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Q7

e-governance projects have a built-in bias towards technology and back-end integration than user-centric designs. Examine.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 10 marks · Transparency and e-Governance

Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.

Core demand of the question

- State what user-centric e-governance would look like
- Show how many Indian projects privilege technology stacks and departmental back ends
- Examine consequences for the citizen
- Suggest a correction that keeps **Digital India** but flips the design order

Revision summary

User-centric e-governance starts from the citizen's journey; many projects start from ID, ledger and dashboard.

NeGP, GSTN, Aadhaar and PFMS are strong backs; language, OTP-on-one-phone and failed biometrics are weak fronts.

2nd ARC, Sevottam and public-service guarantee laws already asked for time-bound citizen outcomes.

DPDP and RPwD add consent and accessibility duties.

- **Correction:** assisted kiosks, local language, offline fallback, and the same data for the ward as for the secretary.

Introduction

E-governance is the use of digital systems to deliver public authority - licences, rations, taxes, police complaints. A **user-centric** design starts from the person at the kiosk or on a slow phone. Many Indian projects have started from the **server**, the unique ID, and the ministry's reporting dashboard. The bias is real, and it is not an argument against digital government. It is an argument against **building the warehouse before the door**.

Body**The built-in bias**

NeGP, **Digital India**, GSTN, UIDAI, PFMS and state service-delivery gateways are triumphs of **back-end integration**: one ledger, one identity, one payment pipe. Engineers and secretaries share a language of APIs, de-duplication and leak-proofing. **2nd ARC** already warned that e-governance fails when it is computerisation of the clerk's desk rather than redesign of the citizen's journey.

- **Symptoms:** portals that need **English and a captcha**; apps that assume **OTP on a personal phone** in a household where the handset belongs to a man; **Aadhaar authentication** that fails for the old and the outdoor worker; dashboards that glow green while the Anganwadi still runs a paper register. **Sevottam** and the Right to Public Services laws asked for time-bound delivery; many e-tools measure departmental SLA, not whether a migrant actually got a ration in the destination city.

Why it happens

Procurement rewards large systems integrators. Ministries are accountable **upward** to Parliament and NITI dashboards, not sideways to a user researcher. **India Stack** (Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, Account Aggregator) is a powerful public good; its first customers were **regulators and banks**. **DPDP Act, 2023**, and accessibility under the **RPwD Act** are still catching up with consent screens and screen-readers.

- **COVID-19 CoWIN showed both faces:** a national back end that worked, and urban-first slots that rural connectivity and language did not.

Correction

Keep the back end - leak-proof PDS and GST need it - but **design the front end first:** local language, assisted kiosks, offline fallback, grievance that a human reads (**CPGRAMS** with teeth), and **once-only data** so the citizen is not the integration layer. **UMANG** and **MyGov** point that way when they are not just app stores. Parliamentary standing committees on IT and on personnel have said the same in plainer Hindi: the test is the last mile, not the data centre.

User-centric e-governance is **subsidiarity in software**. The Gram Sabha and the ward office should see the same screen the secretary sees, not a thinner version.

Flow diagram

Back-end stack -> Dashboard
User journey -> Service actually received
Back-end stack -> bias Dashboard
User journey -> Service actually received

Conclusion

Indian e-governance has integrated ministries better than it has integrated the citizen's day. Technology bias is a design order problem. Flip the order: journey first, stack second, with language, assistance and a human appeal.

Facts & figures

India Stack

Public digital infrastructure including Aadhaar, UPI and DigiLocker, built for interoperability more than for low-literacy UX.

DPDP Act, 2023

Requires lawful processing of personal data, including extra care for children's data, which e-governance portals must now design for.

2nd ARC on e-governance

Treated ICT as a means to process redesign and citizen service, not as computerisation of existing files.

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