

## Good Governance & Sustainable Development (SD) in India

Dr. Vijay Kumar Verma\*\*, Vinod Singh Kushwaha<sup>b</sup>

a. Dyal Singh College, University of Delhi, New Delhi.

b. School of Social Sciences, Research Unit of IGNOU Campus, New Delhi.

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### Abstract

With the independence there has been a growing concern about reducing inequality, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, illiteracy, agrarian and labour unrest, imbalanced regional development etc. Since last some decades (specially 1990s onward) there has also been a growing focus on reducing corruption and to protect environment and promote well-being of all. Many rules and regulations have been made and amended such as: economic reforms, administrative reforms, poverty eradication programmes, anti-corruption laws, RTI Act, e-governance initiatives, environment protection laws, literacy programmes, labour laws, employment guarantee, etc. and there has a continuous focus on to evolve a society based on equity and justice (socio-economic and political). All these changes show that the focus has been shifted from the model of economic growth only to the new model of sustainable development. Despite many new changes, the question on how to achieve sustainable development goals still remains. Good governance is one of the most recognized tools to cope with sustainable development agenda.

This article gives an overview on the issue of sustainable development and highlights the links between the concept of good governance and heterogenous dimensions of sustainable development. The article also outlines the selected indicators of good governance and challenges & strategy for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Good Governance, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Introduction

Despite the many reforms and good economic growth in the era of LPG model, the first round of the neoliberal reforms failed to reduce the inequality and poverty, which led to socio-economic and political unsteadiness. In 2015, the United Nations launched the sustainable development agenda (which is known as the SDGs 2030 agenda) which replaced the millennium development agenda that was launched in 2000. Many strategies, tools, and recommendations have been suggested to achieve these goals.

There are many challenges facing in terms of sustainable development like corruption, high unemployment rate, widespread inequality & poverty, poor health and environmental degradation, etc. In this regard, the new paradigm based on good governance is the new strategy that emphasizes the role of state in the economy where the joint participation of state and non-state actors, civil society and private sector etc. is essential in the process of public governance.

### Basic Concept of Good Governance

Governance is a neutral term while good governance implies positive attributes and values associated with the quality of governance. It is very dynamic concept which involves much subjectivity in defining the aspects of good governance.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1997 report, defined good governance as "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels" and recognized eight core characteristics of it:

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\*Corresponding Author: Email: vijayvermadu@gmail.com • Mobile No. 9810626397

1. **Participatory:** Direct or indirect participation of all sections of society is cornerstone of good governance. This participation needs to be informed and organized which includes freedom of association and expression as well as an organized civil society.
2. **Rule of Law:** Just and legal frameworks are the obligation to the rule of law which ensures the fair implementation of the decisions. An impartial and uncorrupt police force and an independent and fair judiciary are a must for the rule of law.
3. **Transparency:** The decisions taken and their enforcement follow rules and regulations and all the information to be available to those who will be affected by such decisions.
4. **Accountability:** In general, the organizations and institutions are accountable to those who are affected by their decisions. This accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and rule of law.
5. **Responsiveness:** To obtain a service delivery within a reasonable timeframe to all stakeholders is necessary for good governance.
6. **Equity and Inclusiveness:** The well-being of any society depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in the mainstream of society.
7. **Consensus Oriented:** A broad consensus for setting the priorities among the whole community of the society, and how this can be achieved are the essential for good governance. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is need for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such developments.
8. **Effective and Efficient:** The process and institutions produce results into the optimum use of natural resources to fulfill the needs for sustainable development. It covers the protection of the environment for the future generations.

The stakeholders of governance at national level can be categorized into three broad categories- State, Market and Civil Society.

#### **Basic Concept of Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development (SD) is a concept that has been developed, shaped and transformed over the years, however it became a topic of discussion at international level after the publication of Brundtland report in 1987 entitled 'Our Common Future' by the United Nations. It defines SD as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The principles of SD include;

- Promotion of good governance
- Stable and long term economic growth
- Reduction of regional differences and proportionate and balanced socio-economic development
- Active employment policies
- Growth of personal income and consumption
- Promotion of justice (social, economic and political)
- Environment protection for next generations and efficient usages and allocation of scarce natural resources.

Sustainable Development is a visionary approach towards the future. It will not be brought about by merely policies. It requires the spreading of awareness of the need to convert the natural assets for inter-generational equity.

#### **Millennium Declaration of United Nations**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century was started with a peculiar declaration for the international cooperation towards the poverty eradication from the globe. The United Nations declared 8 millennium development goals in the year 2000, to be achieved by 2015;

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1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve mental health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

These goals recognized the vital link between good governance, development and human rights. There were widely accepted arguments that the governance should play a stronger role in the post 2015 development agenda.

### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all member states of the United Nations in September 2015 as a part of the resolution, 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. The SDGs were built upon the achievements of the MDGs. The 17 SDGs are;

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequality
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals.

The goals are comprehensive and people centered, undividable, integrated and keep the balance between the three core pillars of sustainable development; society, economy and ecology.

To achieve the SDGs, it requires the partnership among public and private sectors, civil society and citizens alike to make sure we leave a better planet for future generations.

### Challenges to Sustainable Development (In India)

Some key challenges to SD are;

- **Population:** According to data (2020), India is the second most populous country in the world and approximately 138 crore (17.7% of the world) people live in India.
- **Inequality:** In spite of being one of the fastest growing economy in the world, India is one of the most unequal country. According to Oxfam data (2020), the top 10% of Indian population holds 77%

(the richest 1% holds 40%) of the total national wealth while 90% population holds only 23% wealth and 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1% only. This gap is widening day by day and increasing inequalities affect marginalized sections (poor, lower castes, women, children etc.).

- **Poverty and Hunger:** According to Indian Government data (2019), the 6.7% of its population lives in below poverty line. In Global Hunger Index (GHI 2020), India ranked 94<sup>th</sup> out of the 107 countries.
- **Low literacy:** The literacy rate of India is just 77.7% which is below the average of world literacy rate of 86.48%.
- Corruption.
- Huge Unemployment and corruption.
- The lack of safe drinking water.
- Disease, malnutrition and poor medical facilities.
- Deforestation due to the development of agriculture and increasing urbanization.
- The rising consumption of energy and petroleum.
- Depletion of natural resources and increasing pollution.
- **COVID19 Pandemic:** It is sweeping the world and India is no exception. In India, the first wave of Covid outbreak in 2020 while the second wave in 2021. It has been making lots of losses to the economy, society and human lives. Poverty is increasing as well as health & education is negatively affected.

#### Strategy for Sustainable Development (In India)

India is committed to achieve the 17 SDGs and the 169 associated targets, which comprehensively cover social, economic and environmental dimensions of development and focus on ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions. The NITI Aayog has been assigned the role of overseeing the implementation of SDGs in the country at the Central Government level.

Some key suggestions and strategies for SD are;

- Minimize corruption and promote good governance.
- Minimize the gap between rich and poor to make inclusive society.
- Minimize all types of pollutions like air, water, land, etc.
- Promote sustainable consumption and production
- All possible attempts to replenish renewable resources (e.g., by planting trees).
- Judicious use of natural resources like trees and minerals (petroleum), remembering the needs of future generations.
- Focus on renewable sources of energy like the Sun and the wind for energy needs. The tropical countries like India can easily convert Sun light into solar energy and electricity and so create an atmosphere for green development.
- Using environment friendly sources of energy like LPG, CNG, solar cell, etc., which are eco-friendly fuel and help in reducing the green-house gases from the Earth. Delhi Transport Corporation's initiative to CNG and Electric buses in Delhi is one of such effort to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and other harmful gases. Electric engine in Indian Railway, E-rickshaw and electric bicycle are important initiatives by Government of India in this direction.
- Focus on Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) to reduce the pressure on urban areas and the associated pollution.
- Revive ethnic Indian system of irrigation and waterways.
- Stimulate organic farming and recycling wastes.
- Ensure strict watch and control with respect to environmental hazards such as happened in the Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984).
- Focus on regional level forums for regional and local development.

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- The private sector is an important stakeholder in the implementation of SDGs, so promote public-private partnerships (PPP).
- To achieve Sustainable Development, any sector of economy need to focus on; economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. Development in any one of these whether positive or negative will usually have a knock-on effect on the other two elements. So, for SD, proper balance between economic, social and environment is essential.

### Role of Good Governance in Sustainable Development

In relation to the implementation of the Agenda 2030, good governance will have to play a crucial role at every level. Good governance in principle and practice is foundationally about the process for making and implementing decisions. It is not only about making 'correct decisions', but also about the best possible process for executing those decisions. The decision-making processes and good governance share some characteristics which are keys to the implementation of development agenda. These characteristics have a positive impact on various levels and aspects of governance including;

Consultation policies and practices

Role clarification and good working relationships

Meeting procedures

Duty bearer conduct

Service delivery

These characteristics would include but not be limited to only the eight characteristics of good governance as suggested by UNDP in 1997 which are discussed above.

Corruption is one of the biggest obstacles for implementing the agenda in poor and developing countries. Good governance plays a critical role in fighting against corruption.

In the run up to the framing of new global, regional and local agreement on SD, the call for most of elements of good governance are found in the most advocacy and lobbying documents presented during the post-2015.

**Some major good governance initiatives taken in India to ensure the sustainable development are:**

- Decentralization and People's Participation – 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act-1992; Rural and Urban Governance.
- Developing programs for weaker sections and backward areas; Social, Economic and Political Justice.
- Financial management and budget sanctity.
- Citizen's Charters.
- E-Governance and use of ICT tools; Digital India.
- Transparency and Accountability measures; Right to Information & Social Audits.
- Public service morale & anti corruption measures; Whistle Blowers Protection Act.
- Poverty Eradication Programmes.
- Right to Education; Article 21A.
- Ayushman Bharat Health Insurance Scheme.
- Women empowerment program; Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, etc.
- Environment protection laws; National Green Tribunal (NGT) Act.
- Public-Private Partnerships in different sectors such as in metro, airport, railway, health, education, infrastructure and environment protection, etc.

### Conclusion

Today, almost every sector of Indian economy is considering the concept of sustainable development and sustainability whether it is education, health, construction, energy, petroleum, power, transportation, textile,

farming and environment etc. for all its future endeavours. The term is quietly used in India and same is being done all over the world whether it is developed or developing economy in tune with SDGs.

In spite of good economic growth and open market policies, the development agenda do not seem to achieve much success in the absence of good governance.

Now, it has been determined that there is a highly significant and positive relationship between elements of good governance and sustainable development and it is also understood that neither can be pursued without other. Thus, we can say that sustainable development and good governance are two sides of the same coin.

Since, the Government of India has taken many initiatives to strengthen the governance yet many more initiatives ought to be taken in this direction to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and make India as a developed economy in true sense.

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