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GOOD GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY IN INDIA

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Abstract

Good Governance is required to ensure that the public policies have their desired effect. In the recent past, issues of governance have received serious attention from the researchers, policy makers and international development community. Today, 'governance' not only occupies centre stage in the development discourse but is also considered as a crucial element to be incorporated in the development strategy. The major focus of the study is on Good Governance and public policy process in India. In this context the present research paper discusses the basic concepts and elements of Good Governance in the first part of the article. The need of the Good Governance in the effective implementation of public policies has been elaborately discussed and the nature of public policy has been mentioned in the next part. Various stages and constraints that are involved in public policy process and need for an effective policy has been discussed in detail in subsequent parts.

Keywords

Good Governance, Public Policy

1. Introduction

In the recent past, issues of governance have received serious attention from the researchers, policy makers and international development community. Today, ‘governance’ not only occupies centre stage in the development discourse but is also considered as a crucial element to be incorporated in the development strategy. The search for good governance has been going on since time immemorial. Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Marx, Macpherson, Rawls in western tradition and Kautilya et al., in Indian tradition; and many others directly and indirectly have given the theory of governance of society and state in one form or the other.

2. Meaning of Governance

Government refers to the machinery and institutional arrangements of exercising the sovereign power for serving the political community, whereas governance means the process as well as the result of making authoritative decisions for the benefit of the society.

“Governance”, according to Oxford Dictionary, means “the act or manner of governing or the way of control”. So we define governance as the manner in which authority, control and power of government is exercised in mobilizing a society’s economic and social resources to address the issues of public interest. In brief, it is the art of governing associated with the exercise of authority within specific jurisdiction and is embedded in the structure of authority.

It would be good to bear in mind that governance refers to the interaction between government and other factors of the social sphere and the process of decision making in a complex world. Important though it is, the idea of governance need not be restricted only to the government. It is to be seen as a part of the complex matrix of relationship between the political and administrative structure and the society in the process of decision making, implementation and accountability.

World Bank defined Governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the

management of a country's economic and social resources.

UNDP viewed governance as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. According to OECD the concept of governance denotes the use of political authority and exercise of control in a society in relation to the management of its resources for social and economic development.

2.1 Meaning of Good and Good Governance

Governance as process denotes a value free dispensation whereas good governance connotes certain value assumptions. Thus, good governance is a value laden concept.

The word "good" is derived from the word God and carries an innate sense of judgment, i.e. what is right, what is wrong; what is just, what is unjust; what is fair, what is unfair; what is moral, what is immoral. So when judgment or deed is just, right fair or moral it is good. In the context of good governance it means right or just or moral judgments made by those exercising authority in the public interest. Now question arises what is public interest? Public interest at best means an aggregation of the interest of the many but certainly not of all. This comes closer to western thinking represented by Bentham – 'the greatest good for the greatest number' which rarely encompasses universality.

The journey of the concept of Good Governance in modern times has gone through many phases. In pre-independence period Gandhiji's vision of good governance essentially meant democratic decentralization which entailed power to the Gram Panchayats and people at the lowest level of political hierarchy. By the early 1990s, however, the idea of good governance had turned into a metaphor of donor-conditionality for the debt-ridden countries of Asia and Africa. It was often blamed for social unrest and political upheaval in many parts of the world. But freed from the element of coercion and external force, the concept retained a certain attraction spurring a number of policy initiatives based on the demand for participatory development, transparency in decision making and empowerment of people to decide and shape their destiny.

The concept of good governance was highlighted by World Bank in 1989 in its document on Sub-Saharan Africa. By good governance, it meant, sound public management, and in this context, identified four dimensions.

- Public sector management;
- Accountability;

- Legal framework for development; and
- Information and transparency.

In 1992, the Bank's document *Governance and Development* said, "Good governance is central to creating and sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development and it is an essential complement to sound economic policies". While saying so the document identified three aspects of governance:

- The form of political regimes;
- The process by which authority is exercised in the management of country's economic and social resources, and
- The capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policies and, in general, to discharge government functions.

2.2. Elements of Good Governance

The essential elements of good governance are:

2.2.1 Participation

It means people are the key to good governance. They are not only beneficiaries of good governance but also are the agents of it. They act not only through formal bodies like the executive, the legislature and the judiciary and formal means, such as the right to vote, but also through various groups and associations like trade unions, political parties, NGOs, business groups, caste or religious groups and even in their individual capacities, such as , writing letter to the editor, expressing views in radio or television. Participation can become meaningful only if governmental structures are flexible enough to facilitate easy and unhindered participation.

2.2.2 Accountability

It means those who rule are answerable to those from whom they derive their authority. This means establishing standards or "criteria for judging the performance of public officials.

2.2.3 Transparency

If refers to the availability of information to the general public and clarity about government rules, regulations, and decisions. This can be done by enforcing the citizen's right to information. Transparency helps in curbing corruption.

2.2.4 Consensus-oriented

It means that in a society where there are as many opinions as there are actors it is

mediation of different interests to find the best interest of the community.

2.2.5 Responsiveness

It means that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time. Effectiveness and efficiency imply that institutions and processes produce results that meet the needs of the society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.

2.2.6 Equity and inclusiveness

A call for a society whose well-being depends upon ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and nobody feels excluded from the mainstream of the society.

2.2.7 Rule of law

It stands for fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. This also included protection of human rights.

From the above discussion it should be clear that good governance is an ideal, which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Few countries and societies have come close to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure sustainable human development actions need to be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.

2.3 Public Policy and Good Governance

The objective of public policy is always and for all times is the betterment of the entire society. Good Governance is required to ensure that those policies have their desired effect. In essence, it concerns norms of behavior that help ensure that governments actually deliver to their citizens what they say they will. The two terms are so closely interlinked that it is very difficult to draw a dividing line between the two. They are like two sides of the same coin.

Public policy is the chief instrument of a politically organized community. The entire process involving /concerning public policy needs to be discerned primarily from two dominant angles. From the input side, the articulation of needs and interests and finally the factors determining the choice activity have to be looked at from the output side; a distributive analysis has to be undertaken, in that the impact of the policy has to be assessed. This brings two major dimensions to public policy making. It is an instrument of effective control over the environment in that it harbors the potential to create “apocryptic social transformation”. The other dimension is that it “derives the normative on which it is based from the environment.” It is the chief instrumentality by which the input throughput and output activity is performed.

3. What is policy?

Policy can be broadly be defined as a proposed course of action of an individual a group an institution or government, to realize a specific objective or purpose, within a given environment.

To William Jenkins (1978) who is regarded as an authority in the field of public policy, a policy is ‘a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actors or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve’.

Some of the definitions of Public policy are as following Robert Eye Stone terms public policy as “the relationship of government unit to its environment”. Thomas R. Dye says that “public policy is whatever government chooses to do or not do” Richard Rose says says, “Public Policy is not a decision, it is a course of pattern of activity”.

From these definitions it is clear that public policies are governmental decisions, and are actually the result of activities which the government undertakes in pursuance of certain goals and objectives. It can also be said that public policy formulation and implementation involves a well planned patterns or course of activity. It requires a thoroughly close knit relation and interaction between the important governmental agencies viz., the political executive, legislature, bureaucracy and judiciary.

The following points will make the nature of public policy clearer.

- Public policies are goal oriented. Public policies are formulated and implemented n order to attain the objectives which the Government has in view for the ultimate benefit of the masses in general. These policies clearly spell out the programmed of the government.
- Public policy is the outcome of the government’s collective actions. It means that it is a pattern or course of activity of the government officials and actors in a collective sense than being termed as third discrete and segregated decision.
- Public policy is what the government actually decides or chooses to do. It is the relationship of the government units to the specific field of political environment in a given administrative system. It can take a variety of forms like law, ordinances, court decisions, executive orders, decisions, etc.

- Public policy is positive in the sense that it depicts the concern of the government and involves its action to a participation problem on which the policy is made. It has the sanction of law and authority behind it. Negatively it involves a decision by the government officials regarding not taking any action on a particular issue.

3.1 Stages in Public Policy Process

A brief highlight on the various stages of public policy will clarify the actual process of public policy.

Policy formulation is the first stage in public policy process. Through this process the demands of the system are converted into policies. But before this it has to be clearly established as to which demands require to be converted into policies. The next stage in public policy process is policy education. The government through various channels of mass-media attempts to make masses aware of the formulated policies. After this come the stage of policy implementation, which the policies are systematically executed by the different administrative agencies at the central, state and local levels. To ascertain the impact of policies, it is very essential to keep an eye on the implementation process, to see that the expenditure does not exceed the resources available and to see that policies are positively affecting those for whom they are being made. For this proper monitoring of policy implementation has to be done, and policy evaluation is the final stage in policy process. Proper and appropriate administrative and adjudicative functions are needed for keeping a complete control over the public policies.

3.2 Constraints in Policy Making

The success of any policy depends on how well it is designed, formulated, implemented and evaluated. Thus all the stages of policy cycle are crucial, still a systematic policy design, a full-fledged policy education programme and a near fool-proof evaluation system can go a long way in making the policy effective.

There are various constraints in policy making which adversely affect the policy process. Inadequate expertise and skills available with the personnel engaged in policy making, lack of clarity of goals and emphasis on short term benefits, non-involvement of socially enlightened groups are some of the constraints. In making a choice, the decision makers may also be influenced by their ideologies, caste and class interests or regional and ethnic loyalties.

At policy implementation level there are many constraints like inadequacy of financial

resources, increase in expenditure due to non-adherence of time schedules political interference, lack of peoples support. There are problems related to implementation like lack of administrative will, lack of initiative, lack of team spirit, corrupt officials, lack of motivation and lack of accountability. Also there are problems due to delay like delays in sanction due to the involvement of a large number of agencies, delays due to frustrating negotiations.

Moreover faulty policy design, non-existence of policy education, improper monitoring and evaluation of policies can also be added to the list of constraints.

3.3. To overcome the constraints

Need for an effective policy process:

Public policy is a via media between the government and citizens. It provides instances of citizen-government interface. Hence the spirit in which democracy is played is expressed via policy statement. Citizen-involvement in administration is crucial. Participatory via participatory policy formation and implementation, and decentralized decision making, it is hoped, will cultivate healthy citizenship on the part of the people. There should be sufficient mechanisms for demand articulation and conflict resolution. Policy process requires the support of voluntary associations, workers cooperatives, trade unions, women's organisations, human rights groups and various enlightened bodies to make policies and achieve their goals. These are the for a through which diverse opinions can be articulated and presented to the government. The government must give opportunities for the expression of such opinions.

Public interest is at the core of public policy formulation. It is contended that it is unfair to consider majority will as public interest. Majority opinion however is an important variable and cannot be discounted. There is then the question of minority opinion and of its integration with the majority opinion. There should be integration or harmonization of different interests through consensus.

Public policy should attain distributive and re-distributive goals. Social Equity and social ethics must be weaved into the fabric of policy science.

To make the administration citizen-friendly, mechanisms have to be developed for citizens' grievance ventilation and redressed. Politicization of bureaucracy and interference of administration in the lives of citizens will need to be ended. Questions of appointment, promotion, transfer of civil servants and their interface with Ministers, etc., have to be looked

into, and health norms of accountability to the people established through necessary administrative reform. The following changes must be made to make the administration citizen friendly:

- First and foremost, there has to be a behavioural and attitudinal change in the civil services. The civil servant must be trained to serve the people, inculcate a work culture and spirit of efficiency and excellence. Also we must rid the sources of casteism, corruption and politicization. Officials, before starting their career, in addition to the taking of an oath of loyalty to the constitution, should swear to abide by the basic principles of good governance. The administrative structure and systems have to be consciously redesigned.
- Denial of timely services to the public must be specifically made a serious conduct offence and subjected to summary and exemplary punishment. There must be better accountability procedure by curbing the tendency of having multiplicity of hierarchical levels, diffusion of responsibility and passing the buck. Where public servants cause loss to the state by their malafide actions or omissions, they should be made liable to make good the loss caused and in addition, pay damages. A law should be enacted to provide for forfeiture of benami property of corrupt public servant as well as non-public servants.
- There is need to review the prescribed procedures for inquiries, punishment, appealed to shorten their duration and to reduce the possibility of interlocutory delays or more than one appeal. Constitutional safeguards to services under Art 322 may need reconsideration to ensure greater accountability.
- Supervision and inspection must be prescribed as primary duties of the higher echelons and negligence in this matter made a black mark for the purpose of performance evaluation and promotion. The reformed system should provide effective ways of prompt decision making, quick disposal and avoidance of delays, misuse of discretion and attendant corruption.
- A prominently displayed and widely published citizens' charter may be the principal declaratory mission statement on behalf of each department and office having dealings with the public.
- There should full use of all the new and emerging technologies for more efficient

governance.

Policy education is a very important stage in policy cycle. People have to be made aware of the objectives of the policies, the benefits that can be derived from them, the implementation machinery chosen for the policies the changes that could be brought about through policies, the nature of their effect on the people. Such type of education can go a long way in developing the right kind of attitudes in people towards government policies and increasing people's participation in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

In order to determine the success or failure of a policy, it is essential that a systematic and effective policy evaluation system should exist in the country. Policy evaluation has to be quantitative as well as qualitative.

4. Conclusion

After all, it is implementation that yields results more than the soundness of public policy as such. But implementation is ultimately a team work. Blame game which is often found in our society, is to be avoided at all costs. Those who formulate the public policy ought to have the sacred responsibility of overseeing its implementation without any sort of bias. Those who are involved in the implementation of public policy ought to know the basic philosophical approach enshrined in the public policy. Then only team work becomes easier and faster. Insulating the bureaucracy from the unwarranted political pressures is indispensable to achieve the values of good governance. Accountability is another basic requirement to realize the goals and ideals of good governance; and it should at all levels. Accountability, can be reasonably expected, makes the bureaucrat to put his/her heart and soul into the work. But, at another level it is the feeling of responsiveness or conscience pricking that acts as a greater spur and haunts the official to work harder and to realize the cherished goals. Inter alia, enlightened citizenship will make the democracy more vibrant and it will go a long way in achieving the goals of good governance. This is what that was stressed by Lord Beveridge when he famously remarked "Democracy if it knows its business has no need to fear bureaucracy."

To sum up, an honest public policy and efficient yet good governance are the primary tools if we are to realize the Gandhi is greatest words "to wipe out every tear from every man's eye."

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