

Understanding Governance

Introduction

Governance is not merely what a government does. It also includes how decisions are taken and the processes involved; how the same is carried out and how it engages the citizen in decision making and carrying out the same. This includes exercising its authority under the Constitution, various Acts, Rules and established procedures; management of resources under its command and discharging its duties and obligations as well as improving well-being and equity of the society. It also includes the process of decision making in exercising the authority and taking other administrative actions. Democracy is not merely a form of government but valuing individual citizen irrespective of his or her social and economic status and providing best care to meet everyone's need, aspirations and well-being. Thus whatever government does is not in vacuum but in relation to the people. There has to be a continuous interactive process between the government and the civil society and how the citizen gets engaged in that process shapes the nature of governance. The same varies widely across countries and across states within the same country and the nature of governance is a key determinant of the progress of the country or state, as the case may be in terms of well-being of the people. Understanding nature of governance and how the same can be improved for maximizing well-being of the citizen thus assumed great importance.

Politics and Governance

In a democratic set up government policy is guided by the political ideology and vision of the ruling political party. Politics involves processes by which a group of people reach collective decisions and enforce or attempt to enforce the same. Political party in power exercises legitimate authority through the political executives by framing government policy and monitoring implementation of the same. Thus political parties exercise power through the government formed by them and the government exercises power through its bureaucracy, which requires norms for avoiding or at least minimizing subjectivity in exercising power. The mechanism of exercising political power in governance should also be properly laid which will pass the test of judicial scrutiny. However, in practice political authorities may exercise power without legitimacy and bypassing the laid procedures. That is possible only if the procedure for exercising political power is not laid clearly leaving loopholes or the same is violated. However, such violation is generally possible if the bureaucracy also becomes an accomplice either being threatened (of being transferred etc which the political executives are authorized to do etc) and the officer concerned fails to take a stand against illegitimate action or he/she colludes with the political executives for some gain (good posting or financial gain). Lack of transparency makes such collusion easier. Any illegitimate use of power leads to weakening of the bureaucracy, which succumb to more such pressures, either under threat or for gain leading to poor governance. Even legitimate use of power by political executives may also lead to poor governance, if decision is taken with ill motive like undue financial gain or promoting other vested interest under the influence of various powerful groups. Such influences can be subtle and resulting decisions may have adverse impact on people with little awareness and voice and, therefore, may be overlooked or may be imposed against the wishes of those people. With growing market and related forces there is more possibility of powerful lobbying for financial gain by groups sacrificing interests of the others. Watch on the government actions by the civil

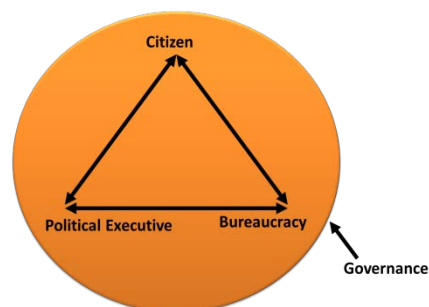
society, mass media and political parties can prevent actions which adversely affects the overall interests of the country or the state. Public interest litigation and interventions of the judiciary has also has become an important dimension of preventing political executives from doing certain things or forcing them to take and implement certain decisions. Therefore, the civil society, mass media, the political parties in opposition and the judiciary have important roles in shaping governance by the political executives. Any ruling party does not have absolute support of all the citizens and, therefore, considering that governance is just a collective steering and management of the common problems of the society through formal law and rule based system, it is better to have the views of the political parties in opposition, who have their followers, in deciding policy by the ruling party. It is even better to consult the citizen directly in case of very critical issues through process of referendum, which is yet to be adopted in India. Consultation with all political parties may be treated as a proxy of consulting all citizen and different interest groups. That requires continuous dialogue among political parties and public debate and discussions on the major issues involved, to get issue based feedback of as many stake holders as possible. Those in opposition may cooperate or go on a path of conflict, in case their view on policy is to the contrary. Policy related issues of governance are determined by the ideology of the political party in power and administration of the policy through the government structure is more guided by Acts, Rules and Procedures and should be neutral to any political system. Reaching consensus and majority support through dialogue is likely to increase cooperation and reduce the areas of conflict which helps better implementation of the policies and the citizens (with allegiance to different political parties) may find it easier to participate in the government programmes. In reality there could be less tolerance and respect for each other among political parties, which badly affects governance. Thus the nature of political formation and inter-relations of the political parties have impact on governance.

The political agenda of the ruling party is a key determinant of the nature of governance in terms of what gets priority to be delivered to the citizen. Setting the agenda depends on what the people demand in terms of their need and based on that what is prioritized by the political parties for overall transformation of the society and its economy. Politicization of agenda is thus very crucial. However, some of the issues are easy to be politicized because of their sensitivity (issues related to price rise, wage rate, reservation for jobs & many economic demands etc) but there are very important social issues like child labour, elementary education, immunization, prevention of diseases by improving public health determinants like safe water, nutrition & sanitation etc. which are comparatively more difficult to be politicized. Such issues have not been brought to the forefront by political parties as much as other issues and the country continue to have poor social indicators as compared to other countries with similar income. Those social issues require tremendous mobilization of the people to participate and involvement of political parties in pursuing those goals can facilitate faster development. Therefore, nature of influence on governance by political parties will have two major components – firstly the agenda put to priority by the political parties and in articulating such demand by mobilizing the people behind the same and secondly the processes followed in translating their agenda in to concrete deliverable by the bureaucracy.

Citizen and Governance

Democracy can be truly functional only by continuous engagement of the citizen with the government. The form of the government is structured by the Constitutional and legal

framework. The way citizen gets engaged with the government is not so structured on a legal framework (except in the process of formation of government by exercising their voting rights) but depends much on various norms and practices which evolve over time to build up related social capital. The same is facilitated by providing appropriate legal rights (which often depends on raising demand by the citizen of which one good example is the enactment of the Right to Information Act) as well as various social and political factors. The nature of engagement of the citizen and proactiveness of the government in promoting such engagement is an important determinant of the nature of governance as well as its outcome in terms of well-being of the people. The process of engagement involves understanding of functioning of the government, assessing its performance and quality and efficiency of services delivered as well as their rights and obligation by the citizen. They should also be aware of the possible policy options and the alternatives if they are not satisfied with any decision or its implementation and should be empowered to articulate their voice. Governance can improve only by creating condition for better articulation of voice of the citizen and improving various processes within government to meet the needs of the people by translating the feedback from the citizen in to tangible action. Thus bureaucracy has a big role in understanding the needs and grievances of the people and responding to their voice. Assessing functioning of government by the people requires unmediated access to adequate information and the constraint government faces should also be clearly communicated to avoid demands which cannot be satisfied and the best option is to also seek people's advice on such constraints so that either both government and the people together work out a way out or the people appreciate the difficulty and drop the demand. This process can be enhanced only with more dialogue with the citizen and transparency in functioning of the government. In order to articulate the voice of the citizen there should be suitable organizations, which can be location specific or content specific. The range of such organizations could vary from a small Community Based Organizations (could be even a SHG or their Cluster) or a Non Government Organization or a profession based group or a political outfit. However, even individual citizen raises many important issues and communicates their grievances. The government has to be sensitive enough in redressing such grievances, if necessary through appropriate systemic improvement. In practice, such issue, however important that may be, tends to be neglected. Thus the problems get aggravated and the people lose confidence on the government leading to serious dislocation and even violence. People's grievances and related failures of government are also brought to notice by the press and other mass media and the visual effect of electronic media is growingly influencing public opinion. Free press and other mass media can be effective in promoting governance by bringing the failure before the people and thereby compelling government to take cognizance of the issue and taking necessary corrective measures. Governance can improve only by changing attitude and building capacity of the government in registering grievances of the citizen and sorting those out promptly. Enhancing people's engagement and sensitizing the bureaucracy in being more citizen-centric is essential in this context. Governance is thus an interactive process among the political functionaries; the permanent bureaucracy and the citizen for delivering certain goods and services efficiently and effectively for well-being of the citizen. The interactive relationship of governance is shown in the diagram below.



The people's representatives and the political executives in government internalizes needs of the citizen and steer the bureaucracy accordingly and they also receive feedback from the citizen about satisfaction of their needs; the bureaucracy delivers goods and services to the citizen and the citizens participate in delivery of those services and expresses their suggestions and grievances and the bureaucracy reports to the political executives about the output that is delivered, its outcome and its impact which is judges against the goals set based on the political vision of the political party in power. Governance improves if the said mutual relationships and interactions are strong, healthy and mutually reinforcing.

Governance for Achieving Goals Effectively and Efficiently

Governance in a democratic set up is all about collectively working towards maximizing well-being of the people with justice, equity and sustainability. The goals related to enhancement of overall well-being and how the same will be achieved is to be clearly set to avoid any deviations. Also, there is competing demand on government resources by various interest groups with different needs and aspirations. Some of the groups could be powerful enough to influence government decisions in their favour while interests of others may be ignored. Also, benefits or goals related to the deprived sections may be misappropriated by those who have the means to do so unless the targets and processes are clearly established. It is pertinent to mention that at present more than 50% of the GDP in India is contributed by the private sector and many of the needs of the people who can afford to pay is catered by that sector. That leaves certain core functions related to regulatory administration which in not possible to be handled in the private domain or not remunerative (such as law and order, granting citizenship, control of communicable diseases etc.) and delivery of those public goods and services which the poorer section needs for their survival and moving towards ending deprivation is to be handled directly by the government alone. Many of the regulatory tasks related to core governance functions are linked to providing basic citizen services and protecting various rights including human rights provided under the law. The goals and related functions are clearly laid in such cases and the seriousness associated with reaching those goals and ensuring related rights to every citizen is an important determinant of governance. Many of the developmental goals are also becoming right-based such as right to get unskilled wage labour, right to education etc. and the goals are clearly set under the relevant Act. Governance in these cases is to reach the goal and normally the poorer sections of the society only are away from the set goals and pro-poor governance helps to make those rights universal. Other goals not guaranteed by any Act, are to be clearly set and people are to be made aware of the same. Setting clear goals and related deliverables of goods and services in objective terms and deciding the processes and timeframe of achieving those are important aspects of governance. The goals are to be achieved by administrative actions and there has to be clearly defined outputs to eventually reach the outcome as per the goal. Ability to govern is judged by the efficiency of mobilizing all possible resources, which include manpower, money and material etc. and deploying those resources for achieving all the goals and within the given timeframe. This also requires clear identification of tasks, delegation of responsibilities related to those tasks to different sub-units and ultimately to each person within the government organization, defining the processes and system for carrying out all tasks so that everyone associated with governance is clearly enabled and empowered to perform his/her task and every sub-unit of government has clearly identified deliverables. There also has to be arrangement for monitoring of performance/outputs at each level, measuring outcomes and evaluating impacts related to the goals to be achieved. Also, there is need for a strong system of monitoring and

evaluation as well as obtaining feedback from the citizen for correcting any failure in delivery of goods or services through strong enforcement mechanism.

Governance and Sound Fiscal Management

All activities related to governance involve expenditure. While governance as a whole may be understood as doing the right thing in the right way but another dimension of the same is doing thing at the right cost. Apart from issues related to expenditure authorization and following prudent financial norms, ability to mobilize fund in a sustainable way is very crucial. The questions which can be raised are whether the government is mobilizing enough resources in the right way and spending the same keeping in mind the goals set with prudence and what are the alternatives possible. Inability to mobilize resources, over dependence on borrowing and utilizing resources more than what can be sustained and inability to utilize available resources on time reflect poor efficiency and lack of prudence. Many of the shortfalls in reaching the desired goals are linked to lack of sound financial management system, which also promotes corruption. The problem gets more complicated in a federal set up in which ability to raise resources may not conform to the expenditure liability of the lower tiers of government. Efficiency of mobilizing revenue, prudence in expenditure authorization, timeliness in fund utilization and following rules and norms for fiscal management are very important in deciding the nature of governance. There are several indicators of fiscal management which can be understood by the ordinary people and the same should be shared with the citizen for their knowledge, appreciation and public debate. Allowing the citizen to assess the fiscal situation and keeping them apprised with facts is an important aspect of governance. On the other hand lack of transparency, providing incomplete information or distorted information may enhance the crisis related to fiscal management in governance.

Another important aspect of governance is the expenditure the citizen has to incur in accessing services from the government as well as their cost of participation in various governance processes for steering public policy as well as in expressing their dissatisfaction. Both are very crucial for the poorer section of the community for whom the cost of participation may be disproportionately higher than the expected gain forcing them to remain out of the loop. The same has to be reduced for improving governance. With advancement of electronic technology it is now easier to reduce both the costs substantially.

Decentralization for Improving Governance

Needs and aspiration of the people as well as the local context in terms of socio-economic status, agro-climatic condition, history of development and culture etc. vary widely across different regions. The problem is more complex and diverse for vast countries like India. Therefore, central or even state level governments are not in a position to address the local issues with widely varying characteristics. Also, there are several governance functions which can be addressed more effectively and efficiently from local level. In fact, for efficiency of allocation of resources as well as responsiveness and effectiveness, the principle of subsidiarity demands that any decision, which may be taken at any particular level, should not be taken from higher than that level. Thus, local government has the potential for gaining in effectiveness and efficiency in delivering public services. For enabling the local governments to function well appropriate functions which may be handled at the local level are to be devolved on the local bodies. Devolution (of function) is what is entrusted fully without living any discretion of

interventions from above and for carrying out the entrusted responsibilities those bodies should be duly supported with necessary fund, functionaries and freedom. Authority is to be entrusted on the local bodies preferably through legislative process and the local governments has to conform to the rules and processes established for carrying out their functions. Conformance to rules and processes as well as ability to work to achieve the broad goals set by the higher level government is very crucial and performance of the local bodies should be reviewed for related compliances. However, if there is only political decentralization by merely arranging democratically elected government at the local level without devolving required authority and responsibility matched by transferring required resources there is little gain. Decentralization may be done by giving responsibilities to the sub-offices also, which is rather called de-concentration but such system suffers from poor accountability towards the local people, poor supervision from above, exercising authority without any check, administrative delay in responding to the problems requiring interventions from above, lack of sensitivity towards the location specific problems and little flexibility to be responsive to the local needs. The voice of the people for improving governance hardly reaches the decision makers and being far away they can also ignore the problem, as if the problem does not exist. Also areas far from state and district headquarters usually are poorly served due to higher vacancies and the employees belonging to state cadre tend move away from those places. All these alienate the local people from participating in various aspects of governance and they become the objects of development. On the other hand, if functions are devolved to the locally elected bodies that not only helps acquiring ownership by the elected local authorities and ensuring participation of the local people it also improves accountability of the delivery machineries to such authority, who remain answerable to the local people not only through the democratic process of election but also in their easy access and frequent interactions with the community. The elected persons are much more aware of the local issues and can focus on those issues better than any outside officials and the people also face less social distance from the elected authorities, which leads to more inclusiveness in governance. However, the local government has to appreciate the goals set by the higher level government and the local context for appropriate actions in achieving those goals. Keeping all those in mind, the system of local governance with clearly assigned authorities and headed by democratically elected people's representatives has been developed in almost all countries. However, establishment of local government only creates potential for efficiency gain but in practice the actual gain will depend on the nature and extent of devolution and building up capacity of the local bodies in taking those responsibilities. The local governments are to be appropriately enabled and empowered for discharging their responsibilities, which is often neglected in many developing countries. The state has responsibility for establishing and continuously nourishing the local government institution for improving governance at the local level. The local governments are not generally strong enough because of inadequate measures taken from the state government in building institutional capacity and in not devolving enough resources to those bodies. Local governments can not only provide local services assigned to those bodies but can also mediate other needs of the local people more effectively because of their proximity with the people. Thus development of local government institution can improve governance substantially. Also, it is easier to access services from local government by the poorer section of the people and, therefore, alleviation of poverty in all its dimensions is better addressed by the local governments. However, there is need for synergy of functioning of the local government with the higher level governments which require mechanism for continuous dialogue with the local government and the state government.

Rule of Law and Objectivity in Governance

While setting goals and working out strategies for achieving the goals is done by the political executives, often in consultation with permanent bureaucracy, implementation of those involves taking many administrative decisions on a day to day basis. The same requires formal structure with clearly delineated authority at many levels involving a large workforce. Thus governance is a huge collection of decision making and implementation processes taking place at multi-tiers and multi-locations and in different sub-streams of departmental organizations. There is need for coordination and convergence of activities so that all the wings requiring synergy of functioning and having impact of one on the other work in unison. Functioning of such a huge organization requires proper delegation of authority, administrative rules and procedures or written instructions as to how the authority will be exercised so that whoever exercises any authority the outcome does not vary substantially. That also sets the norms for functioning, which is essential for judging whether authority was exercised legitimately and following due processes, which constitutes the accountability framework. For judging the action taken or not taken by anyone in government all processes followed and decisions taken are to be documented in a structured way and preserved in a easily retrievable manner so that there is a clear audit trail as to who has done what. One component of the same is keeping accounts of the expenditure so that expenditure related decisions and actions can be audited. In fact, all financial rules and regulations are to ensure financial accountability. Similarly, physical achievements are to be recorded and people are to be given access to the official records in order that the same can be verified with what the people see or experience, which is the basis of transparency in government. To merely follow rule and maintaining transparency is not adequate if the ultimate goals, as set by the government in terms of well-being of the people are not achieved, which requires every sub-unit of the government to function efficiently and effectively. For organizational efficiency there are three basic requirements. The first one is enabling the bureaucratic machinery to act with authority for achieving certain administrative function and it involves clearly defining the responsibility that everyone has to carry out and assigning due authority required for such functioning. The second one is empowering them with required resources including training and helping them to acquire capacity to transact administrative tasks efficiently and following all rules and procedures as well as with prudence. The third one is a mechanism for identifying all deviations and failures and to enforce compliance to rules once the same is noticed. One should have a clear understanding of how anyone associated with governance has been enabled to function, their level of empowerment in terms of being able to discharge their responsibilities and what is the mechanism by which any failure related to commission or omission is detected, corrected and if circumstance demands is duly punished. Two important failures in this regard are worth mentioning. One is the effort gap of the government functionaries in not doing what they are supposed to do by physical absence (particularly in sub-offices with little day to day supervision), remaining present for the sake of it but not performing their tasks efficiently and pursuing other interests. The second one is various types of unethical practices and corruption including taking bribe for personal gain. Proper governance requires following certain norms, generally known as good governance, as mentioned below.

Issues Related to Good Governance

The word Good governance is widely used to indicate the processes and practices which promote improved functioning of the governance mechanism. Eight major characteristics, which describe

the processes, by which various activities related to governance are carried out, are key determinants of good governance. Those are shown in the diagram below.

Characteristics of good governance



Accountability

Accountability is about being answerable for everything done or not done in governance and is a key requirement of good governance. In general, an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Functioning of the government affects the citizen and the government is primarily accountable to them in terms of overall functioning. However, overall functioning of the government is the aggregate of individual functioning and to ensure that government functions well everyone has to function well and to remain accountable in carrying out responsibilities assigned to him/her as per hierarchy of the administrative structure. However, accountability chain in government is always upwards, i.e., one is accountable to immediate superior and the chain of accountability is quite long to be effective. The citizen should be able to voice any failure and even a feeble voice at the cutting edge should find its way to the appropriate authority to trigger the chain of internal accountability and to take action to redress the grievances. Citizen should have access to information related norms of functioning and actual functioning for judging the government which requires transparency of functioning of the government.

Transparency

Transparency entails system of taking decisions and their enforcement in a manner that follows rules, regulations and prudence as well as easy availability of related information to those who will be affected by such decisions or those who are interested to know the same. So maintaining transparency will require clearly defining how decisions will be taken and there should be no lack of clarity in following the same. Improving transparency will also imply unmediated access to information, which is easier these days using Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and proactively disclosing information which people normally desire to know. Such information should be specific (e.g., not by number of beneficiaries but their names and addresses, if possible) and easily understandable for the public and in adequate detail for proper appreciation of the decision making and implementation processes and outputs. After enactment of the Right to Information Act in the country the legal framework for maintaining transparency has improved, though its proper implementation is far from reality.

Rule of law

Objectivity in governance can be achieved only through impartial decision making and implementation. Therefore, good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. It also requires full protection of human rights and justice towards the deprived section of the community, particularly in reaching benefits targeted towards such people. Impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force and other enforcing machinery for taking penal measures against any failure to comply with the law. Many of the processes in governance can be easily vitiated due to failure of enforcement of law or taking decisions sacrificing ethics and without objectivity and prudence; which are major barriers to good governance. Absence of rule of law promotes and sustains many forms of corruption in governance and lowers the efficiency of use of resources.

Participation

The government is primarily concerned with the well-being of the citizen, who has the highest stake in the quality of governance. Participation of the citizen is, therefore, essential for steering policy of the government, implementation of the same, watching its functioning and raising their voice in case of malfunctioning of the system. Steering government policy requires articulating demand by the people, which in turn requires organization of the people. Since the poor and the deprived people have more dependence on governance and are hit the hardest due to failure of governance their participation in governance is very crucial. However, they have little empowerment to do so and have a low voice to articulate their demand and they need to be organized and empowered to participate in governance. Thus, organizing the poor to facilitate their participation is very crucial. Various civil society organizations and even the Self Help Groups can help the people to articulate their demands related to enhancement of their well-being. The second aspect of participation is to be actively associated with implementation of various programmes. Adequate awareness of the people and reaching out by the government machineries to the unreached are crucial in this respect. This is crucial in respect of all targeted services, which may be miss-appropriated by others or where any benefit has to reach every individual (programmes like elementary education, immunization, registering every birth & death etc). The third aspect of participation is people's watch on the governance. Whatever is reported to have been achieved by the implementing machinery may differ substantially from the experience of the people. That is precisely the reason for which government functionaries may not encourage monitoring of output by the people. Participation of the people in monitoring government function and its outcome is, therefore, very important. The present initiative for social audit may substantially improve people's watch on governance. Transparency is a prior requirement for participation and more and proactive disclosure helps people to participate and watch functioning of the government.

Responsiveness

Good governance requires that the government institution is responsive to the need of the people and those are addressed within a reasonable timeframe. That includes taking cognizance of their problem with least delay and sorting out the same as soon as possible and to communicate with them in case there is any difficulty. If the people are able to communicate their problem properly, which requires prior announcement by government as to which authority is responsible for what services at different levels and if the authority concerned becomes receptive to what is brought to their notice can improve governance. Also, informing the people on action taken or

difficulty, if any, improves trust on the government. Developing proper attitude towards the citizen, proactiveness in resolving their problem and prompt communication with them are important determinants in improving responsiveness. However, instead of being proactive the system is often reactive or indifferent towards the need of the citizen leading to poor governance.

Consensus oriented

There are several actors and many view points in a given society. Good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community and continuous dialogue among all the stakeholders. Consensus in decisions also improves compliance making easier implementation of the decision taken.

Equity and inclusiveness

One of the objectives of development is to end deprivation and sufferings of the people and to provide minimum level of well-being to every citizen. So, consideration of equity in decision making and providing more care and support to those who are lagging behind is one general policy of governance. This acts in respect of delivering goods and services as well as in raising resources for the state. More equity is not only an end in itself by its intrinsic value but the same also unleashes the potential of every human being to function more efficiently in his/her social and economic role for enriching the society. Inclusiveness is an important aspect of any society, which ensures that all its members feel that they have a stake in progress of the society and no one feels excluded from the economic, social and political processes within the society. For good governance every one, particularly those who are marginalized, should have option to participate appropriately in all such processes and feel that the government is concerned to look after their interests and is fair in taking any decision which affects them. More equity promotes inclusiveness of the deprived section of the community and facilitates overall well-being of the society. However, the country faces tremendous amount of inequality in both economic and social development and growth without equity and inclusiveness accelerates dissent and disintegration of the society. Good governance is to focus on correcting those failures as early as possible.

Effectiveness and efficiency

Good governance means that institutional process and its functioning produces results that meet the needs of society effectively by efficient utilization of available resources. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources, protection of the environment and mitigating risk of disaster, which requires current investment for deriving benefit in future. Efficient use of resources may not automatically serve the interest of the people for which it should be ensured that resources are utilized in the best interest of the citizen and to their best satisfaction for which both participation of the people and responsiveness of the government institution towards the problem of the citizen are critical determinants. Since resource is always scarce in government, efficient utilization of available resources in effectively addressing the issues, i.e., reaching the goals with minimum deployment of resources is very crucial. In practice huge resource is wasted and poor discipline associated with large effort-gap

results in low productivity of the bureaucracy and there is poor fiscal management. Efficient management manpower, money and physical resources are essential for good governance and developing capacity for those is an urgent need.

ICT in Promoting Good Governance

Many of the elements of good governance can be achieved by adopting various ICT measures, what is popularly known as e-Governance. The first one is improving accountability. Electronic record keeping including maintaining accounts and processing of data has many advantages like keeping data in a structured form, easy storage and retrieval, rule based processing of the same and maintaining excellent and reliable audit trail of action taken by whom and when, all of which help to improve accountability. Electronic communication is also direct, which cuts the bureaucratic channel of putting information received from the citizen after due processing by others which is helpful in reducing the long chain of accountability. The person having authority can, therefore, be approached by the citizen quickly and directly for triggering the internal hierarchical accountability and subsequent process of rectification concerning any failure. Such communication is also powerful since apart from text form the content may be enriched by photographs, videos etc, which may help better appreciation of the problem. ICT based applications make it easier to measure the output as well as any effort-gap of an individual and it also improves transparency, because any electronic data can be easily shared through websites which provides unmediated access to the information. Common mischief like manipulating date, changing time of submission of applications etc, which are required to be processed serially can be easily prevented in any electronically maintained database and the stages of processing within office can also be shared with the citizen seamlessly through website, SMS based query or interactive telephonic query. Thus many of the internal activities can be brought to public viewing for improving transparency. Increase in efficiency of service delivery is another outcome of e-Governance. Many services may be provided electronically through web portal, which totally eliminates any physical interface with government officials and thereby, any subjectivity involving harassment, insensitive or inefficient dealing or even rent seeking can be avoided. Delivery of services become inefficient or costly to the citizen due to payment of bribe and repeated visits to the office. If applications, tender papers or grievances etc are received electronically that saves lot of trouble and resources of the citizen in visiting the office and even facing obstruction (in submission of tender paper etc) to transact their business. Electronic procurement allow not only submission of tender paper electronically but much faster electronic processing for evaluation of tenders based on set norms, which save time for materializing any tender and avoid human error or any manipulation under some influence. Application of ICT can also enhance participation of the people in steering state policy by articulating their demand through networking and communicating the same electronically, providing feedback on policy papers circulated for public opinion and receiving information from the government through website or specific communication through SMS to any targeted group of people. Thus, there is a very strong case for strengthening e-Governance in all tiers of government. The state has to go a long way in achieving those and to act urgently.

Measuring Governance Quality

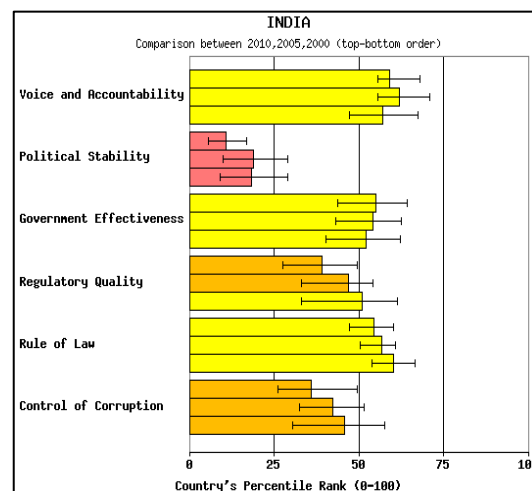
Improving governance results in high dividend in terms of well-being of the citizen and any government central, state or local should strive for improving the same. Improvement can be measured by appropriate indicators. However, as explained before, governance encompasses

multifaceted activities involving various processes aimed at resulting in wide range of outcome for the benefit of the society. Measurement of governance quality by developing an index is, therefore, very difficult, particularly in uniquely identifying the indicators. The indicators could be many to capture various aspects of governance. Such an index will be obviously not very precise but may broadly capture the key components of governance and may be helpful in comparison of quality of governance in different countries or the same country/state or local body over a period. The Development Research Group of the World Bank has developed a World-wide Governance Index (WGI) based on six key dimensions of governance. Those are:-

- 1. Voice and Accountability:** the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media;
- 2. Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism:** the likelihood that the government will be destabilized by unconstitutional or violent means, including terrorism;
- 3. Government Effectiveness:** capacity of the civil service, its quality and independence from political pressures; and the quality of policy formulation;
- 4. Regulatory Quality:** the ability of the government to provide sound policies and regulations that enables and promotes private sector development;
- 5. Rule of Law:** abiding by the rules of society, including the quality of contract enforcement and property rights, the police and the courts, as well as incidence of crime and violence; and
- 6. Control of Corruption:** the extent to which public power is exercised for curbing private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as capture of the state by elites and private interests.

Such indicators may not be able to capture the complexity of the government process in full and there could be many local factors which affects governance positively as well as negatively and not captured in such index. However, progress of any particular country over time can be assessed with the help of such indicators. The diagram below presents the progress of those indicators for India during the period 2000 to 2010, as worked out by the said group of the World Bank (the possible range of error is also shown in the diagram).

Change of governance index for India over the period 2000 to 2010



25th-50th Percentile

50th-75th Percentile

10th-25th Percentile

The diagram above shows that there has been decline in quality of governance in India in many of the indicators over the last ten years. Although the measurement is not precise but recent incidents of public outrage on many of the issues associated with governance is a cause of concern. There should be a major drive in improving governance.

Improving Governance –the way forward

One may be made aware about elements of good governance rather easily but it is difficult to implement those and the same requires many systemic changes and working in unison of the functionaries of the government, the political parties, the citizen and their organizations and the press and other mass media etc. However, government has a key role in facilitating the process and involving all others in the process. Some of the interventions by the government related to improving governance are strategic in nature requiring change of policy and adoption of systemic measures across a large if not the entire government structure. That is to be done from appropriately higher level requiring political will with due administrative measures including strong determination to enforce the changes and close monitoring. This is more important in changes which affect the vested interests because many of the failures in governance are embedded in illegitimate gain and gap in effort. Apart from that there is general apathy to change in any organization. Therefore, management of change is very crucial in improving governance. There are some interventions, which may not be so strategic requiring change of policy but operational in nature involving changes related to procedures and practices at the local level or within a department or directorate or even within an office. Local initiatives can imbibe quite a few elements of good governance, which will have immediate impact in that particular office but will have the potential of being adopted elsewhere. Any officer in charge of an office or even a wing of an office can adopt such measures and to that extent every officer belonging to state civil services can contribute in improving governance. Apart from the right understanding and initiatives the tenure of the officer leading the drive for improvement is important. Since the tenure is uncertain and usually not very long the process for possible improvement should start at the very beginning of joining any new assignment, which may start by questioning the processes and practices followed in the office and the output delivered. What an administrator can do at the operational level is partly common across different offices and development of proper ideas and initiatives can help to begin the process early even in a new posting. In fact, experience gained in one office helps in improving skill and confidence in understanding the failures in other offices and taking measures for its improvement. In addition to that the officers may participate effectively in any systemic improvement taken up at any higher level if they have better understanding of governance and how to improve the same. It is time for everyone concerned to act towards improving governance.