

## Holistic Perception of Good Governance Strategy in Odisha

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### Abstract

Introduction of ICTs in governance is now a universal phenomenon with an irrefutable consensus on the role of technology in bringing out an efficient, transparent, accountable and responsive service delivery system. Varied definitions of Good Governance highlight the importance of technology in administration so much as that e-Governance is seen a natural and inevitable path towards Good Governance. Models from developed countries differ from that of developing nations in terms of extent, nature, and quality of services offered online. India, one of the earliest adopters of e-Governance among the developing countries, has been reinforcing its efforts through programs like *NeGP*, *Digital India*, and many other service-oriented initiatives. While the Govt. of India has taken up the role of a guide and facilitator of e-Governance by initiating umbrella programmes like *Digital India*, state governments have been encouraged to adopt need-based programmes relevant to their socio-economic conditions, technological adaptability, infrastructure availability, and developmental goals. Therefore, disparity in terms of e-governance advances among the states is visible in the absence of a uniform and centralized agenda. States like Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana have aggressively adopted ICTs in delivery of public services as well as carrying out day-to-day government business by re-engineering government processes, creating IT infrastructure and reforming government-citizen interfaces through integrated service portals and Common Service Centres (CSCs). States like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand have recently escalated their efforts towards digitalization through various targeted programs. In this light, this paper attempts to analyse Government of Odisha's approach towards e-Governance and examine the contribution of such initiatives to the overall administrative development of the state.

**Key Words:** ICT, GOOD governance, Odisha

### Introduction

'E-governance' is a buzz word today. United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN) defines E-governance

as "the application of ICT tools in the interaction between government and citizens and businesses, and in internal government operations to simplify and improve democratic governance".<sup>1</sup> Oakley

defines E-Governance as “a technology mediated service that facilitates a transformation in the relationship between government and citizens”.<sup>2</sup>It is clear that E-Governance is not mere computerisation of government documents or processes but transformation of Citizen-Government interaction towards a democratic and effective governance.

Like any other state in India, Odisha has also initiated several programs for service delivery to citizens through the use of ICTs. The present paper seeks to present some facts about the various strategies of e-governance in Odisha. But at the same time the focus of the study is to strengthen the viewpoint that the effective and smooth running of the state requires some humanitarian principles which goes beyond the strategy of ‘e-governance’. The study seeks to emphasize that ‘e-governance’ as practiced in Odisha currently is ‘a shape without form, a shade without colour’. This study therefore, seeks to present a futuristic model to supplement the existing strategy of good governance based on ‘e-governance’. The quintessential objective of the study is to suggest to the policy-planners and researchers what can be done by the state to win the confidence of the beneficiaries who have not been fully benefited by ‘e-governance’. However, let it be made clear with hindsight that the study does not question the efficiency of e-governance but the incompatibilities in the approaches towards digitalization and the overall goals of good governance.

### **Odisha: Background**

With majority of its population being dependent on agriculture and a large section of its workforce migrating to other states/cities as unskilled or semiskilled labourers, Odisha remains at the bottom

positions in the developmental rankings in the country. This resource-rich state has not been able to attract industrial investment in proportionate to its potential in terms of mineral resources, geographical and water-resources. The state is considered to be the mineral hub of India with 92% chromite, 92% Nickel, 52% Bauxite, 44% Manganese, 33% Iron Ore and 24% Coal reserves of the country. The state is the largest producer of stainless steel in the country and has more than 20% of steel-making capacity of the country.<sup>3</sup> However, the state suffers from uneven development with large-scale regional imbalances in addition to frequent natural disasters. Lack of a proper roadmap for industrial development including no Land Acquisition policy has deterred major industries especially after the POSCO and Vedanta fiasco. In political sphere, Odisha has continued with the same political leadership under Sh. Naveen Patnaik for the last twenty two years. In spite of availability of resources and political stability and continuity, Odisha is yet to progress in economic and administrative fronts.

A close analysis of recent governmental initiatives shows that the governance strategy in Odisha, which has put more emphasis and too much priority on e-governance at all spheres of administration, is not enough for reaching the goal of good governance in Odisha. Several glaring defects in its approach demand attention and planned intervention. It must be emphasized that governance in its totality is not only a science but also an art. It implies that there is no universal formula for success in adopting administrative change. Governance is considered as not an end in itself, but a means to an end. It is the system and processes concerned with

ensuring the overall direction, effectiveness, supervision, accountability and availability of benefits of the state. The last one is very significant in the measurement of any initiative. Policies are judged by their outcomes. Governance strategy is not or ought not to be, limited to making of correct decisions but about the best possible processes of making of such decisions.

### **E-Governance in Odisha**

The concept of good governance has been given topmost priority in Odisha at present. It is considered to be the most important prerequisite for fulfilling the broad objectives of government, keeping in view the welfare of the varied sections of society. Accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and time-bound service to citizens are considered as the core characteristics of good governance. In this regard, emergence of ICT assumes greater significance with its potential to offer an alternative mechanism to the outdated and much criticised bureaucratic agencies. Some of the popular e-initiatives in Odisha include e-Districts, Bhulekh (Land Records Web Portal of Odisha), Jana Seva Kendra (CSCs), Student Academic Management System (SAMS), etc. While e-Districts and Jana Seva Kendra are implemented under National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), Bhulekh and SAMS are state government initiatives towards providing digital land records and smooth management of admissions to higher education institutions respectively. Other initiatives like E-Shishu, Odisha Registration Information System (ORIS), E-PDS, etc. remain largely intra-governmental with little or no participation from public. Participation of people in various stages of policies render legitimacy to the policy and enhance its

effectiveness. However, in Odisha, E-Governance policies have been government-centric rather than citizen-centric. The government portals are largely unfriendly to common users without any proper grievance redressal mechanism. Most of the e-services remain as dissemination of information or provision for downloading of the forms for various services. Inter-departmental integration that can truly help a user to access a particular service is still a far-fetched idea. Therefore, the best benefit a citizen receives through these initiatives is the additional trip to cyber café or Jana Seva Kendra to get the application form which was earlier available at government departments.

The recent years have witnessed a growing emphasis on 5Ts- Transparency, Teamwork, Technology, and Timeliness leading to Transformation. The seriousness of the move by the state government is evident from setting up a separate department with Sh. V.K. Pandian, IAS as its Secretary. However, the 5Ts action plan, even after more than two years, does not have specific guidelines for different departments nor any roadmap for the future. In the absence of established criteria for measurement, the ideals remain arbitrary and isolated. As we mentioned before, the governance strategy is not and ought not be limited to making of correct decisions but setting up the best possible processes of making such decisions. The question remains the same as to how can the ideals be translated into sustained practices across departments? Continuous monitoring of actions of large government departments is not possible nor desirable in long run especially when they are expected to comply with uninterpreted ideals without concrete targets. Such ideals at higher levels of policy making is

acceptable under the condition that field offices receive specific instructions and targets that are in consonance with the broad objectives of good governance. There is no doubt that the buzzword presently is Technology and much emphasis is being given on e-Governance in Odisha. With many success stories in other countries and states in India the goal is to transform the process of governance and service delivery. By e-Governance we mean the use of ICTs as a tool to achieve better governance. As defined by the United Nations and American Society for Public Administration (UN and ASPA) e-Governance involves utilizing the internet and the world-wide web for delivering government information and services to citizens.

### e-Governance and its outcomes

The policy-makers hope to encourage participation of the people in the governance process through ICT and thereby making it more transparent, accountable and effective. But in spite of the launching of and continuation of e-governance where does Odisha stand in terms of inclusive development, governance, health, education and tourism and other areas? A survey conducted by the India Today group in November, 2017 shows a dismal picture of Odisha's rank in different areas. The survey measured states' performances in ten different spheres. The following table demonstrates the fact:

Areas	Position among states
1. Overall Ranking of Odisha	13
2. Education	11
3. Infrastructure	11
4. Economy	17
5. Environment and cleanliness	9
6. Agriculture	4
7. Health	11
8. Inclusive Development	12
9. Tourism	7
10. Law and Order	20
11. Governance	16

(Source: India Today- State of the States Report, 2017)

Interestingly, Odisha was pushed down to 18<sup>th</sup> position overall in the year 2018. Moreover, the state secured 19<sup>th</sup> position under the criteria of governance compared to 16<sup>th</sup> position for the same criteria in the

previous year.<sup>4</sup>The table below shows the performance of various states over the period of last three years as per the India Today-State of the States survey.

RANK			STATE	SCORE OUT OF 2,000
2020	2019	2018		
1	1	1	Tamil Nadu	1,263.1
2	2	7	Himachal Pradesh	1,235.1
3	4	5	Punjab	1,235.0
4	5	3	Kerala	1,211.9
5	6	4	Gujarat	1,201.3
6	3	2	Haryana	1,194.3
7	8	10	Andhra Pradesh	1,147.7
8	9	8	Maharashtra	1,133.6
9	10	9	Telangana	1,125.6
10	12	13	West Bengal	1,116.2
11	7	6	Karnataka	1,113.1
12	11	11	Uttarakhand	1,076.9
13	14	12	Madhya Pradesh	980.7
14	13	15	Rajasthan	939.5
15	16	17	Chhattisgarh	910.2
16	17	18	Odisha	863.1
17	15	14	Uttar Pradesh	839.1
18	19	21	Jharkhand	761.6
19	18	19	Assam	757.9
20	20	20	Bihar	681.8

Source: India Today- State of the States Report, 2020.

Odisha's performance remains below the national average even after several initiatives towards administrative reforms. In such situation, the government's over-dependence on ICTs to bring about sustained change in the socio-economic conditions of people needs critical examination.

### The Limitations of E-governance

There is hardly an iota of exaggeration to say that e-governance is a necessary component of good governance but the question still remains whether it is a sufficient cause to bring good governance. The progress of ICT in the state looks like shape without form, shade without colour and gesture without motion. The curious point to note is that

despite Odisha government's loud claim of e-governance leading to better performance, things have turned out to be the opposite. In almost all fields except agriculture Odisha's performance is dismal as per the 2017 survey. Another interesting anomaly depicting the difference between E-Governance and Good Governance can be observed through an examination of National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) Report, 2019 and rankings on Good Governance Index (GGI) submitted to Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) by Centre for Good Governance. While Tamil Nadu is ranked at the top on Good Governance Index with Maharashtra and Karnataka following on second and third respectively, the same

state is placed at the bottom (17<sup>th</sup> among 17 states barring North Eastern and Hill states) on e-Governance Service Models as per the 2019 report by NeSDA. Maharashtra and Karnataka secure 9<sup>th</sup> and

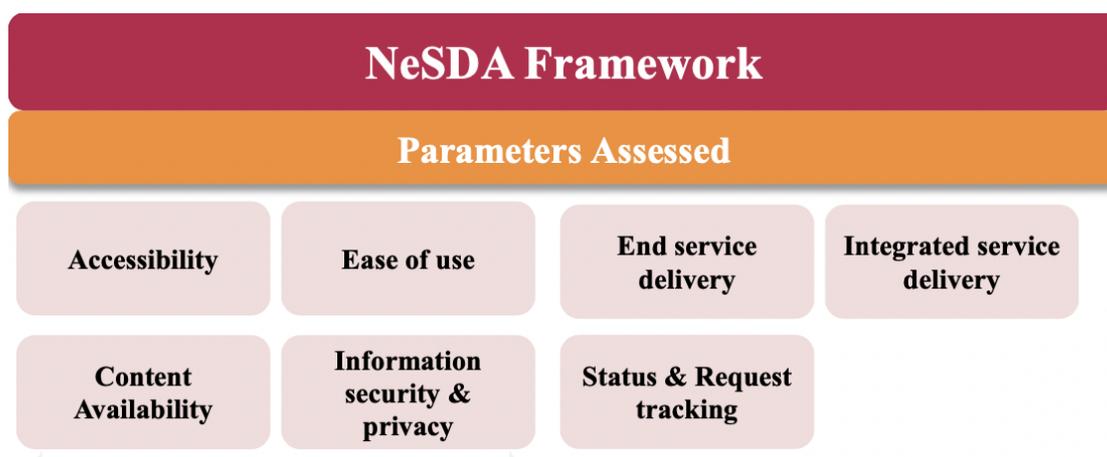
11<sup>th</sup> position respectively. The parameters of Good Governance Index as prepared by the Centre for Good Governance is given below.

### Portals Ranking

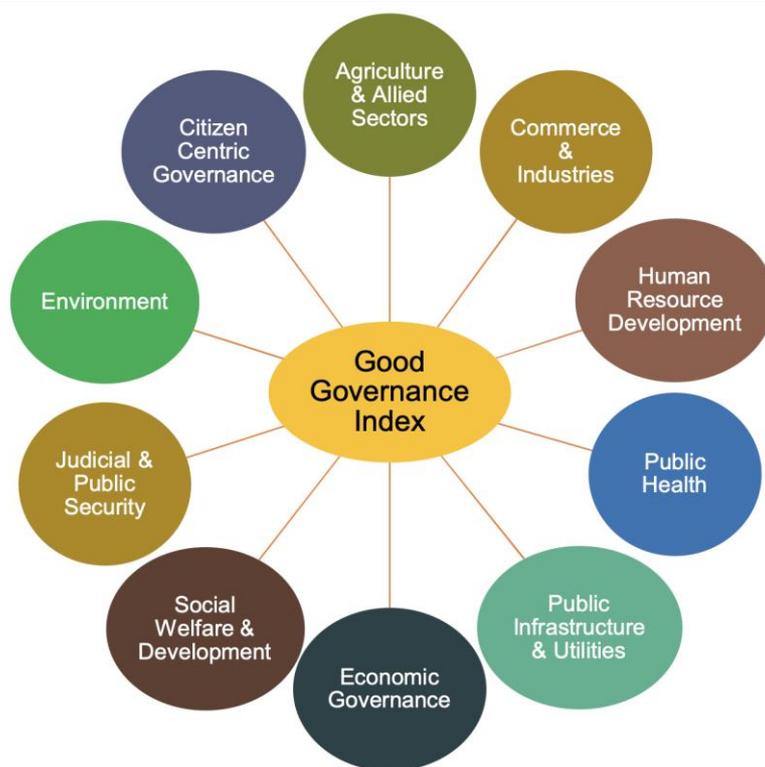
Rank	State Name	Overall Score
1	Kerala	0.83
2	Goa	0.74
3	Haryana	0.68
4	West Bengal	0.67
5	Telangana	0.63
6	Chhattisgarh	0.63
7	Punjab	0.56
8	Gujarat	0.56
9	Maharashtra	0.55
10	Madhya Pradesh	0.54
11	Karnataka	0.53
12	Jharkhand	0.50
13	Andhra Pradesh	0.48
14	Odisha	0.38
15	Rajasthan	0.36
16	Uttar Pradesh	0.26
17	Tamil Nadu	0.13

### Service Portals Ranking

Rank	State Name	Overall Score
1	Haryana	0.63
2	Rajasthan	0.61
3	West Bengal	0.43
4	Uttar Pradesh	0.43
5	Madhya Pradesh	0.41
6	Gujarat	0.40
7	Chhattisgarh	0.38
8	Telangana	0.36
9	Punjab	0.36
10	Bihar	0.35
11	Odisha	0.27
12	Maharashtra	0.24
13	Karnataka	0.24
14	Jharkhand	0.24
15	Kerala	0.19
16	Goa	0.19
17	Andhra Pradesh	0.16
18	Tamil Nadu	0.10



Source: National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment 2019, DARPG (Titled as e-Governance Landscape: India’s Transformative Journey)



Source: Good Governance Index: Assessment of State of Governance submitted by Centre for Good Governance to DARPG, GoI.

It may be noted that even though ICTs offer utility in all the 10 sectors considered under Good Governance Index, the same does not necessarily affect the state's prospects to provide better services. As can be seen, Tamil Nadu secures top position in Good Governance Index in spite of being placed at the bottom in terms of e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment. Interestingly, Odisha is also placed at 14<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> position with regard to assessment of portals and service portals respectively. Therefore, over-emphasis on e-Governance does not necessarily results in better governance or good governance practices.

#### **Governance Not a Science: An Art**

It must be emphasized that governance is not only a science but also an art. Therefore, instead of considering it as a universal scientific principle that is bound to give success, we should also focus on

the environmental and societal conditions for it and shape the process to be adaptive to conditions in Odisha. Although e-governance has been projected as the panacea for all problems in governance, it must be remembered that the effective and smooth running of the political system requires some humanitarian approach which goes beyond the strategies of e-governance. This study, therefore seeks to present a compact approach to good governance strategy in Odisha, a 'Futuristic' model to supplement the existing strategy of governance based on e-governance. The policy-planners and researchers must find out some other strategies because even now, the people of the state have not been fully benefitted by the policies and programmes of the government. The statistics shown in support of the inclusive development and good governance is far from truth. While accepting the efficacy of e-governance,

attempts should be made to supplement with necessary socio-political conditions to make the policies more effective.

### **E-Governance in Odisha: Recommendations**

Each society presents a unique challenge for governance with diversity of population, political culture, socio-economic and educational status playing a major role in the success or failure of a policy. An attempt has been made here to highlight some of the issues to be taken into due consideration for good governance in Odisha.

**First**, good governance must be good at all levels. It is not that the top political executives are competent but the rank and file are very slow in delivering the goods. Only good policies are not enough. Proper execution of policies is as important as its formulation. Proper supervision at different levels through performance-evaluation agencies comprising of eminent personalities and agencies from all walks of life and from all sectors like government, private and civil society must be ensured. This will ensure non-partisan evaluation of government policies and work as a check on political arbitrariness. The important thing is that mutual trust and cooperation between the people and government must be built. For this purpose, direct-contact of bureaucracy with the beneficiaries is necessary. Given the large number of populations without basic necessities, we can hardly afford to rely on the theory of minimum government and maximum governance. Governing is considered as a badly loaded phrase. But in our opinion that government which aims at the upliftment of the greater section of the society must be prepared to deliver good policies by active governance.

**Second**, for good governance more and more people should be participating actors rather than just passive recipients of services. For this purpose, it is necessary that there should be genuine participation of the people at the local level. The recent trend shows that the local self-governments in Odisha are in the hands of the vested interests. It is only in name that there is women representation at the panchayat level. It has been found in more than one occasion that their male counterparts are making proxy presence for the real representatives. The government for the sake of good governance should try to evolve measures to check this practice. Power must remain in the hands of the power holders, not in the proxy man. Local level officers must be given enough authority to ensure that the constitutional provisions are strictly adhered to. To have an effective democracy at the grassroots, we must look into the practice of the policies than mere provisions.

**Thirdly**, there should be total re-orientation of the approach of the bureaucracy towards the common man. The hiatus between the bureaucracy and the common man should be reduced, there should be redressal forum where people can register their grievances and prompt disposal of those must be ensured. Lack of trust towards the government and apathy towards public-funded developmental programmes can be countered with an accountable and responsive government rather than through continuance of the same welfare-approach where the citizens are nothing more than relief-seeking recipients. Role of Civil Society Organizations in Odisha is almost non-existent in the process of implementation of policies. They are either bystanders or in opposition to government policies. Their

inclusion in the process of governance is necessary to create awareness about programmes and trust in the government. As per a study on perception and experience with public services, Odisha holds the top position among the states in India with 68% of the respondents believing in an increase in corruption in public services in the previous year. (CMS-India Corruption Study, 2017) Civil society organizations along with educational institutions must come forward to fill the void.

**Fourthly**, as an alarm to the various cheap populist measures, it is necessary to remember that revolution (here discontent) arises, not when the conditions are at the worst, but when conditions are going to be slightly better. Hence the policy makers must take into consideration the rising expectations of the people. Good governance must, go above vote-bank politics. It is this vote-bank politics which has accounted for bad governance because of the discontentment of the people. Short term gain must not be the priority of the policy makers and executors. The state has continuously figured in the list of low-performing states in India. As per a 2016 study by Public Affairs Centre focusing on Governance index that includes parameters like human development, law and order, transparency & accountability, basic infrastructure, etc., Odisha is at a dismal 15<sup>th</sup> position among the 17 large states with Jharkhand and Bihar at 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> position respectively.

**Fifthly**, the role of Media has been far from a neutral and impartial institution resulting in severe erosion of public trust.

The press is considered as the fourth pillar of governance having the responsibility of working as a check on the other three organs of government. They play an active role in organizing public opinion and binding the people with the government. It is found in Odisha; the print media is not performing its designated role of a communication channel between public and the government. The control over print and electronic media by political parties and leaders is self-explanatory and it reflects in their stand in favour or against the government policies. It exists only for the purpose of either criticizing the government or blindly supporting the government. In a state like Odisha where the civil society and common public are yet to be aware of their rights and duties, print media should be pro-active and take a larger responsibility than playing into the hands of vested interests.

### **Conclusion**

This paper intends to highlight the gaps in governance mechanism in the state that requires a careful introspection. Towards this objective, lessons must be learnt from other states who have successfully implemented e-Governance programmes as complementary to good governance objectives. Integration of ICTs in administration should go beyond mere computerisation and digitalisation. Good governance practices of transparency and participation should reflect not only in implementation but policy formulation too. All the characteristics of good governance are inter-related and co-exist with each other and in the absence of one, the others lose their value.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/eservicej.8.2.3> accessed on September 15, 2021.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. pp. 10.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.odishaminerals.gov.in/IndustryWindow/GrowthPotential> accessed on September 12, 2021.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/state-of-states-conclave/story/india-today-state-of-the-states-2018-complete-rankings-1394303-2018-11-22> accessed on October 01, 2021.

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