



Democratic governance for human development

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Abstract

Recently the terms 'Governance and 'Good Governance' are being increasing used in development literature. Good governance means that process and institutions results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable used of natural resources and the protection of the environment. There are so many principals of Good Governance which are the primary and best source of human development, such as, participation, representation fair conduct of elections, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, openness, rule of law, ethical conduct, innovation, capacity etc. This article tries to explain as simply as possible what 'Governance' and 'Good Governance' means for human development.

Keywords: democratic governance, human development

Introduction

Around the world, more people are recognizing that governance matters for development that institutions, rules and political processes play a big role in whether economies grow, whether children go to school, whether human development moves forward or back. So, promoting human development is not just a social, economic and technological challenge: it is also an institutional and political challenge. Accompanying this new consensus is a growing conviction that many persistent development problems reflect failures of governance. Studies in a range of countries and regions hold weak governance responsible for persistent poverty and lagging development. The governance crisis is evident in widespread corruption, inefficient public services and a host of other failures. These studies have also shown what poor governance means for ordinary citizens—schools without teachers, courts without justice, local bureaucrats demanding bribes at every turn.

Good governance—for what?

From the human development perspective, good governance is democratic governance. Democratic governance means that:-

- People's human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, allowing them to live with dignity.
- People have a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- People can hold decision-makers accountable.
- Inclusive and fair rules, institutions and practices govern social interactions.
- Women are equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision-making.
- People are free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or any other attribute.
- The needs of future generations are reflected in current policies.
- Economic and social policies are responsive to people's needs and aspirations.
- Economic and social policies aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that all people have in their lives.

"Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development."

-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

What does it mean to promote good governance? There is no single answer. But much of the recent debate has focused on what makes institutions and rules more effective, including transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability and the rule of law. All are important for human development—especially since ineffective institutions usually cause the most harm to poor and vulnerable people. But just as human development is about much more than growth in national incomes, governance for human development is about much more than effective institutions and rules. For three reasons, it must also be concerned with whether institutions and rules are fair—and whether all people have a say in how they operate:

- Participating in the rules and institutions that shape one's community is a basic human right and part of human development.

- More inclusive governance can be more effective. When local people are consulted about the location of a new health clinic, for example, there is a better chance it will be built in the right place.
- More participatory governance also can be more equitable. Much is known about the economic and social policies that help eradicate poverty and promote more inclusive growth,

Governance for human development is partly about having efficient institutions and rules that promote development by making markets work and ensuring that public services live up to their name. But it is also about protecting human rights, promoting wider participation in the institutions and rules that affect people's lives and achieving more equitable economic and social outcomes. Thus governance for human development is concerned not just with efficient, equitable outcomes but also with fair processes. Governance for human development must be democratic in substance and in form--- by the people and for the people

The role of political freedom and participation in human development

Political freedom and participation are part of human development, both as development goals in their own right and as means for advancing human development.

Political freedom and participation are essential goals of human development

Political freedom and the ability to participate in the life of one's community are capabilities that are as important for human development as being able to read and write and being in good health. People without political freedom—such as being able to join associations and to form and express opinions—have far fewer choices in life. And being able to participate in the life of one's community—commanding the respect of others and having a say in communal decisions—is fundamental to human existence. That political freedom and participation are crucial to human development is not always well understood. Indeed, there is a widespread misperception that human development is only about economic and social outcomes such as reducing income poverty and improving health and education. Though these are important for human development, its aim is much broader—to promote the freedom, well-being and dignity of people everywhere. Economic growth is a means to these broader ends.

Concept of participatory democracy repudiates this model of democracy as it regards people's political participation as the basic principle of democracy. In short, political participation refers to the active involvement of individuals and groups in the governmental processes effecting their lives. In other words, when citizens themselves play an active role in the process of formulation and implementation of public policies and decisions, their activity is called political participation. Conventional mode of political participation includes voting, contesting for a public office, campaigning for a political party or contributing to the management of a community project like public safety, cleanliness drive, or the maintenance of a public park, etc. Interestingly, an act of opposition or public protest also involves political participation. For example, signing a petition, attending a peaceful demonstration, joining a protest march or forming a human chain, etc. come within the purview of political participation. Indeed, the various acts of public protest in a non-democratic set-up, like passive resistance, civil disobedience and Satyagraha, also qualify as political participation. They are the manifestation of a strong awareness of public interest.

Democracies are better at avoiding catastrophes and at managing sudden downturns that threaten human survival. As Amartya Sen has argued, democratic institutions and processes provide strong incentives for governments to prevent famines. Without opposition parties, uncensored public criticism and the threat of being thrown out of office, rulers can act with impunity. Without a free press, the suffering from famine in isolated rural areas can be invisible to rulers and to the public.

Human development and human dignity

Respect for human dignity implies commitment to creating conditions under which individuals can develop a sense of self-worth and security. True dignity comes with an assurance of one's ability to rise to the challenges of the human situation. Such assurance is unlikely to be fostered in people who have to live with the threat of violence and injustice, with bad governance and instability or with poverty and disease. Eradicating these threats must be the aim of those who recognize the sanctity of human dignity and of those who strive to promote human development. Development as growth, advancement and the realization of potential depends on available resources—and no resource is more potent than people empowered by confidence in their value as human beings. At this time when the world is preoccupied with the menace of terrorism, it is worth considering that people who feel deprived of control over their lives necessary for a dignified life—are liable to search for fulfillment along the path of violence. Merely providing them with a certain material sufficiency is not enough to win them over to peace and unity. Their potential for human development has to be realized and their human dignity respected so that they can gain the skills and confidence to build a world strong and prosperous in harmonious diversity.

Today's Governance Challenge

Democracy and human development have something else in common. They are both more a journey than a destination—a promise rather than a list. Societies can be more or less democratic, just as people can have broader or more constrained choices to lead lives they value. But there is no defined end point. Everywhere, democracy requires a long process of political development. It needs basic institutions, formal and informal, of the state and outside it. It will not thrive without the spread of democratic culture—of values and principles that guide the

behavior of individuals and groups. Threats to democracy come not only from political parties that are personalized and unable to represent people, but also from intolerance, extremism and a lack of respect for human rights and human dignity. Democratic governance in this fast-changing environment is about more than people having the right to vote. It must be about strengthening democratic institutions so that they keep pace with the changing distribution of economic and political power.

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