Towards Good Governance in South-Asia

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Towards Good Governance in South-Asia An Introduction

Juha Vartola
Ismo Lumijärvi
Mohammed Asaduzzaman

Although colonial rule ended in the mid-twentieth century, its legacy continues in most of the post-colonial countries. South Asia has a long colonial history: the British ruled the Indian sub-continent for almost 200 years (1757–1947). The administration of the South Asian countries has therefore been influenced by British rule in that the legacy of colonialism has been persistent and visible in the governance system of these countries. Consequently, the administrative and political systems of South Asia are incompatible with its indigenous social, economic, political and cultural contexts. It has been claimed that such a contextless[1] nature of the administration and governance has direct or a indirect impact on the road to good governance and on sustainable development in South Asia. This edited book thus aims to facilitate the contemporary debate of governance through highlighting its dilemma and by proposing a suitable platform for good governance in South Asia.

The concept of 'good governance' has occupied the central stage of sustainable development across the aid-depending world for more than two decades. It is difficult to find any debates on development that have not included a discussion of good governance. As a concept, 'good governance' does not have a straightforward definition, though it has been expanding immensely. As a result, various interpretations of 'good governance' are found in the literature on contemporary development. In general, this concept is associated with an effective and efficient public administration in a democratic framework. In short, good governance means citizen-

[1] The contextless nature of administration is due to its colonial origins, exogenous post-colonial reforms, and imitative structural and attitudinal changes (for details, see Haque 1996).

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friendly, citizen-caring, responsive, decentralised local governance, an autonomous political society, an efficient and effective bureaucracy, a strong civil society and a free media (Minocha 1998; Stowe 1992). Many argue that governance is good when it serves not merely any public interest but that of the most poor and marginalised people in the society (Aminuzzaman 2006, 14). The World Bank identified the core characteristics of this term rather than defining it, although the characteristics themselves vary from country to country. These characteristics are the following: political and bureaucratic accountability, freedom of the media, freedom of information, rule of law, participation, transparency and a strong civil society. However, it is clear that good governance as a concept is still developing in terms of its definition, its ethical connotations, and its usefulness (Kruiter 1996). Therefore, we suggest that its meaning cannot be confined to the frame of a specific time and country.

The largest continent, Asia, is highly ambitious in implementing the notion of good governance in its region in general and in South Asia in particular during the last two decades. Indeed, features of poor and bad governance have been quite noticeable in many South-Asian countries for many decades. It has also been claimed that some parts of India have also been known to have features of poor governance. The absence of strong democratic institutions in these countries is due to a variety of factors including the lack of skilled and capable civil servants, bureaucratic and political elitism, massive corruption, unaccountable public servants and politicians and, in some cases, the regular direct and indirect military intervention into the democratic process.

As it has already been mentioned, despite the end of direct colonial rule in the aid-depending world in Asia and Africa, the colonial bureaucratic legacy has continued, not only in terms of administrative structure, function, classification, recruitment, socialisation, norms and attitudes, but also in terms of such adverse administrative features as elitism, paternalism, despotism, secrecy, formalism, red-tapism, aloofness and rigidity (Haque 1996). Many claimed that the South Asian countries inherited an administrative system that had adequately and efficiently served their colonial master (Zafarullah & Huque 1998). Administration in these countries is therefore not suitable for the contemporary concepts of 'governance' and 'good governance', which are mostly imported from the Western countries.

South-Asian nations such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lan-

ka are diversified in terms of their political, social and economic structures. Among these four South-Asian countries, India is a federal state, while Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are unitary (Zafarullah & Huque 1998). Popularly known as the largest democracy in the world, India has established a tradition of secular democracy despite its political culture being affected by caste and religious rivalry, whereas Bangladesh has experienced frequent direct and indirect military intervention since its independence as well as occasional democratic governance particularly since 1991. Nepal, having been twisted by the two powerhouses India and China, has a long history of hereditary monarchy with a recent transition towards democracy, while the tradition of democratic politics in Sri Lanka has increasingly moved toward an executive presidency based on centralised power (Haque 2003, 943).

However, India and Sri Lanka are two of the oldest developing nations that are experiencing the democracy across the developing world. In addition, all these four South-Asian nations have moved to functioning and practicing democracies through free and fair elections. Bangladesh introduced a system of 'Care-taker Government' in 1996 in order to conduct free and fair parliamentary elections in the country. It has been seen that a relatively free media, the strong role of the civil society organisations and an increasing role played by the non-profit organisations to alleviate poverty, have all paved the way for the sustainability of the democratic process during the last two decades. Moreover, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka alike have regularly introduced initiatives to reform administration in order to institutionalise both democracy and sustainable development and to ensure good governance (Sobhan 1999). Despite all these positive changes, the quality of governance in these countries is not satisfactory. Instead, the problem of governance has intensified during the last two decades and longer in many cases.

With these scenarios we expect that the present edited book, *Towards Good Governance in South Asia*, is a timely initiative and an opportunity to highlight the contemporary challenges of governance and good governance in the four South-Asian countries. Although a few books on this subject have already been published during the last decade, we hope that our initiative will lead and continue to keep alive the discussion of the good governance phenomenon on the one hand and on the other, will contribute to the discourse of governance and public administration of the 21st century at large. The students, researchers, development practition-

ers and all others interested in good governance discourse are expected to benefit most from this book. This volume is a regular outcome of our extensive research cooperation and collaboration between the Department of Management Studies of the University of Tampere, Finland, and other Universities and research institutions in South Asia. The authors have contributed thought-provoking papers focusing on the multidimensional aspects of governance and good governance in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The contributors have intensively identified the challenges of governance and proposed sound policy guidelines for the road to good governance and sustainable development in these countries.

We are grateful to the authors for their keen interest, cooperation and valuable contributions to this volume. We also acknowledge the cooperation of Jaana Haatainen, Research Associate at the Department of Management Studies for her assistance during the different stages of this book. Our sincere thanks also go to the Department of Management Studies for granting financial support in the printing of this book.

Contents of the book

Professor Salahuddin Aminuzzaman very clearly and correctly examines the different dimensions of governance and development issues in Bangladesh. In the beginning of the paper, he presents a very clear theoretical frame of governance highlighting and interpreting the contemporary views including the donor's perspective. The author identifies the challenges of governance in Bangladesh concerning the five areas. They are: (i) the deteriorating law and order situation and failure of the justice sector to check crime and corruption; (ii) weak public administration; (iii) a regulatory environment that combines overly strict regulation in some sectors and inadequate or no regulation in others; (iv) inadequate national policy and resource commitments to decentralization and local government reform; and (v) the impact of intensifying partisan tensions on every dimension of life in Bangladesh. In addition, he critically examines the constraints of governance from various dimensions such as political, institutional, social and donor. Thus, in particular the contemporary challenges of governance and development in Bangladesh are: culture of confrontational politics, dysfunctional parliament, lack of professionalism in bureaucracy, the

poor are least able to fend for themselves, lacking both the resources and the knowledge to assert their right and donors always dictate and control the governance reform through the aid memories. He concludes that the governance reform in Bangladesh needs a strategic approach considering some important issues such as; reform in political culture and leadership, fostering safeguarding institutions, addressing culture of impunity, reorientation of bureaucracy with new public management (NPM), installing a system of external monitoring and review, reforming public delivery system at local level, right to information and use of ICT in governance.

Professor Ahmed Shafiqul Huque has critically reviews the problems and prospects of good governance in Bangladesh in his paper. He rightly identifies the challenges lies with the contemporary governance in Bangladesh such as constitutional amendments, military intervention, conflicting political culture and alliances, electoral problems, politicization and businessization of military and civil bureaucracy and corruption. Professor Huque also acknowledges the recent development of governance such as the process of democratization through electoral reforms, enhanced scope of people's participation and decentralization, the role of non-partisan caretaker government, role of non-profit organizations in poverty alleviation, independence of judiciary, strengthening anti-corruption commission and the market and private sector development. In the conclusion, he precisely presents the challenge of good governance in Bangladesh in view of severe contrasts apparent in its social, economic and political settings. They are: 'the country is politically advanced in terms of high awareness of issues and participation, but a sophisticated political system remains a distant dream. Corruption erodes productivity, yet economic growth has been achieved through successive years. The society is reasonably free, yet it remains under strong military influence. Bangladesh's traditional society has shown impressive performance in promoting gender equality. In addition to the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and the Deputy Leader of the Parliament, three of the key ministries – Home Affairs, Agriculture, and Foreign Affairs – are headed by women. A state religion is enshrined in the constitution, but the people and society remain secular in spirit. Significant advancement was achieved in assisting the poor, but widespread poverty prevails. Finally, there has been huge growth in population, but the membership of Parliament is fixed at 300 since 1972. The number of seats reserved for women, however, was increased from 15 to 30 and eventually to 45'.

Professor Samaratunge and ***Dr. Coghill*** observe the prospects and challenges of integrated governance in South Asia in general and Sri Lanka in Particular. Initially they discuss the theoretical framework of integrated governance reviewing the emerging contemporary theories of governance. In this paper authors have given immense attention to the nature and characteristics of the various social actors participating in the governance process in Sri Lanka following the experience of the Tsunami period. The authors identified the major challenges of integrated governance in Sri Lanka as they are bureaucratic, lack of coordination within governmental units, inefficiencies in administration and centralized decision making process. This paper concludes that achieving high levels of integrated governance requires a sustained effort by government, with the involvement of business and NGOs, to identify and address the specific structural and cultural barriers to effective implementation of integrated governance.

Professor Habib Zafarullah examines the importance of the disadvantaged social groups and their incorporation, influence and representation within the democratic institutions in developing nations in general and Bangladesh in particular. He states that the quality of any democracy or governance is reflected by the extent and magnitude of democratic inclusion inherent or intended for the system. In his paper, Professor Zafarullah precisely analyzes the 'quota system' which he calls 'affirmative action' in the civil service in Bangladesh and its challenges. The author found that although Bangladesh has been practicing affirmative action in the public sector for 36 years now but the program is still being tinkered with. No concrete policy was ever framed and basically *ad hoc*ism has endured the quota system. The results have been mixed as the civil service remains as unrepresentative as ever and continuously deviates from its main rationale that of achieving equality, equity and representativeness. Successive government failed to dig out the wrongs of the system and streamline it for its efficient working and for providing desired services to society. As affirmative action is quota-based rather than focused on numerical targets or timetables, as in many advanced countries, it creates more problems than it solves. This has made the system difficult to administer and has left it open to political and bureaucratic manipulation. He concludes that affirmative action, if it can be divorced from partisan political contrivance and mindless bureaucratic artifice, can remove the broader dimensions of social exclusion including the many forms of inequality and apartheid,

and make the public bureaucracy more equitable, representative and participative – all hallmarks of democratic governance or good governance in Bangladesh.

Professor Amita Singh critically discusses the administrative reforms and the role of bureaucracy in implementing the administrative reform in India. In her paper she tries to look into a much ignored side of implementing reforms which deals with the trappings of a new, enthusiastic but a fairly less experienced political master heading the Ministry who is ill-advised, coaxed and obstructed by a pre-existing bureaucratic machinery to dilute deadlines, complicate financial distribution amongst programmes, blunt speed and discourage political ambition. Professor Amita claims that bureaucracy in India is clueless and hence panicking about the implementation of the huge volume of past administrative reforms. Thus an anxious search for the right partners and then a strategy for monitoring partners is the biggest challenge being encountered by bureaucracy presently in India. In this paper she categorically states that bureaucracy in India continue to be the greatest obstacles to implementing administrative reform as it refuses to shed denounces its role as a 'ringmaster in the circus of reforms'. However, in the conclusion she suggests to methods of achieving a responsive, accountable and knowledge based governance in India. They are: the demand side of reforms should be made effective through the strengthening of Citizens' Charters and the supply side of implementation should be carry incentives for work through streamlining procedures in the performance appraisal systems for administrators.

Professor Tek Nath Dhakal rightly examines decentralization one of the leading issues of good governance with the special reference of introducing citizen charter in Nepal. The observations of this paper are based on the empirical findings. The author precisely covers some research questions in order to discover the grassroots reality of decentralized governance in Nepal. They are: What is the status of decentralization in Nepal? Do the local bodies like municipalities improve the service provision after introduction of citizen charter? Are people satisfied with local service provision? Do they register any marked improvement after the introduction of citizen charter? What are the major bottlenecks not for implementing the citizen charter effectively? The grassroots reality confirms that the introduction of citizen charter in the municipalities in Nepal found for helping the people. The citizen charter helped in understanding types and the nature of services that the municipalities provide to its citizens along with

information on fees and service charges that are payable as well as lead time taken to complete a formality or provide requested service. In addition mass people took it as a positive departure from traditional mode of functioning where information was hard to come by and there was no way of knowing in advance about formalities and other requirements in connection with receiving municipal services. The author concludes that the citizen charter is a new scheme aiming to bring citizen centric governance in many organizations, the proper implementation would need some more time to bring into practice. The scheme brings a new intervention at the traditional practice of service delivery mechanism in Nepal, however, full fledge implementation has not comfortably taken in the service delivery agents' part and also beneficiaries' part.

Professor Juha Vartola, ***Professor Ismo Lumijärvi*** and ***Dr. M. Asaduzzaman*** analyses how the decentralization policy in Bangladesh and Nepal has been followed in the perspective of NPM fashion reform and what challenges are there in practicing decentralization policy in these two culturally and geographically different countries? They have also presented a theoretical framework of decentralization and NPM in their paper. The authors observe that despite regular past attempts and reforms, the successive governments of both countries have relatively failed to practice the decentralization policy in their governance system due to confrontational political culture, the "winner take all" attitudes, patron-client relationship and political and bureaucratic ill will. As a result, independent, people oriented and empowered local governance has not been established in these countries in one hand, and the local people are still far from the benefits of decentralization and NPM on the other. The major challenges and obstacles that are identified have been developed in these two countries over centuries and cannot remove with the blink of an eye. Through interpreting and reinterpreting the contemporary literatures, authors suggested that an integrated and partnership form of local governance might help in order to practice decentralization policy effectively and efficiently in these two countries giving up the traditional let alone approach.

Risako Ishii and ***Dr. Farhad Hossain*** precisely examine the linear relation between decentralisation, democracy, and people's participation in developing countries based on the ground realities from the Philippine. Through reviewing the contemporary literatures authors presented a clear theoretical picture of decentralization and people's participation. From the ground realities, they advocated that the impact of decentralisation

on people's participation varies across local governments, because incentives both of local government and the citizens for participation differ depending on backgrounds, social construction and capacities of the local government and the society. Despite the theoretical limitations such as tokenism, citizens' attitudes, lack of representativeness and limited capacities of local government, it has been found that in the Philippines there are attempts of LGUs to involve their constituencies in local governance in a feasible and efficient manner. Finally, they conclude that provincial city governments try to cooperate with local NGOs to fulfill their gaps in social service delivery, while highly urbanized city governments make efforts to enlarge public access to local governance rather than involve diversified civil organisations to a greater extent.

Renuka Priyantha observes in her paper the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) in terms of complex interrelationship between central government, other levels of political and administrative units and the civil society drawing particular attention to the general education policy in Sri Lanka. Despite the challenges of MLG, the author found that the cross-functional linkages at the different level of governance would enhance system wide efficiency and effectiveness in terms of achieving overall policy goals and envisage strengthening the good governance and fulfilling its aspirations. The author concludes that though attempts were made to shape the administrative structure more multilevel oriented, it should be more impressive to the public than the mere decentralization where politicians are still play a significant role in the policy process. If structural and functional arrangements to be succeeded in implementation, responsible authorities should learn from past failures and take necessary forward steps to overcome issues and constraints for future prospects.

Professor Mohabbat Khan very precisely describes the state of good governance in light of the past and present developments in administration and judiciary in Bangladesh. He emphasizes that since the role of the state has been changed, a collaborative relationship must evolve between the state, market and civil society premised on interdependence, steering and networking in order to ensure good governance. Professor Khan states that politicization of administration and judiciary, lack of accountability, lack of transparency, massive corruption and anti-poor criminal/civil justice have jeopardized the good governance in administration and judiciary in Bangladesh.

Professor Shree Krisha Shrestha observes the public service accessibility and delivery to the indigenous community in Nepal with special reference to the Santhal community, one of the highly marginally backward communities in Nepal. This is an empirical research. In his paper professor Shrestha intends to assess the perception of the members of Santhal community about the presence of government of Nepal in terms of their accessibility and availability of services extended by Government. Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country with diverse cultures. He states that though certain areas of Nepal are strongly associated with particular ethnic/caste groups, there is an extensive scattering of various ethnic/caste groups across the country. Author found that indigenous nationalities fall behind the national average in terms of commonly accepted human development indicators in Nepal. He observed from the realities that Santhal community who are living in the mixed community and those who belong to higher economic status have opportunity to access the information and have greater opportunities to acquire the services extended by government. Finally he concludes that more efforts are required to mobilize marginalized groups so that they can articulate their demands and be brought into the development mainstream, ensuring their access to services.

Professor Ishtiaq Jamil and ***Professor Pranab Kumar Pandey*** discusses contemporary events in the political scene of Bangladesh that took place in the period from 2006 to the present. They divide this period into three crucial stages: i) the period prior to the taking over of the army backed care taker government on 11th January 2007 popularly termed 1/11. b) the period of the care taker government from January 2007 to December 2008, and c) the 9th parliamentary election held at the end of 2008 and its aftermath. The authors observed that in the midst of confrontational politics during later part of the 2006 when the country went into a situation of unrest, chaos, and political conflict, the people of Bangladesh welcomed the army backed care taker government. The care taker government through their strong stands against corruption and initiatives to reform in almost every sector received wide spread support of the general public. However, there popularity went down when they failed to control price hike of daily essential commodities. Despite their failure to control market prices, they stuck to their promise when they assumed power of holding the election and transferring power to a civilian government. Despite the landslide victory of AL led great alliance, authors emphasize four aspects that should

be considered to fulfil the demands of the people of Bangladesh. They are: 1) they should not act as a single and only one party given the overwhelming majority, but rather should be open, accessible and transparent to new ideas even though they may be diametrically opposite; 2) they should and must not allow party members to take undue advantage of this absolute majority; 3) AL used some long term visions to guide voters such as "digital Bangladesh" in the election. Such visions must be clearly spelled out and acted upon because common people would like o see that the AL sticks to their promises; and 4) the bureaucracy must not be politicized by favouring some and punishing others.

Shipra Bhatia highlights the changing role of the Indian government and the direction and examines methodologies of reform which are emerging as variants of new public management approach being introduced in some states, following popular trends in advanced market economies. She states that the public sector undertaking (PSUs) are vested with social, economic and commercial objectives. Clarity of the objectives is the first pre-requisite for PSU reforms. Efficiency for PSUs, need a holistic measure capable of assessing the social, economic and commercial objectives. There is a need to bring harmony between economic reforms and aspirations of common people. India's reforms clearly emphasize the importance of efficiency and effectiveness, reliance on explicit standards, greater competition and private sector styles of management. She also claims that there are attempts to reduce corruption and to address accountability issues but are far from those desired. Judiciary remains a weak link in the process and is not performing desired role in the transition to market economy. It is still based on conservative ideology of the independence era and along with the executive fostering a market based economy. However, she suggests that government to become more informed and active shareholders by simplifying the chain of accountability through centralizing or more effectively coordinating shareholding responsibilities within the state administration. It also seeks to reduce political interference in day-to-day management. It wants to empower boards by clarifying their mandates and respecting their independence. Lastly, strengthening internal controls and carrying out independent, external audits based on international standards should improve transparency.

Professor Habibur Rahman reveals the role of State in local government reforms from a historical perspective in Bangladesh. Dr. Rahman precisely states that despite of a long historical tradition, popular agenda

for reform during the last four decades and recent attempts by successive democratic governments, the institution still maintains antediluvian and puppet like existence administered through remote control mechanisms by a central state, having no basis in the productive or political forces at the grass root level. He concludes that the political and bureaucratic unwillingness, partisan political culture and winners-takes-all system are the major obstacles to the road of local governance reform in Bangladesh. Finally he concludes that the local government policy reform process is hazy and characterized by implicit action by lawmakers and political leaders.

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