

E-Governance as a Catalyst for Good Governance: A Policy and Administrative Analysis of Digital Transformation in Uttarakhand

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Abstract

This study comprehensively evaluates the transformational role of e-governance or Electronic Governance, in strengthening good governance in Uttarakhand, through a policy and administrative lens. Within the framework of broadened digital push in India, post the Digital India initiative in 2015, the state of Uttarakhand has evolved as a driving agent, adopting various Information and Communication Technology (ICT) initiatives targeted at enhancing transparency, accountability, efficiency and citizen-centric public service delivery. The study starts with exploring the theoretical and conceptual foundations of e-governance and its inherent connection with good governance ideals. It then looks closely at the digital policy landscape and the emerging architecture of e-governance in the nation & state, spotlighting flagship initiatives such as the Apuni Sarkar Portal, Samarth Portal, Rojgar Prayag portal etc. The paper subsequently reviews the practical implementation of these flagship initiatives, scrutinizing how they have reshaped and redefined the existing administrative processes and enhanced access to public services. Deliberate attention is given to how e-governance is being blended into holistic public policy and administrative overhaul strategies. Through a comprehensive evaluation of results, including achievements and remaining organisational and grassroots hurdles, the study reveals key sectors for improvement. The conclusion displays a long term roadmap for a more inclusive, just, innovative and technologically empowered governance model in Uttarakhand, proposing insights for policymakers, research scholars and governance experts in other developing hilly states of India.

Keywords: Good Governance, Digital India, e-governance, Public Service Delivery, Public Policy

Introduction

Governance is not just about administering (ruling), rather about approaching (reaching). In an era distinguished by technological advancements specially digital transformation, the real test of governance resides in its capability to innovate, adjust and deliver with speed, transparency and inclusiveness.

Electronic Governance or e-governance has surfaced as a powerful governing tool to reshape the existing relationship between the state (Government) and its citizens, facilitating efficient as well as quality service delivery, diminishing bureaucratic and systemic delays and boosting public accountability. At its very core, e-governance pertains to the application of information and

communication technologies (ICTs) by key government organizations to deliver services, transfer information and enable easy going decision-making processes.

As per the World Bank, e-governance includes the use of digital tools and communication technologies by the state [i.e. Government(s)] to strengthen the standard, accessibility and proficiency of its services. It aims to build government functioning more responsive, transparent, people-friendly and accountable while promoting larger democratic participation and collaboration with businesses, society at large and other social agencies(The Institute for Public-Private Partnerships,2009).

Bannister and Connolly (2012) distinguish e-governance from e-government, asserting that while e-government emphasizes on digital service delivery, e-governance showcases a broadened transformation in how ICT rejuvenates accountability, participation and efficient decision-making within governance systems.

e-governance plays a pivotal role in enhancing efficiency, transparency and accessibility in the government operations by digitalizing public services and processes thereof (Balaji ,2025). e-governance encompasses the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to extend public services, encourage citizen participation and refine the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the governing administrative systems. Shifting from traditional governance to online platforms is quintessential in living up to expectations of a tech-savvy modern day generation. Widening digital connectivity among citizens has improved the situation.

Though it offers merits, such as better service delivery, rationalised or streamlined public administration and strengthened inter departmental co-ordination. Yet the implementation of e-governance remains complex because it faces a wide range of technical and organizational obstacles,such as the requirement for suitable infrastructure, coherent public policies and trained manpower or human resources equipped with skill-set, to ensure effective execution (Jolade et al.,2025).Thus,e-Governance denotes a paradigm shift from conventional bureaucratic structures to a modern version which is more responsive, interactive, participatory and citizen-centric model of public administration.

Parallely, the idea of good governance, as promoted by institutions like the UNDP (United Nation Development Programme) and the World Bank, highlights principles such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equity and most importantly the rule of law. In this scenario, e-governance becomes a means to execute or operationalize good governance by incorporating these values into the administrative setup. When governance becomes SMART i.e. Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent, it becomes capable of nurturing a loyalty-based, robust digital ecosystem.

The study done by Addo and Senyo(2021) explores the role of digital identity in encouraging development, using a theme based analysis of secondary data from 40 published studies focused on Aadhaar system of India which is the world's largest digital identity initiative, covering more than 1.2 billion people. It highlights key themes linking digital identity with socio-economic inclusion and presents a conceptual and theoretical framework that underpins how digital identity can act as a tool for enhancing inclusive e-governance.

In India, and specifically in geographically tough ,diverse and ecologically susceptible areas like Uttarakhand, the prevalence of e-governance is even more noticeable. The state's topographical hurdles, spread out population and developmental ambitions make digital or e-governance not just a choice, but a necessity. e-governance has been path breaking in bridging the rural-urban divide, enhancing access to

welfare schemes of the government(s) and facilitating real-time grievance redressal in the hilly state of Uttarakhand.

Shou et al.(2024) underscores that while ICT has considerably enhanced e-governance world over , however its progress specifically in rural region remains underexplored. Majority of studies tend to emphasize on urban perspectives or individual-centric benefits, ignoring the distinct struggle faced by rural ecosystems. They advocated for an ecological perspective to comprehend how ICT impacts e-governance exclusively across rural landscapes.

This paper examines that how e-governance, beyond being a technological transformation, is an essential instrument of efficient public policy and an administrative innovation that strengthens the ideals of good governance. By evaluating various initiatives undertaken by the Central government as well as Uttarakhand government, the study showcases the role of digital transformation in reformulating citizen-state relationship, exemplifying organisational efficiency and nurturing participatory governance as well as participatory democracy (cooperative federalism) in a Himalayan state like Uttarakhand.

Policy Landscape and e-Governance Architecture in Uttarakhand

The beautiful state of Uttarakhand, nestled in the Himalayan region of India, has gradually upgraded its digital governance infrastructure to sync with national e-governance blueprint while confronting its own distinct geographical as well as socio-economic obstacles. The policy framework for e-governance in Uttarakhand is influenced by both, i.e. directions of the government of India such as the Digital India Initiative, National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) etc. and by Uttarakhand state-centric, strategic initiatives kickstarted by state government which are aimed at strengthening administrative efficacy, systemic transparency and public service delivery.

Uttarakhand's digital governance framework gained consistency and momentum with the induction of the State e-Governance Roadmap, which laid the foundational infrastructure for ICT-enabled services across departments.

The Information Technology Policy of Uttarakhand (2018) is a landmark module that presents the futuristic vision for building a digitally strengthened or capacitated society and a knowledge based economy in the hilly state. It elaborates the development of a large pool of common service centres (CSCs) for the ease of the citizens , the widening of broadband and mobile connectivity in remote regions within the state and the use of new age technology for inclusive and sustainable growth. The policy also advocates for investments in e-infrastructure, cybersecurity and the promotion of digital literacy among citizens in order to bridge the existing digital divide.

A key component of Uttarakhand's digital governance framework is the establishment of resilient and vigorous platforms for efficient service delivery and administrative digitization. A few of them are explained below :-

Apuni Sarkar Portal: The Government of Uttarakhand's Information Technology Development Agency (ITDA) launched the 'Apuni Sarkar' platform to provide citizen-centric services in a faceless, paperless, and cashless manner. It unites multiple key departmental services under one digital umbrella, ensuring transparency, efficiency and timely delivery. Accessible via CSCs, e-District Centres, and individual users, it harnesses backend automation to streamline governance in Uttarakhand and minimise systemic or bureaucratic delays in public service delivery (E-Services, n.d.-a). This service can be accessed at website: <https://eservices.uk.gov.in/>

The Apuni Sarkar Portal stands as an integrated interface offering more than 100 people-centric services across more than 50 departments.

Key departments included are - Revenue, Training and Employment, Panchyati Raj ,Urban Development, Irrigation, Soldier Welfare ,Forest, Home,Water ,Women Empowerment and Child Development, Transport,Agriculture, Labour,Excise ,MSME,Animal Husbandry, Public Works etc.

Services majorly provided include - caste certificate, character certificate, Domicile certificate, EWS certificate, Employment Registration, Pariwar Register ,Ex Servicemen Employment registration, Hak-Hakuk,NOC for tree felling, New Water Connection, Application for women empowerment schemes such as Matru Vandana Yojana ,Nanda Gaura Yojana , Transport related certificates such as Driving License etc.

BHULEKH Uttarakhand: Bhulekh Uttarakhand is the official digital platform of the state for accessing land records online. It was previously named as Devbhoomi Portal. It is currently managed by the Department of Revenue,Government of Uttarakhand. It enables citizens to view and download essential documents like Khasra, Khatauni and Record of Rights (RoR).

Citizens can search records by owner name, Khasra number or account number. This initiative amplifies transparency, reduces dependency on intermediaries and streamlines easy access to land information for all residents across Uttarakhand.

This can be accessed on: https://bhulekh.uk.gov.in/public/public_ror/Public_ROR.jsp

Rojgar Prayag portal: The Rojgar Prayag Portal, launched by the Government of Uttarakhand, is a unified digital platform developed to connect job seekers with employment opportunities across the state. Inaugurated during the Uttarakhand Youth Festival 2023, it acts as a integrated or unified hub for job listings,new job applications and career related guidance, meeting the requirements of both private and public sectors. The portal aims to empower and equip the youth by delivering easy access to skill development resources and securing public outreach even in remote and geographically challenging regions, thus stimulating inclusive and sustainable economic growth. It is available at:

<https://rojgarprayag.uk.gov.in/IEP/Login.aspx>

Samarth Portal Uttarakhand: The Samarth Portal Uttarakhand is the official digital medium for higher education admissions across the state. Launched by the Department of Higher Education, it facilitates integrated or centralized applications for undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. programs in government colleges and aided institutions, as well as state universities. Applicants can select programs or universities/colleges of their choice, rationalising or streamlining the admission process and improving transparency. This initiative seeks to offer just and equitable access to quality education, particularly benefiting students from remote areas as well as deprived communities, by simplifying procedures and minimising the need for physical visits. The portal resonates with the vision of "One State, One Entrance, One Examination, One Result," fostering efficiency and inclusivity in the higher education system. This service can be accessed at website:

<https://uttarakhand.samarth.ac.in/index.php/site/login>

Samadhan Portal: It is an innovative e governance module also known as citizens grievance redressal platform. It is reframed as CM help line Portal (1905). Uttarakhand's State Grievance Redressal Digital System or the Samadhan (solution) framework, is a key initiative targeted at enhancing public service delivery. It enables common people to conveniently or effortlessly register their respective grievances, submit suggestion if any and share their invaluable experiences through various channels. This system emphasizes on facilitating equitable services, enhancing public welfare and aligning with state and

national welfare centric policies. Key objectives of it include improving the efficiency of the grievance redressal mechanism, expanding public service coverage in the state, giving precedence to remote rural districts and ensuring citizen satisfaction. The CM Helpline 1905, an essential part of this system, uses a digital methodology to offer good governance, timely resolution of key issues and support for residents in remote areas. This service can be accessed at website: <https://cmhelpline.uk.gov.in/>

Uttarakhand RTI Online Portal: The Uttarakhand RTI Online Portal is a digital medium launched by the Government of Uttarakhand to enable the filing of Right to Information (RTI) 2005, a fundamental right, applications and appeals. Citizens can submit RTI requests, first appeals, and second appeals online, along with the requisite fees (Rs.10 only, No fee for BPL card holders), through various payment modes such as UPI, net banking, NEFT, RTGS and e-challan. The portal also presents features like tracking application status, accessing proactive disclosures and viewing RTI related rules and guidelines. Subsequently, an integrated or hybrid hearing system has been introduced to accelerate the resolution of second appeals and complaints, uniting online and offline processes. This facility aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and accessibility in governance structure, especially benefiting residents in remote areas of the state. This service can be accessed at website: <https://rtionline.uk.gov.in/index.php?lan=E>

The e-Procurement System of Uttarakhand: It is an online platform designed and developed by the Government of Uttarakhand to streamline public procurement related processes. It is accessible via website:- uktenders.gov.in, the portal enables interested vendors to register, download tender documents and submit bids electronically without interference of any agent in a very transparent and democratic manner. Key features include digital signature authentication, secure bid encryption, real-time bid tracking and automated notifications. The system aids various tender types, including open, limited and single tenders and adheres to General Financial Rules (GFR) and Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) frameworks. By enabling transparent and efficient procurement, the eProcurement System fosters accountability and accessibility in government contracting processes across the state of Uttarakhand. It is available at website: <https://uktenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>

e-Health and Telemedicine: Health is mentioned under state list in the Constitution of India. Being a hilly state which has a tough geographical terrain, it becomes a very challenging to provide access to healthcare facilities in the remote region. However, post the COVID-19 pandemic, the Uttarakhand government escalated its efforts to amplify telemedicine services in the state and thus, initiated tele-consultation services from four medical colleges namely Haldwani, Almora, Dehradun and Srinagar, connecting them with 400 Primary Health Centres (PHCs) across the state, thereby establishing a holistic digital healthcare network (Tyagi, 2022). In context of policy integration, Uttarakhand has also been an active participant in central government led initiatives such as DigiLocker, UMANG App, e-NAM for agricultural marketing, and the famous COWIN platform for health governance. The implementation of these schemes reflects a multi sectoral governance structure where the state and central governments collaborate with each other to ensure effective service as well as policy delivery. Overall, Uttarakhand's digital governance architecture is emerging from isolated ICT projects to a more democratic, integrated, citizen-centric model of pro people governance. However, for this evolving architecture to be fully operational and effective; continuous policy innovation, capacity building and rural digital inclusion must remain key to its design and implementation. It is available at: <https://nhm.uk.gov.in/service/telemedicine/>

Integrating E-Governance into Public Policy

The unification of e-governance into public policy and administrative reform paves way for a paradigmatic transition towards a more responsible, transparent and accountable governance framework. In Uttarakhand, this synergy is highly evident as digital mediums are contained within institutionalised mechanisms to standardize democratic and swift decision-making, advance public service delivery and encourage participatory governance.

E-governance, as an essential tool of governance, has paved the way for effectiveness, transparency and accountability in governments and their governance outlook. E-governance is not just a technological upgradation ; it is an agent of holistic transformation that enables pragmatic as well as research -based policymaking, real-time supervision and data-backed administration.

By amalgamation of ICT solutions into public policy processes, such as online dashboards, online grievance redressal portals such as CM helpline 1905 and automated performance monitoring modules , governments can make insightful ,well - informed and just-in-time interventions. Initiatives like the Apuni Sarkar Portal, Rojgar Prayas or HOPE portal, Unnati Portal and e-Cabinet displays how Uttarakhand government is facilitating use of technology to institutionalize transparency and interdepartmental coordination.

Digital Governance related Administrative reforms in Uttarakhand

The Government of Uttarakhand has undertaken significant digital and administrative reforms in recent years to promote transparency, efficiency, and accessibility. As elaborated previously, administrative reforms like the Bhulekh Portal, Rojgar Prayag or HOPE Portal, Unnati Portal and e-Cabinet exemplify the government's resolve to harnessing technology for institutionalizing inter-departmental coordination and citizen-centric services.

e-FIR mechanism: The e-FIR system enables citizens to file First Information Reports (FIRs) online from the place of their residence, eliminating the need for physical paperwork. Alongside, the 112 emergency helpline offers a centralized response mechanism, augmenting the state's law enforcement outreach and efficiency.

e-Beat Book: It is developed by the Uttarakhand Police. The e-Beat Book is a mobile app that permits ground-level police personnel to upload real-time videos and photographs from crime scenes. This digital tool helps in evidence collection and preservation and affirms on-time reporting.

UNNATI Portal: The UNNATI portal enhances continuous and uninterrupted interdepartmental coordination through a completely paperless and cashless system. It streamlines official communication and encourages efficient public service delivery.

e-Cabinet (e-Mantralay): This platform enables online discussions among cabinet members, nurturing seamless and more transparent decision-making at the to levels of governance.

e-Office in Secretariat: Implementation of e-Office in various secretariat departments has digitized internal workflows, minimizing paperwork ,time taking and improving administrative productivity.

Char Dham Yatra Digital Portal: Pilgrims can now book their yatra slots online, bringing order and transparency to one of Uttarakhand's largest religious tourism movements. A toll free tourist care number 1364 has also been launched to help the visitors. This service can be accessed at-registrationandtouristcare.uk.gov.in

e-Granthalaya: e-Granthalaya is a digital library portal that offers access to e-books, various journals and other educational resources, contributing to knowledge exchange and academic accessibility.

e-Mulakat: A progressive initiative that enables virtual meetings between jail inmates and their family members, ensuring compassionate treatment and emotional support for those in custody.

e-Khareed: This platform tracks the procurement of rice and paddy at Minimum Support Prices (MSP), carrying transparency and accountability to agricultural transactions.

Thus, these digital governance oriented administrative reforms in Uttarakhand showcases a firm dedication to infusing transparency, bureaucratic or administrative efficiency and public service accessibility in public administration without red-tapism. By integrating, advanced technology into various governance processes, the state is setting a model for enhanced service delivery, accountability and people's engagement. As these reforms continue to evolve, they hold the potential to remarkably strengthen existing governance system of Uttarakhand by ensuring a more inclusive, just and responsive administration for the people of Uttarakhand.

Evaluating Outcomes: Achievements, Institutional Gaps and Grassroots Realities

E-governance in Uttarakhand has commenced notable administrative improvements by systematizing and simplifying public service delivery, exemplifying transparency and improving grievance redressal mechanisms. Key initiatives like the e-Services or e-District Portal, CM Helpline 1905 and Online RTI system have extended public access and reduced systemic as well as bureaucratic delays. The integration of Aadhar and digital payments through UPI (Unified Payments Interface) has further improved fiscal accountability. However, infrastructural bottlenecks, disparities in ICT usage across departments and restricted digital literacy among employees continue to limit full-scale operationalization.

At the grassroots, digital divide persists, particularly in rural and tribal regions, due to lack of electronic devices, uninterrupted digital connectivity and user awareness. These systemic gaps present challenges to equitable digital governance. Although, the state government of Uttarakhand is trying level best to change the status by prioritizing inclusive governance via inclusive digital access, capacity-building and inter-departmental coordination. In order to sustain and scale these reforms, synchronized efforts are required.

Ultimately, Uttarakhand's e-governance success relies not just on adoption of new technology but, on empowering people, upgradation and rejuvenation of administrative culture and fostering a digitally inclusive development outlook that leaves no one behind and promotes equity for all.

Conclusion

E-Governance in Uttarakhand stands at a transformative juncture, offering a big opportunity to reshape the horizons of public administration and citizen-centric governance within the state. The state's journey, synchronized with the vision of Digital India and Viksit Bharat@2047, has laid a robust foundation for administrative proficiency, bureaucratic transparency and participatory governance.

With many reforms, as discussed above, Uttarakhand has responded assertively toward a paperless, seamless, responsive and accountable governance framework. However, the next major breakthrough demands a strategic paradigm shift from digital adoption to digital transformation. This entails embedding e-governance into the core of policy compilation and administrative ethos. Future reforms must give priority to last-mile connectivity, customized user interfaces or native-language interface designs alongside mobile-based governance to ensure digital inclusivity, particularly in hilly and remote regions.

Subsequently, training of the administrative officers of all levels, digital literacy campaigns for the citizens and inter-departmental data integration must be elevated for smoother service delivery. A futuristic plan would also benefit from synchronizing emerging digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain and GIS mapping into governance environment. These technical innovations can considerably strengthen and enhance real-time decision-making, welfarism and resource optimization.

Working in sync with the Central Government, the policy innovation in e-governance must continue to uphold the ideals of “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.” The vision of a digitally empowered, transparent and inclusive governance model is no longer aspirational but achievable with sustained political will, administrative resolve and cooperation from citizenry.

As Uttarakhand, advances toward its Uttarakhand Vision 2047 in lines with Viksit Bharat @2047 development goals and beyond, e-governance ought not to merely persist as a tool of efficiency but grow into an innovative apparatus of democracy, equity and sustainable development. This vision, if realized, will position Uttarakhand as a digital governance model for other Himalayan and other states to follow.

As rightly articulated by hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, “e-governance exemplifies simplicity, efficiency and economic sustainability, creating a pathway for effective and transparent governance i.e. Good Governance.” It lays the foundation for a more inclusive and accountable government.

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