

# Good Governance at a glance *By: Anton X. Rajinthrakumar*

## Why a big fuss about Good Governance

It's fair to state at the outset that recently the term "good governance" has been widely used in economic and political arenas. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of failures of projects and developmental programmes especially in developing nations. In some cases, bad governance is being regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies.

Good Governance has been the buzz word since the early nineties in the development literature. When we look around the world today, the complex relationship between stability, good governance and economic development is abundantly apparent. There is a spectrum of circumstances, ranging from the war-torn and ungovernable to the vibrant and thriving, and everything in between. Over the last couple of decades, a greater importance has been given to both governance and the corruption that arises due to bad governance.

Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. It is important to note that when politicians declare that they are striving to improve governance, they are often using a diplomatic way of saying that reducing corruption is a priority. Governance is a wide and inclusive concept that covers formal as well as informal spheres of life in any human society, emphasizing compliance with many ethical virtues like transparency, equality, fairness, responsibility, participation, responsiveness to the needs of the people and efficiency in the management of public fund and resources.

## What is Good Governance?

Given that the term "governance" means different things to different people, before going any further in elaborating the importance of Good Governance - we have to answer the question "What is exactly meant by Good Governance?" There is no single and exhaustive definition of "good governance" and thus no common assessment tool. However, based on the consensus among various stakeholders, Governance can be defined as **the set of processes, policies and laws affecting the way a country, institution, society, etc., is directed, administered or controlled.**

In other words, governance means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented.

Essentially, Good Governance is anti-corruption whereby authority and its institutions are accountable. Corruption is a universal, historic issue which occurs in both wealthy and poor countries and in public and private sectors as well as both profit and non-profit sectors. Corruption, from petty bribery, nepotism to large-scale larceny, can have a devastating impact and far reaching consequences. Undermining development, destroying public trust and burdening the lives of many, in particular the vulnerable, corruption's reach is insidious and effect destructive. The debilitating effects of corruption call for a firm action against it and that in fact stresses the importance of Good Governance loud and clear.

Good governance is about good practice and not merely about good structure. In the context of democratically elected entities, people must be diligent in evaluating the performance of the elected officials to ensure that the governance system is working. In order to get things done, elected officials must be able to influence and get agreement with numerous and diverse stakeholders, from constituents to support staff. Good governance can facilitate to effectively influence and foster consensus among people with different needs and viewpoints to ensure ongoing success.

### **Key attributes of Good Governance**

According to subject matter experts Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

Depending on the context and the overriding objective sought, good governance has been said at various times to encompass: full respect of human rights, the rule of law, effective participation, multi-actor partnerships, political pluralism, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, an efficient and effective public sector, legitimacy, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people, equity, sustainability, and attitudes and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance. Governance is a process and it is not an institution or group of institutions. In some contexts, good governance means fostering a climate that is conducive to trade, investment and more inclusive economic growth. The concept of

efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable utilization of natural resources and the protection of environment.

## **Good Governance, Human Rights and Development**

Can poor governance lead to breakdown in rule of law and that in turn give way to systemic human rights violations? If so, should good governance be a pre requisite for granting aid to fragile and failed states? These are, of course, difficult questions, the answers to which can be both politically charged and hotly contested.

Number of declaration by International Community stresses the interconnection between good governance, human rights and sustainable development. Good governance and human rights are mutually reinforcing. Human rights principles provide a set of values to guide the work of governments and other political and social actors. They also provide a set of performance standards against which these actors can be held accountable. Moreover, human rights principles inform the content of good governance efforts: they may inform the development of legislative frameworks, policies, programmes, budgetary allocations and other measures.

Civil society is about people contributing to the governing of their country through their participation in the community. It is difficult to participate if you are poor, unemployed, hungry, homeless and uneducated. People who live under these conditions are being denied their economic, social and cultural rights. Good governance cannot truly occur until these rights are guaranteed by a government willing to take responsibility for the social security of its people. At national level, Governments must set up political and legal frameworks, where good governance is practiced to ensure a fair environment for sustained development.

The fact that developed countries providing development assistance, along with international organizations such as the IMF or the World Bank are becoming more sensitive to this issue is just another reason why better governance is becoming crucial for the success of developing nations. Major donors and international financial institutions are increasingly basing their aid and loans on the condition that reforms that ensure "good governance" are undertaken by the authorities. Donors no longer settle for "good enough governance".

## **Good Governance through young people and good citizenship**

It is imperative to note that today's young people are the world's future. Young people have the potential and passion to build our societies' economies, and make decisions that will have positive impact in the lives of future generations. Contrary to popular belief, young people have the idealism, resourcefulness, responsiveness & resilience in helping to address not only the issues resulting from poor governance and corruption but also to improve governance in their communities and countries.

History reminds us that often times while much effort is focused on the eradication of war and poverty that affect so many people, including young people, little attention has been directed to the root cause of conflicts. It's a sad but known fact that many civil wars and conflicts within countries stem from poor governance and discrimination.

All great nations of the world did not attain their enviable status without good governance and transparency and moral uprightness by both their leaders and followers. Values-driven good citizenship can put a stop to many social ills such as corruption, violence, criminality and dirty politics and ensures good governance. Good citizenship actions, no matter how small, engenders unity and promotes peace and prosperity to all citizens. Governance has a direct impact on young people's development and their ability to influence social change. However, well-informed and motivated masses especially young people can be agents of transformation within their own communities. The power to create an equal and fair society resides especially within its young citizens and their freewill to work for it.

## **Governance in voluntary and community organizations**

There are countless charities and voluntary organizations function locally and internationally. These community organizations play a vital role in the lives of so many people and command enormous public trust and confidence. This is reflected in the generosity with which people give their time, talent and money to these community organizations.

Good Governance is essential for the success of any organization. Committee members or board of directors, trustees or some other name by which the organization's governing body is called and this body has the overall responsibility to

oversee and control the management of the organization. Committee members bring passion and commitment as well as skills and experience to the organization they manage and lead. Patricians around the globe have formed number of Alumni Associations with the primary motive to help our Alma Mater in Jaffna. As Patricians we had the opportunity to learn and experience the importance of good governance within the portals of our Alma Mater. In various Alumni Associations, the importance of good governance has been recognized as a basis for both underpinning effective and efficient performance, and for ensuring these Associations meet the legitimate aspirations of stakeholders.

## Conclusion

We are living in a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world facing multiple challenges and trends that require coordinated and focused action. It is important to note that general public has a crucial role when it comes to improve local governance. In order to achieve this, though, it has to be well informed, interested, organized, and empowered, actively pursuing it. Just as the dancer cannot be separated from the dance, the organs or actors executing governance in their respective spheres should take front and centre stage instead of being relegated to the background. We expect governance to be high on the agenda and adherence to good governance practices to be the top most priority in all sectors – public, private and voluntary.

The importance of Good Governance and the disastrous ramifications of poor governance and corruption will surely continue to occupy the central stage especially in the developing countries. Let's hope that Good Governance leads to the realization of human rights, including the elimination of poverty and ensuring a satisfactory livelihood for all the people. It's worthy to strive for the ideal of Good Governance step by step and one after the other to create a society free of corruption that takes great pride in Good Governance for the benefit of all its citizens. Good governance promotes the rule of law, it *ipso-facto* promotes transparency, enhances accountability and is committed to improvement of the general well-being of the populace.

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