

Network Governance, Aadhaar, and Public Service Delivery

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Many scholars defined network governance differently in different context. The concept of Network Governance was confined to the organizations (Piore & Sable, 1984; Eccles, 1981; Powell, 1990; and Uzzi, 1996) by some scholars extended to the state, civil society and markets (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Larson, 1992; and Liebeskind, Oliver, Zucker, & Brewer, 1996) by some scholars. Sørensen and Torfing (2009) in their interesting work on Network Governance said that effective Network Governance begins with the identification of relevant policy problems and ends with the building of capacities for future cooperation.

In the New Public Services era, public service delivery plays a crucial role as the citizen is the core of the governance process. The difficult task in network governance is network management. Network management focuses more on mediating and co-originating inter-organizational policy making (Klinj & Koppenjan, 2000). While the term is more apt for the corporate sector, network governance is gradually extending to the domain of functioning of state and government. The responsibility of the state in network governance is to extend and collaborate the networks with markets, civil society, media, technocrats, and finally the citizen for policy-making and policy implementations. There will not be any hierarchy and silo approach, but it should be the flat, inclusive and combined approach.

Later, some scholars extended the network governance to the institutions and elected governments. The role of the state was emphasized as the ‘focus on governance involves the use of institutions and structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and to coordinate and control joint action across the network as a whole’ (Provan & Kenis, 2007). When the Governments are moving towards the Governance, they form Networks with Citizen, Civil Society, Corporate for enhancing the governance levels and help in effective policy delivery. Chhattisgarh’s food security policy will be an example of how Governments are ‘blurring’ their boundaries (Stroker, 1998) and moving beyond their comfort zones for public policy making and implementation. Some say that networks are ‘socially but not legally bounded’ (Jones et al., 1997) and some say networks are not ‘legal bounded entities’ (Provan & Kenis, 2007).

Authors like Sørensen and Torfing in their phenomenal work on Networked Governance explain that effective Network Governance begins with the identification of relevant policy problems and ends with the building of capacities for future cooperation. In the New Public Administration era, public service delivery plays a crucial role as the citizen is the core of the governance process. The strengthened governance networks composed of public and private actors might help solve wicked problems (like leakages and corruption in PDS) and enhance the democratic participation in public policy making (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). Networking with stakeholders is necessary as there is a common goal for all stakeholders – state, market, civil society, beneficiaries, ration shop owners, media, etc. The common goal as per the PDS is to provide food for the poor and reduce hunger.

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There is rich literature on the Public Service Delivery in India mainly concentrating on the Public Service Delivery – Challenges and Opportunities by Muralidaran (2007), Public Services and ICT by Jannifer (2012). Some works concentrating on the state-specific studies – Sinha (2016) and some highlighted the benchmarks Public Services in Indian states like Paul, Balakrishnan, and others (2005).

Deaton, Dreze, and Khera conducted research extensively on the Indian Food Security policy and leakages in Public Distribution System. Saini and Gulati (2015) also analyzed the reasons for the leakages and suggested various strategies to control them. Researchers like Aggarwal (2011), Chatterjee (2014), Choithani and Pritchard (2015), Dhorajiwali and Gupta (2011) Dreze and Khera (2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, &2015) intensively researched in various states and suggested policy measures.

Most of the researchers worked on the challenges and systemic issues like corruption in PDS, but there is a gap in understanding the basic problems in the implementation of electronic Public Distribution System (e-PDS). Aadhaar seeding with Public Distribution System can control the corruption, plug out the unauthorized cards (ghost cards) and help in real time governance. There are certain challenges with the Aadhaar seeding like internet network issues, and un-authentication of biometric and hence beneficiaries are facing the problems. There is a need to understand the present network structure for understanding the major challenges in PDS and empirically find out whether the strengthening of networked governance will lead to effective public service delivery.

The main objective of the study is to know the role of the state government to build the networks with stakeholders and find out the problems with the technological innovations like Aadhaar seeding to the Public Service delivery like Public Distribution System (PDS) and build an environment for the effective service delivery. To put it in other words, how the Government as a node at the center of the public service delivery can build effective networks with civil society groups, corporates, and citizens and implement the public policy schemes.