



A sociological study of the role of e-Governance in modernization of land records

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Abstract

E-Governance plays a vital role in achieving effective governance in Indian states. This article examines whether information and communication technology can enhance land record management as a form of good governance. The main objective is to analyze Indian states land record system and the reforms implemented by the government aimed at improving transparency and efficiency. The article also addresses the obstacles that hinder the establishment of good governance within a strong land record management framework. This study reveals the role of e-governance in moderation of land records of Karnataka state.

Keywords: e-Governance, land records, human endeavors, natural resources, ICT applications, e-initiatives

Introduction

Human existence on Earth is closely tied to land, which fulfills essential needs. The United Nations defines land as the ultimate resource vital for sustaining life. It is fundamental to all forms of production, serving as a foundation, workspace, and storage for human endeavors. Land is crucial for accessing and utilizing nature's resources. Without it, humanity cannot thrive. Ownership of land implies control over those who inhabit it, and it can also be a valuable asset. Socially, land ownership signifies status and influences socio-economic relationships. In some cultures, land holds spiritual significance, seen as a deity that governs its people. For these reasons, land plays a vital role in both individual and national socio-economic outcomes. Security in land ownership can enhance economic and social mobility, particularly in agrarian societies. In rural communities, there is a reciprocal bond between people and land, which shapes social hierarchy, political power, and economic frameworks. Land often reflects identity and belonging, making it essential for development. However, there is insufficient land to satisfy the increasing demands of the population. This scarcity, combined with growing reliance on land, has led to conflicts, prompting nations worldwide to pay closer attention to land issues.

Karnataka is primarily recognized as a rural agrarian state, with 61 percent of its population residing in rural areas and agriculture accounting for 54.8 percent of employment. To harness agriculture's full potential and foster socio-economic development, targeted strategies have been developed. Simultaneously, Karnataka stands as a leader in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), renowned for its innovative and user-friendly administrative practices. The state has undertaken significant efforts through various e-initiatives to create a strong digital administrative framework, backed by IT infrastructure and advanced ICT applications. These initiatives have initiated transformative changes in governance, garnering national and global acclaim for their digitization efforts. By introducing innovative models, Karnataka has made notable strides in e-Governance, prioritizing not only improved governance but also empowering citizens to meet their evolving needs. Such continuous endeavors are essential for

achieving effective socio-economic transformation, particularly in agriculture and related sectors. Within the Revenue Department, several initiatives aim to bridge the digital divide, with the BHOOMI project serving as a pioneering model in land revenue administration. Furthermore, the department has launched additional innovative e-initiatives to connect citizens more closely with their government. Key projects include the integration of BHOOMI-KAVERI (BK), BHOOMI-Bank (BB), MOJINI, KAVERI-MOJINI Integration (KM), BHOOMI-KAVERI-MOJINI (BKM) Integration, Kandaya Adalath, Sakala, and Atal Jana Shnehi Kendra, among others. Despite extensive documentation on these policies, there has been a lack of analysis regarding how these e-governance initiatives have impacted the socio-economic landscape of the state. Existing literature typically focuses on the surface aspects of e-governance, neglecting a comprehensive examination of its socio-economic effects.

Review of literature

Godbale Madhava (2014) emphasized the significant role of Good Governance in development. The study identified various policies and programs that contributed positively to governance, as well as those that failed due to unsustainable practices. A key focus was on the relationship between the governed and the governing, advocating for a citizen-centered approach to governance. The study recommended Public-Private Partnerships to address financial shortfalls faced by governments. Hossain Monzur (2015) examined land as a vital natural resource and its critical impact on the development trajectory of Bangladesh. He pointed out that ineffective land record management could result in a decrease in agricultural land usage. Consequently, he urged for the prompt adoption of ICT-enabled administration in Bangladesh, referencing successful e-initiatives from Indian states and asserting that e-Governance serves as an effective means for delivering transparent and efficient services to citizens. He highlighted that digitizing land records and establishing a centralized management system would enhance service delivery quality. Chakrabarti Rajesh and Sangal Kaushiki (2017) concentrated on public policies, their objectives, and the stages involved in policy planning. Their study underscored the importance of public policy in

improving socio-economic conditions. The key elements analyzed include the steps of policy-making, formulation, implementation, and assessment, along with the current challenges in India. Additionally, the study recognized the necessity of political will to achieve a socio-economic transformation in the country.

Importance of the study

Karnataka has been utilizing information and communication technology (ICT) since its introduction in government operations, firmly believing that e-Governance initiatives significantly improve the lives of its citizens. The guiding principle is to create a transparent and efficient e-Governance system that enables seamless access to secure and authentic information while breaking down barriers between different departments, ultimately ensuring fair and unbiased services for the public, as noted by former President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. This study aims to analyze and assess the existing e-Governance projects related to land records and their effects on the state's socio-economic landscape. It is clear that this research will assist in the effective design, development, and implementation of e-Governance initiatives, contributing to positive socio-economic changes for the people of Karnataka.

Objectives of the study

This study focuses on several key objectives:

1. To outline the historical development of land administration in Karnataka, highlighting the significance of land records and their management within the framework of good governance.
2. To analyze the factors that contributed to the digitization of land records and to describe the role of e-governance in facilitating smooth revenue administration in the state.
3. To conduct an empirical analysis of the modernization of land records and its socio-economic effects, particularly on farmers in the Dakshina Kannada and Tumkuru districts.
4. To evaluate the responses of officials from the Revenue Department in Dakshina Kannada and Tumkuru regarding the implementation of e-governance initiatives.
5. To discuss the future direction of e-governance in promoting good governance, particularly in the management of land records, including potential challenges and solutions.

Research methodology

Both interview schedules and questionnaires have been utilized in this study. Specifically, interview schedules were created for farmers, while questionnaires were designed for officials. A total of 200 farmers and 200 officials from each district have been chosen for this research. The study employs a simple random sampling method.

Scope and limitations of the study

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has significantly transformed governance by enhancing institutional structures and practices. Karnataka's e-Governance initiatives are recognized on a global scale. The modernization of land records has led to greater transparency, reduced corruption, and easier access to information at lower costs. However, this study focuses on

just two districts in the state due to time constraints and geographic size. The findings from primary data may differ based on the socio-economic, religious, regional backgrounds, and personal viewpoints of the respondents. The conclusions drawn from both primary and secondary data are subject to change. Additionally, e-Governance itself continues to evolve, influenced by citizens' needs and government policies. This evolution may lead to outdated, biased, or overly general opinions. Nonetheless, careful analysis has been conducted to interpret the data responsibly and scientifically.

Important findings

1. The age distribution among officials indicates that a significant number are under the age of forty-four. Half of the officials fall within the 20 to 24 age range, suggesting they are more adaptable to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Gender analysis within the Revenue Department and Sub-Registrar's office shows a nearly equal representation of males and females. However, in the Survey Department and among Operators/Consultants of Bhoomi and AJSK, there is a predominance of males due to the demands of fieldwork. In contrast, a considerable number of women may be employed temporarily for lower wages.
2. The caste composition of revenue officials reveals that most belong to the general and backward categories, with Hindu officers making up 85-90% of the workforce in both districts, and very few from non-Hindu religions.
3. Access to services, transparency, and efficient administration largely depend on the attitudes of officials. The attitudes of the bureaucracy can significantly influence public perceptions of the government. Research indicates that 98% of respondents maintain a positive attitude towards their work, reflecting an optimistic approach to their responsibilities.
4. Approximately 75% of respondents from both districts express satisfaction with the implementation of ICT in administration. This demonstrates their acceptance of change and adaptability to the evolving ICT landscape. Officials believe that incorporating ICT into administration will lessen their workload and enhance record management, ultimately improving administrative quality.
5. Officials across three departments show favorable responses (85-90%) towards e-Governance. They recognize its potential to enhance transparency, efficiency, and service delivery quality. Additionally, they perceive e-Governance as a means to increase citizen involvement in administration and minimize corruption.

Important suggestions

1. The study reveals that the condition and management of record rooms are severely inadequate. Accessing services from these record rooms is extremely difficult, contributing to land disputes and legal issues, which can disrupt administration and create social unrest. To address this, the study suggests implementing an 'e-Record Room' equipped with advanced computer systems and secure storage to maintain records, along with CCTV surveillance. A biometric system should be

- introduced for managing access, which will help prevent theft and tampering of important records, thereby holding officials more accountable.
2. Effective management of land records can be achieved through an 'Electronic Monitoring System' (EMS). Currently, the head of the revenue department also oversees land records at the state level, resulting in an overwhelming workload. An EMS mechanism is necessary to monitor transactions and prevent misuse of land records, allowing for timely updates on any changes.
 3. There is a need for a dedicated unit at both state and district levels to oversee changes in land records managed by the revenue department. This unit should be led by professionals with expertise in civil engineering and computer science, enabling them to provide support and guidance to decision-makers in cases of land disputes and litigation.
 4. The study recommends reducing reliance on manual documents, which are vulnerable to damage and fraud. All land records should be maintained in electronic format, thus promoting the concept of e-Documents.
 5. Furthermore, land surveys related to granted cases have not been conducted for many years, resulting in delays in issuing the 11E sketch. It is crucial to extend initiatives like the Phodhi Mukta Abhiyana to all villages within the state.
 6. Additionally, the survey stones from the original land surveys are outdated, making them hard to locate today. Therefore, it is essential to install standard-sized and uniquely identifiable survey stones for each survey number to clearly define legal boundaries.

Conclusion

The digitization of land records and processes in the state aligns with the goals of the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP), initiated by the Government of India in 2008. The key objectives include: (i) creating a centralized system for managing land records, which encompasses maintaining and updating textual information, maps, survey activities, settlement operations, and the registration of immovable property; (ii) implementing the mirror principle, ensuring that cadastral records reflect actual land ownership by providing farmers and government agencies with real-time access to this information; (iii) applying the curtain principle, which states that the title record accurately represents ownership status, with automated and streamlined updates following registration, eliminating the need for additional reference to records; and (iv) offering title insurance that protects the title's validity and compensates the holder for any losses due to defects in ownership rights.

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