

## **Importance of people's participation in good governance**

**MEENU**

Department of Public Administration, Shah Satnam Ji Girls' P.G. College,  
Sirsa (Haryana) India

### **ABSTRACT**

People participation is a key cornerstone of good governance. It is only in a democracy that people can be empowered to demand and shape better policies, express grievances, seek justice and hold government to account. Good governance is essential to achieve development while true participatory democracy ensures that development is equitable and sustainable. People participation improves the quality of decisions made and citizen compliance with policies. People's participation in the election is what makes our democracy a representative and participatory democracy. But the meaning of people's participation does not begin and end with their voting in elections. People's participation is also expressed through public debates, newspaper editorials, protest demonstrations and their active involvement in governmental programmes. In fact, participation comprises all those actions of citizens by which they seek to influence, support or criticize the government and its policies. They do so to ensure that their representatives respond to their needs and aspirations.

**Key Words :** People participation, Good governance., Policies

### **INTRODUCTION**

On paper, people are supposed to have a direct say in decision-making. The 73rd and 74th amendments, passed in 1992, were designed to devolve powers so that citizens would actually have their voices heard and play an active role in governance. At the panchayat level, through the implementation of the 73rd amendment, this has begun to happen. Its efficacy is not uniform and varies from state to state. MyGov is an innovative platform launched to ensure citizens' engagement in decision making by the Government so that the ultimate goal of Good Governance for building India is achieved. This initiative is an opportunity for citizens and well-wishers from across the world to share their views on key issues directly with the Prime Minister of India. Due to poverty, illiteracy, non-awareness, unemployment, deprivation of opportunities, people do not participate in governance. In this paper attempt is made to describe the barriers to people participation for good governance and suggestions are made to promote people participation for good governance.

#### **People's participation :**

People's participation is becoming the central issue of current period. Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social and cultural and political processes that affect their lives. People may in some cases have complete and direct control over these processes – in other

cases the control may be partial or indirect. People can participate as individuals or groups. As individuals in a democracy they may participate as voters or political activists or in the market as entrepreneurs or workers. Often they participate more and more effectively through group action as members of a community organization or a trade union or a political party

According to UNDP (1993:21), "Participation means that people are closely involved in economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, participation is a process by which the beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of a development programme to enhance prosperity in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values that they cherish.

People's participation in the election is what makes our democracy a representative and participatory democracy. But the meaning of people's participation does not begin and end with their voting in elections. People's participation is also expressed through public debates, newspaper editorials, protest demonstrations and their active involvement in governmental programmes. Even in respect of election process, it includes participation in campaign, political discussion, working for political parties and standing as candidates. People's participation may be defined as, "behavior through which people directly express their political opinions"<sup>2</sup>. In fact, participation comprises all those actions of citizens by which they seek to influence, support or criticize the government and its policies. They do so to ensure that their representatives respond to their needs and aspirations.

#### **Good governance :**

Good governance helps create an environment in which sustained economic growth becomes achievable. Conditions of good governance allow citizens to maximize their returns on investment. Good governance does not occur by chance. It must be demanded by citizens and nourished explicitly and consciously by the nation state. It is, therefore, necessary that the citizens are allowed to participate freely, openly and fully in the political process. The citizens must have the right to compete for office, form political party and enjoy fundamental rights and civil liberty. Good governance is accordingly associated with accountable political leadership, enlightened policy-making and a civil service imbued with a professional ethos. The presence of a strong civil society including a free press and independent judiciary are pre-conditions for good governance. Good governance must aim at expansion in social opportunities and removal of poverty.

Good governance creates an environment where elected members and council officers ask themselves 'what is the right thing to do?' when making decisions. Making choices and having to account for them in an open and transparent way encourages honest consideration of the choices facing those in the governance process<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Elements of Good Governance :**

The concept centers on the responsibility of governments and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in society. Good governance is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law<sup>4</sup>. Good governance is responsive to the present and future needs of the organization, exercises prudence in policy-setting and decision-making, and that the best interests of all stakeholders are taken into account.

#### **Benefits of good governance :**

- Promotes community confidence
- Leads to better decisions
- Helps local government meet its legislative responsibilities
- Supports ethical decision making

**Challenges to Good Governance :**

- The responsibility of the Indian nation-state to protect the life and property of every citizen is being seriously threatened particularly in areas affected by terrorism (Jammu and Kashmir), insurgency (north-eastern states), and naxalite violence in 150 districts of India's mainland.
- Some citizens do not know their rights and cannot afford legal aid to advocate on their behalf. A related aspect is fairness of access as some people involved in the legal proceedings and large numbers of criminal prosecutions are not voluntary participants. The most severe challenge relates to complexity of adjudication as legal proceedings are lengthy and costly and the judiciary lacks personnel and logistics to deal with these matters.
- The concept of good governance is undoubtedly linked with the citizens' right of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. This could be secured in a democracy only through the rule of law. In our constitutional system, every person is entitled to equality before law and equal protection under the law. No person can be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. Thus the state is bound to protect the life and liberty of every human being.
- Corruption and Electoral Reforms: The hitherto laissez-faire system of funding of elections is the biggest countervailing factor in the emergence of democratic India as an honest state.
- Criminalization of Politics: The Criminalization of the political process and the unholy nexus between politicians, civil servants, and business houses are having a baneful influence on public policy formulation and governance. Political class as such is losing respect. The Indian State is facing a serious challenge to its authority from lawless elements. The Jehadi terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir and its ad hoc but frequent spread to other parts of India, the insurgency in the North-East, and rapidly expanding base of naxalite movement in mainland India constitute grave challenge to democratic governance.
- A political culture seems to be taking roots in which membership of state legislatures and Parliament are viewed as offices for seeking private gain and for making money. Such elements have also found place in Council of Ministers and a Prime Minister or a Chief Minister in an era of coalition politics cannot take strong action for that might lead to the fall of the government itself. The Gandhian values of simple living and self-less service to public causes are rapidly vanishing.
- Corruption: The complex and non-transparent system of command and control, monopoly of the government as a service provider, underdeveloped legal framework, and lack of information and weak notion of citizens' rights have provided incentives for corruption in India. One of the recent sources of corruption at political level relates to schemes of MPLADS and MLALADS and these needs to be abolished. In any case these are non-legislative functions.

**Barriers to People's Participation for Good Governance :**

- Lack of confidence among citizens.
- Lack of skill or desire among citizens was perceived to be a major barrier.
- Illiteracy: India currently has the largest population of illiterate adults in the world with 287 million. This is 37 per cent of the global total. While India's literacy rate raised from 48 per cent in 1991 to 63 per cent in 2006, "population growth cancelled the gains so there was no change in the number of illiterate adults," the report stated<sup>5</sup>.
- Unemployment: Unemployment Rate in India decreased to 5.20 percent in 2012 from 6.30 percent in 2011. Unemployment Rate in India averaged 7.58 Percent from 1983 until 2012, reaching an all time high of 9.40 Percent in 2009<sup>6</sup>.
- Hunger: The 2011 global index (GHI) Report ranked India 15th, amongst leading countries with hunger situation. It also places India amongst the three countries where the GHI between 1996 and 2011 went up from 22.9 to 23.7. 25% of all hungry people worldwide live in India. Since 1990 there have been some improvements for children but the proportion of hungry in the population has

increased. An estimated 32.7 percent of the Indian population lives on less than US\$ 1.25 per day. The country is home to a quarter of all undernourished people worldwide. In addition, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) passed in 2013 is a milestone in the history of India's fight against hunger and malnutrition, as it empowers more than 800 million Indians (75 per cent of the rural and 50 percent of the urban population living below and just above the national poverty line) to legally claim their right to highly subsidized staple foods<sup>7</sup>.

– All voters do not cast their vote: According to the election commission of India, 814.5 million people were eligible to vote, with an increase of 100 million voters since the last general election in 2009. The average election turnout over all nine phases was around 66.38%, the highest ever in the history of Indian general elections. Over 76% eligible voters in Haryana and 64% in Maharashtra exercised their franchise in assembly elections<sup>8</sup>.

**Suggestions to promote people's participation :**

- Strengthen rights and opportunities of people especially traditionally underrepresented groups to take greater part in governance and affairs of the community, nationally and internationally.
- Actively engage people's participation in development and implementation of policies at local and national level, and paying particular attention to include traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, basic sectors (workers and farmers), youth, disabled persons, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples.
- Fully guarantee freedom of speech, a free press, the right to assembly and association, and the right to vote and be elected in public office.
- Limit influence of money in politics by imposing spending limits, contribution limits, and bans on certain types of donations to political parties and offices.
- Recognize and value cultural diversity of different communities and support and promote traditional knowledge and customary practices in governance.
- Uphold the right of indigenous peoples' communities to free prior and informed consent in all actions, policies and developments affecting their communities; and
- Consciously expand education and awareness about people's rights to participate in public affairs.
- Recognize and operationalize the right to information. This includes publishing and disseminating budget information in easy and accessible formats through all possible means.
- Perform social audits in partnership with civil society.
- Hold public justice and law enforcement agencies – police force and courts – to highest standards of integrity and human rights adherence. Ensure access to remedies for victims of human rights violations by strengthening ombudspersons, elections commissions and human rights commissions.
- Introduce accountability mechanisms which people can access and participate in regardless of their background and which they can use to ensure that their human rights are being met; and ensure that these processes are decided in a transparent and equitable process.
- Inspire and raise awareness of individuals and organisations to boost engagement in decision-making processes.
- Strengthen civil society to become more effective, accountable, inclusive and representative.
- Lobby government and other service providers for pro-poor policies and to encourage better responsibility and effectiveness.
- Encourage peace-building.

## REFERENCES

1. Waheduzzaman, (2010) "Value of people's participation for good governance in developing countries", *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, Vol. 4: 4, pp. 386.
2. Bobby Ramakant (2011). People's Participation in Governance Vital to Democracy, news blaze, February 21, 2011
3. Gourav Vallabh (2015). Defining Good Governance, the New Indian Express, Published: 15th January 2015
4. Roy, K.C. and Tisdell, C.A. (1998). "Good governance in sustainable development: the impact of institutions". *Internat. J. Soc. Econ.*, **25** (6/7/8) : 1313
5. India's illiterate population largest in the world, says UNESCO report, the Hindu, January 30, 2014
6. [www.Tradingeconomics.com](http://www.Tradingeconomics.com), India unemployment rate.
7. [www.indiafoodbanking.org/hunger](http://www.indiafoodbanking.org/hunger), Hunger in India, Submitted by IFBN on 23 September 2014
8. [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), highest voter turnout in 2014 election.

\*\*\*\*\*