



Mains Practice Question

Q. In order to ensure success of e-governance , India needs to bridge the digital divide. Examine. (150 words)

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Approach

- Introduce by giving definition and extent of digital divide in India
- In body, discuss the benefits of e-governance and reasons for digital divide
- Discuss steps needed to overcome digital divide

Answer

Introduction:

- In general, the digital divide is a phenomenon wherein those who have access to ICT are benefited by the use of it. Their economic well being is ensured in the form of highly paid jobs and more business opportunities, while those who do not have the access to ICT remain aloof of these benefits and hence comparatively they are in a disadvantageous position.
- About one third of Indian population is connected to internet. TRAI data recognizes that while urban India has about 65% Internet subscriptions, rural India has about 20% internet penetration. Given that total Urban Population is much lower than total rural population, the Urban-Rural Digital divide is actually more acute.

Body

E-governance is the short form of 'electronic governance'. The application of ICT to government processes is called E-governance in short, and it can have a profound impact - on the efficiency, responsiveness and accountability of government; thereby, on the quality of life and productivity of citizens, especially the poor and ultimately, on the economic output and growth of the country as a whole.

Reasons For Existence Of Digital Divide

- First is the non availability of a reliable ICT infrastructure to access the internet. India has to import the necessary ICT infrastructure. There is lack of resources to invest in information infrastructure, and research and development in India.
- Secondly there are problems in accessing the internet regularly. There is the problem of connectivity i.e. availability of a fast, reliable and cost effective internet connection. Then there is the cost of accessing the internet which includes telephone tariff and line rental and cost of Internet Service Provider (ISP). To this may be added the replacement cost of computer.
- Thirdly education is one of the major factors hampering diffusion of ICT amongst masses. Only those who are not only literates but computer literates can really benefit from ICT.
- Fourth reason is the availability of relevant material in one's own language. The absence of relevant content in relevant language may act as a barrier to Internet access.
- Fifth is the digital capacity of the society i.e., e-readiness. E-readiness is the capacity of the society

to incorporate ICT in all its pursuits. The different segments of the society viz the households, business, the government etc. should be willing to accept and absorb ICT.

Measures To Bridge The Divide

- **Providing internet access at public places:** The first step to be taken in this direction is to solve the problem of non availability of infrastructure. Since it is impossible to give everyone the required infrastructure there can be community approach i.e. all have access to common facilities which are available at public places like schools and libraries.
- **Education matters most of all:** The promotion of education and literacy generally, and digital literacy in particular, is a basic step to bridge the divide.
- **Exploring the various forms of ICT:** Besides the Internet, there are other information and communications technologies which can be helpful. International Telecommunication Union has reported that mobile phones diffuse faster than the Internet. Thus mobile phones can become alternative routes of getting information because they are not as demanding as computers and the PC-based Internet in terms of cost and skills. Even illiterates can use them.
- **Government policies and support:** Enhanced governmental support in the form of budgetary allocations, lower taxes and a regulatory framework are essential for the transition to the ICT society. Some of the initiatives of the government includes The Digital India Programme, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, Kisan Call Centre, Bhoomi Project

Conclusion

- ICTs are one of the enabling tools to bridge digital divide. Creation of ICT infrastructure is at the core to the technology innovation and economic development which ultimately in a planned manner will certainly lessen the gap.
- E-governance is an empowering tool. It has the power to bring in equality, equity, transparency and accountability. It can create a world where the powerless and the powerful enjoy equal opportunities to be online and equal chances to access information. And to avail these benefits the digital divide should be abridged by investing more in ICT education and infrastructure development.

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