

Concept of Good Governance:

The concept of "governance" is now most used word in the study of society and development. Now the concept is being used mostly in developing countries to achieve sustainable development management. There are various definitions of governance and good governance.

"Governance" means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance -and local governance." (<http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp>)

According to V.K. Chopra, good governance is "a system of governance that is able to unambiguously identify the basic values of the society where values are economic, political and socio-cultural issues including human rights, and pursue these values through an accountable and honest administration." (Chopra, V.K., "The mirage of good governance", Towards good governance, eds; chopra, S.K., Konark publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi-110092, p.32, 1997.)

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified some aspects of good governance. (Ibid, p.3) Some of these are:

1. The promotion of democracy and open pluralistic societies;
2. The Strengthening of transparent, accountable, efficient and effective national and local government;
3. The promotion of respect for human right;
4. The reinforcement of rule of law, including fair and accessible legal and judicial systems;
5. The promotion of independent media and the dissemination of information;
6. Anti-corruption initiatives; and
7. Efforts to reduce excessive military expenditure.

There is no complete and universal recognized definition of good governance. In general, good governance means such an ideal governing system that is expected for political, social, economic, cultural and human development of a nation. This system operates a state most efficiently to achieve self-reliance, social justice and sustainable development .

In this regard we should discuss the elements of good governance for better understanding.

Elements of Good Governance:

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP- "Governance and Sustainable Human Development, 1977) has identified five basic principles of good governance, which are as follows:

1. Legitimacy and voice - all men and women should have a voice in decision-making either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their intention.
2. Direction - leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development.
3. Performance - Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources.
4. Accountability - decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public.
5. Fairness - All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being and legal framework should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws on human rights.

D. Bandyopadhyay ("Administration decentralization and good governance", Towards Good Governance, eds; Chopa, S.K., Konark publishers Pvt. Ltd. Delhi-110092, p.32, 1997), identified some of the main elements of 'good governance, like:

1. Accountability - both financial and political;
2. Transparency both financial and political;
3. Access to information;
4. Participation in decision making and implementation;
5. Responsiveness;
6. Efficient delivery system of services and goods;
7. Enforcement of rule of law supplanting the rule of whims and caprices of rulers whether stipendiary or elected;
8. Client/ citizen satisfaction; and
9. An overall caring and humane ambience promoting an equalitarian and equitable social and economic order.

In the article, Road Map to Good Governance in Bangladesh, Syed Ahsanul Alam used nine criteria of good governance to determine whether a country qualifies to have good governance. These are,

1. Independent and Non Partisan Election Commission
2. Independent Judiciary and the Rule of Law
3. Independent Media and Freedom of Speech
4. Independent Anti-Corruption Commission
5. Investing In the People
6. Independent and Effective Parliament
7. Independent Human Rights Commission
8. Independent Ombudsman System
9. Investment Friendly Government.

(<http://bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.com/2007/02/road-map-to-good-governance-in.html>)

He proposes these nine components to be referred as the Nine I's of good governance or Nine 'I' model of good governance. In the absence of this Nine I's good will be a far cry. Mr. Alam examines the Nine I's of Good governance as follows:

Independent Election Commission: Independent and Non Partisan Election Commission is a precondition for free & fair elections. The fair elections can make accountable leadership. This can give the nation a representative parliament, where peoples of the state can participate in the decision making process.

Independent Judiciary and the Rule of Law

Every citizen and the organs of the government will be abide by the law. Rule of law and independent judiciary system is essential for promote peace and human rights. Moreover,

it helps to make government departments accountable to each other and to the people.

Independent Media and Freedom of Speech

For developing countries, like Bangladesh, freedom of peace is a must to promote good governance. The independent media can play a vital role to create awareness among peoples about their rights and responsibilities. This freedom also can ensure the accountability of the public institutions and policies. The more peoples have access to information, the more their rights will be secured.

Independent Anti-Corruption Commission

Good governance also means combating corruptions as it destroys economic growth, foreign investment to the developing countries. So, it is a must to fight against corruption. Independent anti-corruption commission can play role to prevent corruption from the all sectors of a nations.

Investing In The People

Good governance requires that government to invest in people to preserve their welfare. This includes invest in health care, nutrition, housing, education, and poverty elevation etc. In general, a positive economic environment is necessary to serve the nation effectively and efficiently. The other components are discussed earlier in this study.

According to the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Good governance has eight major characteristics. Those are: Participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. The commission figured out these issues as following:

Figure 1: Characteristics of good governance

Elements of good governance: Bangladesh perspective:

It is important to discuss these characteristics and elements to know how flexible the present situation of Bangladesh for promoting good governance.

Participation

Participation of citizens in decision making process is a key thing of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through institutions or representatives. The civil society has an influential participation in decision making in Bangladesh. But the political culture is not good enough to support this positive influence. The media play bias role sometime for their own interests. Participation should be informed and organized. But the role of civil society and institutions are either confusing or ignored by the policy makers.

Rule of law

Rule of law is a precondition of good governance. To ensure good governance in state a fair and impartial legal framework is essential. It also calls for protection of human rights. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible administrative system. But the situation is not as easy as we can see in Bangladesh. The Berlin-based international anti-corruption organization, Transparency International (TI) released its annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2008 on September 2008. The index provides global ranking of countries in terms of political and administrative corruption. It showed that Bangladesh scored 2.1 points in a scale of 0-10, and has continued to be ranked low - 10th from below, which is 147th among 180 countries. Bangladesh was earlier placed at the very bottom of the list for the fifth successive year from 2001-2005. In 2006 Bangladesh was ranked in no 3, and last year 7th. (http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/Annunal_Report_2008f.pdf)

Transparency

Transparency is the way to take decisions and to enforce them within rules and regulations. To promote transparency in decision making process, it is necessary to make the information available and accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also requires that enough information should be provided in easily understandable forms and media. The problem with Bangladesh is that most of the peoples are illiterate and don't have access to information. Poverty is the main cause of illiteracy and ignorance. They don't have clear idea about public service. The government officials are not interested to promote rural peoples with social services like education, health, sanitation, and other social services. This is because of lack of transparency in public sector.

Responsiveness

Reasonable timeframe is essential to serve good governance to its subjects. All processes and steps should be in proper time to supply proper management. The implementation of projects in Bangladesh is very slow in comparison with other developing countries. For instance, Japan's future development assistance to Bangladesh is at risk as the government has failed poor implementation of Japanese-funded projects. The slow implementation of projects is also slowing down the disbursement of Japanese loans committed to development projects in Bangladesh. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the development arm of the world's second largest economy, evaluated that the Japanese government could disburse only 30 per cent of its target to spend 12 billion yen (approximately US\$ 130 million) to implement the ongoing JICA-funded project. "Japan is now worried about how the government would catch up with the remaining 70 per cent of the target in next three months," said Mayumi Endoh, senior representative of JICA. (<http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2010/01/02/88410.html>)

Consensus oriented

There are several actors in a given society. Good governance requires negotiation of the different interests of those actors in society to reach a broad agreement in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be fulfilled. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective for sustainable human development. An understanding of the cultural and social contexts of a society can only provide such consensus. In the case of Bangladesh, the gap between the rich and poor is too large and it affects the harmony of the social agreements. Economic condition hampers the relation between the classes in the society. It is said that the urban citizens are consuming the most of the facilities provided by the government where rural people are deprived of basic needs such as pure water, proper sanitation, infrastructural facilities, and quality education and so on. This deprivation results an imbalance in society. We can compare the literacy rate between rural and urban population to justify the realities. The Literacy Assessment Survey (LAS) 2008, conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), showed that the rural people are still lagging behind in education than the urban people. Only 46.4 per cent adult rural population (15 years and above) is literate, 10.3 per cent lower than the urban literacy rate of 56.7 per cent. The LAS 2008 showed that the richest people are the most literate than other wealth-level group in the society. Total 76 per cent of the richest are literate in the country followed by 64 per cent of the rich, 51 per cent of the middle class, 39 per cent of the poor and 28 per cent poorest.

(<http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/01/03/54947.html>)

Equity and inclusiveness

A society's well being depends on ensuring that all its members should feel their presence in the society. Particularly the most vulnerable, should have prospects to improve their condition. This concept is more likely related with the concept of agreement between the actors of the society. It depends on the socio-economic culture of a country.

Effectiveness and efficiency

The more Public administration will be efficient, the more good governance will be provided. The public institutions should provide services with effectiveness and efficiency. This is a basic requirement of good governance. The decision making process have to meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources. Corruption and bureaucratic complexity are great obstacles to make the public policies effective and efficient in Bangladesh. Another reason behind the poor management system is political instability. The long term projects are being hampered by the political instability in Bangladesh.

Accountability

Accountability is a key obligation of good governance. It depends on the transparency and the rule of law. Not only governmental organizations but also the private sector and civil society must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Accountability provides better service and prevents corruption in organizations. That is why an organization or an institution should be accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. The problems with poor governance in Bangladesh are almost interrelated and interdependent. The political culture and socio-economic perspective of this country is not in favor of accountable administration and public services. The government in Bangladesh is accountable to its subjects through the national parliament, for instance. But in reality, parliament remains inactive all the year round. It is seen that the majority always want to dominate the other political parties. And the opposition parties are not getting involved in constructive criticism. Private sector is more or less accountable but they try to get benefit of the political crisis. Civil society and the mass media are now much more strong and they have influence on the decision making process of the government. But it is common that this power is often used for the interest of some groups rather than for the common citizens.

Initiatives for good governance in Bangladesh: The World Bank's review

According to the World Bank, Bangladesh is now aware of its overall governance environment. (<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSAREGTOPPRISECDEV/0,,contentMDK:20584870~menuPK:496677~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:496671,00.html>)

The bank finds out some initiatives like, improving core governance systems in areas of public procurement, financial management, fiscal reporting, and watchdog institutions. A number of public administration reforms have been implemented over the years. They include

improvement of a promotion policy training policy for Government employees; and creation of a Career Planning and Training Wing in the Ministry of Establishment. the Government issued new annual budget guidelines to improve public financial management, on a pilot basis, which contained elements of more strategic budgeting practices, better fiscal discipline, and better coordination of recurrent and capital budgets. The Government also released a comprehensive Public Financial Management Action Plan. A strategic development plan is approved to increase revenue collection, developing a more effective organizational structure uniformly and equitably.

The World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for fiscal year 2006-09 targets three themes:

1. Core Governance: The strategy wants to enhance accountability and transparency by strengthening 'core' governance institutions including Public Accounts Committee, Bangladesh Bank, Public Service Commission, Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) etc. This 'core' governance requires greater transparency in government and free access to information by citizens.
2. Investment friendly environment through sectoral governance reforms: The CAS focuses on reducing administrative barriers by streamlining regulatory processes, facilitating infrastructure services through industrial zones, and building capacity of government agencies such as the Board of Investment and Export Processing Zone Authority.
3. Empowering the Poor: The program will maintain governance reforms and investments in public services like health, education, sanitation etc. These initiatives are also part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These initiatives aim at the empowerment of poor through participation.

Obstacles to Good Governance in Bangladesh:

Md.Awal Hossain Mollah, in the article "Good Governance in Bangladesh: Role of Parliament" identifies some major problems for ensuring good governance in Bangladesh. These are:

- a) Corruption
- b) Inefficiency of Bureaucracy
- c) Political interference in administration
- d) Nepotism
- e) Improper and non-observance of the rule of law
- f) Improper use of resources

Furthermore, over population and limited resources, high illiteracy rate, acute poverty are some more obstacles to gain proper management in public services and governance.

Role of actors to gain good governance in present situation in Bangladesh:

Good governance can be assured only by the active participation of all the organs of the society. Let see the role of key actors of the country to set up better governance:

Role of Parliament to promote good governance: In a democratic system, parliament is the key point to ensure good governance. The accountability of the executive power is ensured by the parliament. In Bangladesh, the role of parliament is most important. The parliament exercises its power to control over the government. The ministers along with the prime minister are accountable to the parliament for their actions. This accountability ensures the transparency of the government. Moreover, the opposition parties can criticize the actions of the government and can take part in the decision making process. This is why, in a democratic system, parliament can play a significant role to improve the quality of governance. Parliamentary debates are strong way to justify a decision whether it is good for the nation or not. These debates help government to purify their planning and actions. This is also a chance for the oppositions to express their opinions towards the decision. Parliamentary committee system is the most effective instrument of parliamentary oversight. According to the recommendation of 9th international Anti-corruption conference (IACC) 10-15, October, 1999, Durban, South Africa, the parliamentary committee should be gradually make committee meeting more open and transparent. The committee should elect strong chairs who can build consensus across party lines and oversight Committee should be chaired by opposition members.

Role of the civil society: Civil society is a strong actor in the field of democracy. Democratic system requires role of its actors to provide the facilities to the citizens. The civil society can play prominent role to ensure proper management system of the public services. The organizations and the media are part of civil society and they have influence on public policy as they can motivate peoples to support or to oppose a public decision. But it is a matter of great regret that the civil society in Bangladesh is divided for own interest. The neutrality of media is necessary to provide the peoples with the information. Political culture of Bangladesh is not in favor of the factor. However, a change is being happened over years. Peoples are now more conscious about their rights and responsibilities.

Role of Private Sector: The private sector can play a more active role for friendly governance. Corporate bodies and business houses can set clear and enforceable policies against corruption. Business house management can emphasis on business ethics to ensure minimal standards of the organization. The positive environment in business and economy can attract foreign investment. The private organizations also have influence on major reforms of the government. They can express their opinion to promote good governance.

Role of Institutions: Institution can guide the society and the power of the state toward gaining good governance. For this, existing institutions should be strengthened by laws and regulations and should be more independent. Political appointment destroys the independence of the institutions like the Human Rights Commissions, Anti-Corruption Commission, Law commission, Media and Press Commission.

Role of Media: The growth in the number of private electronic and print media outlets in Bangladesh has increased. This is because not just the amount of information available but also for the quality of media. Media is now a strong actor in Bangladeshi social and economic culture. The media can prevent corruption by naming and shaming the individuals and organizations. Even in developing countries, where corruption is accepted as a necessary evil, naming and shaming tactic has been effective in recent years. The media is strong enough to generate outrage among the people and can use the power to control and eradicate corruption and maladministration. There is of course chance to use the power in wrong way. However, it is proved that the role and power of media in the society is essential for establishing good governance.

Recommendations for good governance in Bangladesh:

In the discussion above, I have tried to focus on the problems and prospects of good governance in Bangladesh. After the study I have some recommendations to overcome the challenges in order to promote good governance in Bangladesh.

First, most of the problems of the country are derived from the population problem. Because of over population and limited resources, it is really difficult to provide citizens with their basic needs. So, the government should take necessary steps to control the growth rate.

Second, democracy is the must for good governance. Bangladesh is in the practice in democracy. But to attain the benefit of democracy it is essential to practice democracy in all organs of the state like institutions, political parties, NGOs, private sector etc. The institutions should be independent so that they can promote better services to the public.

Third, strong local government system is necessary for Bangladesh as most of the people are affected by the system. The control of the central government hampers the activities of the local organs. Resources distribution will be proper and justified and people will get opportunity to participate in decision making process.

Forth, red tapism of bureaucracy is a major block to gain good governance. It reduces the efficiency of government officials. To remove the block the rules of procedure should be simplified and one stop service should be introduced. The peoples should have opportunity to get services in time.

Fifth, Political interference in administration should be withdrawn immediately as it causes sufferings to the citizen to have easy access to services. It also causes corruption and destroys impartial administrative system. To recover the problem, mass media and the civil society can play a vital role. A legal framework can also be introduced as a remedy of it.

Sixth, good governance requires a first and easy accessible service system. E-governance is an important step for better and rapid service. Although for the poor economic condition of the country is a barrier to the E-governance, government should ask cooperation from development partners and organizations.

Seventh, finally a political commitment is necessary for good governance. The law is not enough to make all the concern authorities aware of the current situation. Political parties are the most powerful and they have the more opportunity to create awareness among the whole nation.

Conclusion:

Bangladesh is a newly independent country. The time is not sufficient for better democratic system. Although some progress can be found in past, but the process is very slow. In the circumstances, the hope of good governance needs struggle of all organs of the state including political parties, civil society, mass media, NGOs. Awareness among the citizen is required as they should have strong demand for good governance. Bangladesh needs development in economy. The democracy should be institutionalized. The government should have fulfilled basic necessities of the people. All these initiatives will be supported and inspired if the initiative to promote good governance is speed up
