participation and accountability among local governments, citizens, and other stakeholders, alongside investments in new, more inclusive delivery modalities. However, there is a growing recognition that limited institutional capacity at all levels remains a significant barrier. These constraints are reflected in the challenges faced in key sectors such as education, health, and social welfare that are made worse by the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (D. Abasilim et al., 2017).

1. Resource Constraints and Implementation Gaps

Despite elaborate institutional mechanisms, public service delivery remains poor in India, especially at the subnational level responsible for health care, education, water, and sanitation (Singh, 2008). Many states, particularly the poorer ones, lack the necessary fiscal and administrative capacity. Moreover, increasing patronage politics, rampant rent-seeking, and widespread corruption have adversely affected the quality of public expenditure. These resultant deficiencies are evident in a variety of outcome indicators, such as infant mortality and life expectancy; in input measures, such as the extent of corruption and staff absenteeism; and in citizen behavior, such as a growing tendency to opt for private services or to vote for non-establishment parties. The existence of state-level disparities in human development, as reflected in the Human Development Index, further illustrates the resource and implementation gap. The absence of a positive correlation—whether overall or for the public sector—between health expenditure and the Index highlights the significance of these deficits.

2. Institutional Reforms and Capacity Building

Governing and delivering public services, especially in a country as vast and diverse as India, is a daunting challenge, and success to date is only partly satisfying. The public administration system has been perhaps at once the "most remarkable," and "perhaps misguided," element of the Indian republic. It is sometimes strikingly effective in the delivery of services, and quite at other times completely absent, incompetent, or corrupt. There also exists serious scope, however, for positive changes at scale. Concerted and sustained steps are necessary not only to strengthen the civil services but also to improve the capacity of the entire public administration system at all levels and in every responsible institution of government. A three-part strategy of institutional reforms, policy changes, and capacity-building initiatives would address both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the Indian state's functioning. Starting with institutional arrangements, India's bureaucratic structure needs to become more client- and issue-oriented through greater decentralization, consolidation, and flexibility of resource deployment. Built mostly along functional lines, it has important resource gaps in areas such as health, education, infrastructure, welfare, and police, exerts a short-term focus, and impairs the state's role as a enable. The. Managerial capability for training, evaluation, and performance-linked human resource development must also improve.

3. Towards Universal, Equitable Public Service Delivery

India has made considerable progress in extending public services to its people since the advent of the welfare state after independence. However, the emphasis on universalism coupled with the necessity for parochial and targeted interventions has also resulted in substantial inequities in access and quality of delivery across regions, communities, and even services. Services such as health care, education, nourishment, housing, and sanitation continue to elude large sections of population despite considerable public investments. Efforts at extending the scope of universal public delivery have also resulted in gravely inequitable access and bypassing of the poorest. More than seventy years of democracy have not yet

fostered a citizen-centric state and public service delivery. Governance at all levels is marred by suboptimal performance, systemic inefficiencies, and compromised quality, with the situation worse at the municipal level where essential services are constitutionally mandated (Singh, 2008). The Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) of public service delivery continues to be the government, with little to no involvement of the private sector and community. The electorate repeatedly votes against the establishment and not in favor of alternative options, indicating a lack of trust in governance and governance providers. Public expectations for universal delivery of comprehensive, coordinated, universal, and timely access in a civilized manner continue to widen.

Conclusion

The concept of good governance raises high expectations about access to quality public services. Academic, as well as policy debates on governance, have increasingly recognized that effective public service delivery is a central pillar of good governance.Public services touch the life of every citizen and there is growing demand for public authorities to provide these services equitably, efficiently, and in a time bound and predictable manner. Citizens want quality services delivered at minimal cost and with little trouble or additional expenditure. Expressed more positively, people want service delivery that goes beyond mere satisfaction of basic needs towards the provision of social welfare and economic development with emphasis on accelerated outcomes. Building an administrative structure that is verifiably accountable, transparent and responsive whilst providing services is one of the foremost responsibilities of the State administration. It involves capable personnel, appropriate work ethos, dynamic leadership, supporting legal and institutional frameworks, an ecosystem of willing citizens and easy access to services.

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