



UNDERSTANDING GOVERNANCE

Historically, particularly after the Second World War, it was assumed that the job of governing nation-states was the responsibility of the governments. Democratic political frameworks of governments suggested three independent and inter related functions: *legislative*, *executive* and *judiciary*. In different societies over the past fifty years, these functions have been organized differently, though still carrying a common aspiration.

With growing disenchantment of ordinary people with institutions of the government, with declining capacity of these institutions to respond to diverse interests and expectations of their population, with increasing gap in the policies of governments and their practical elaboration, with growing distance with and alienation of the poor and the marginalized from the elite-dominated institutions of government, with continued persistence of problems of poverty, exclusion and marginalization in many countries of the world, and with growing importance of national and transnational private business interests, the concept of government has now begun to be changed to the concept of governance. In its elementary meaning governance, however, is equated with the functioning of the state and consequently good governance is equated with efficient functioning of the state and its institutions and promotion of equity and social justice.

It is the World Bank, which first brought the concept “good governance” into development discourse in recent years. The Bank’s experience of failure of its economic policies in African countries led the Bank to attribute the failure to “bad governance” i.e. administrative inefficiency, corruption, lack of transparency, etc. in these countries. The conceptualization of “bad governance” then led to the conceptualization of “good governance” which includes parameters like administrative efficiency, rule of law, accountability, and transparency. The Bank however, did not associate “good governance” with any particular political regime. The association between “good governance” and democracy is vigorously pushed into the development discourse by the bilateral aid agencies by making aid conditional to promotion of regular election, promotion of human rights and rule of law.

UNDP treats good governance as the existence of a network of institutions of government coupled with laws and regulations that together create and maintain a social environment in which human development takes place, and for all groups in society. Good governance is thus, a subset of governance, wherein public resources and problems are managed effectively, efficiently and in response to needs of society. Public Participation in influencing decision making, transparency, and accountability are thus the hallmarks of good governance (UNDP, 1997).

Good governance, therefore, entails not merely reform of the public service, and efficiency and cost effectiveness of public agencies but also participation and voice of the poor, the marginalized and the under-represented. In elaborating the principles of good governance, the following needs to be kept in mind:

- universal protection of universal human rights;
- promotion of equity and equality of opportunity;
- rule of law that is implemented in a non-discriminatory manner;
- efficient, impartial and quick judicial system;
- transparency in functioning of public agencies and officials (right to information);
- accountability of decisions made about public issues and public resources by public leaders and officials;
- devolution of resources and decision-making power to local levels and bodies in rural and urban areas;
- Participation and inclusion of all citizens in debating public policies and choices.

Areas of Governance

The agenda of good governance is vast. The range of governance issues from local to national could be myriad. In order to secure a focus, this note concentrates on three dimensions of governance:

- 1. Public policy**
- 2. Accountability**
- 3. Local self-governance**

These three issues have enormous relevance in contemporary context.

1. Public Policy

Each state formulates a large number of legislations, policies and programme concerning the welfare of its citizens. Many of these have been particularly targeted for the benefit of the poor and the marginalized. However, the nature of the state as it evolves creates a situation where many of these well-intentioned policies and programme get undermined. The state, which was constituted on the basis of liberal-welfare principles, over the years, becomes a mechanism to serve the affluent and privileged sections of the population. Besides the appropriation of benefits by the affluent sections, the nature of policy formulation alienates the common people. Both at the national and the provincial levels the bureaucracy is vested with the power to formulate the policies, which are expected to bring benefits to the common people. This process which does not involve the opinion of the people in decision making

fails in many cases to take cognizance of their needs. Below mentioned are three dimensions of public policy from the vantage point of the marginalized:

- Exclusion of the interests, priorities and concerns of the marginalized sections in elaboration of public policies
- Impediments in the implementation of the policies
- Policies which are perceived as oppressive by certain segments of Indian society

Civil society organizations, nevertheless, have been interrogating and putting pressure on the state to broaden the scope of public policy making process to include those interests of the marginalized which are absent in the current policy provisions. At the same time there is effort towards the implementation of the existing policies and resistance to the policies which are perceived as oppressive. We find that many social movements and civil society organizations focusing on the issues of environment, gender, health etc. have brought the affected people to the fore-front and have pressurized the government to register their opinion. As a result, the top down approach in policy formulation and implementation is influenced from the bottom-up.

2. Accountability

The question of accountability like all governance questions is a reflection of the deviation of democratic developmental state from its set procedures and goals. The constitutional granting of democratic rights, promotion of equality, delivery by public institutions, promotion of collective good – in short the responsibility for creation of an environment in which citizens exercise their democratic rights and enhance their life chances by availing the benefits of developmental endeavours was assumed by the state with much alacrity in the opening decades of independence. Needless to say this requires the elected representatives and public officials and institutions to be accountable to the citizens. But despite the democratic form of governance and the constitutional granting of rights, the non- accountability of the state to its citizens, which the state shows by either keeping silence or by continuing its action, has generated a feeling of discontent among the people towards the state and its agencies. This feeling of discontent has manifested in the contemporary times in the form of collective action in the public sphere.

3. Local Self-Governance

In recent years, decentralization and devolution are generating pressures for local self-governance. With the constitutional mandates, it is highly likely that good governance would become a major concern at local level in these institutions. Nevertheless, even after the Constitutional Amendments are passed to effect changes in the local governance and make decentralization functional, the decision-making capacity of the local bodies is limited in many respects.