

PEOPLE'S ROLE IN GOOD GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

There can be no good governance without active participation of the people. The paper analyses how the people in Pakistan are playing their part in ensuring good governance. People's role in governance looks limited at first glance but a closer look reveals its importance. The general dissatisfaction of the masses with the poor performance of state institutions has resulted in the growth of advocacy groups in the non government sector, sections of civil society and the media. As a result, a participatory culture is taking roots in Pakistan. But this is not enough. Good governance demands a much larger participation of the people.

Key Words: Governance, Pakistan, People, Participation, Role.

Introduction

Governance indicators in Pakistan do not present a satisfactory picture. However, the onus for that is not entirely on the government. Good governance is not a one-way process; it requires active participation of the people. People can participate in a number of ways in the social, political and economic aspects of governance process. Despite constitutional guarantees a participatory culture could not evolve in Pakistan. The curtailing of civil and political rights by both elected civil governments and military regimes, badly affected the process. The paper explores the avenues people have used to promote good governance and identifies the areas of this interaction. It also examines whether the prerequisites for people's participation exist in Pakistan and studies how the various segments of society have contributed towards good governance and whether it has been effective or not.

Defining Concepts

Governance is a vast term and deals with a range of activities from ensuring the security of life and property of the people which is a government's primary

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duty to provision of basic facilities, such as health and education and people's participation in policy-making, strengthening democratic institutions and values.

People in this paper mean the various segments of the civilian population representing the civil society, the media, the legal community, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and similar, other groups.

Relationship between People and Good Governance

Governance is a modification of the term government and suggests the capacity or incapacity of the government to fulfill its responsibilities and address the problems facing the community with the participation of the civil society in general. While government entails a top-down approach, governance dovetails the pyramidal base through participation of society's representative rungs.

Good governance involves numerous groups and organizations at various levels of the society. These entities cooperate with each other towards achievement of common goals. In studying governance two things are important — process and performance; while performance tells of normative outcomes, how those outcomes are achieved is described by process.¹ People form an integral part of the governance process, by raising their voices through various mechanisms, taking collective action, influencing policy-making, and by fulfilling the needs of the society etc. Hyden et al. believe that the extent to which people can play a significant role depends on the environment provided to them; if democracy prevails in a state and civil society is allowed necessary play under existing law, it can contribute its share in governance. On the other hand, if the state is weak and fails to perform its functions, the civil society emerges as a substitute to it by default.² Good governance can also be brought about if the institutions in the society play their part and they are effective.

Participatory Culture in Pakistan

Political behaviour of societies tends to show collective trends in spite of individual divergences from the mainstream. The political behaviour of the society shapes its political attitudes and political ideologies. Political culture is defined as the “basic norms for political activity in a society.”³ Political

¹ Goran Hyden, Julius Court and Kenneth Mease, *Making Sense of Governance: Empirical Evidence from 16 Developing Countries* (New Delhi: Viva, 2005), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 63.

³ Patrick O'Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 78.

cultures can change over time through integration, technological innovation and globalization.

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees fundamental civil and political rights such as freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of speech and the right to information, recently introduced under the Eighteenth Amendment in 2010.⁴ With these constitutional guarantees, a thriving participatory culture should have been in place. Unfortunately, these fundamental rights have often been restricted or curtailed both by military regimes and also by elected governments. The freedom of the civil society has remained short lived due to frequent imposition of martial laws. Public demonstrations and assemblies were banned, civil society members were often arrested and political pressure was exerted⁵ to bring the opposition in line. Not that the civil society members have not been divided among themselves along political, ethnic and sectarian lines. Civil society failed to emerge as a united voice and assert a collective stance.⁶ The attitude of the governments has been inconsistent towards NGOs, being mostly favourable towards welfare-oriented NGOs and hostile towards advocacy-focused bodies. The role of the people has been limited in the past but resistance to undemocratic regimes has always been there. The civil society role was crucial in bringing about the end of President Musharraf's regime. A participatory culture has been taking root in society due to general dissatisfaction of the people against ineffective governance, rampant corruption and worsening law and order situation together with the emergence of multiple media outlets and various advocacy NGOs, People are increasingly taking part in the governance process.

Political culture can be measured by voter turnout in an election depicting the size of the population that is politically active. The voter turnout in Pakistan during the last general elections of 2008 was 44.1 per cent.⁷ The voter turnout has ranged between the lowest of 35 per cent to the highest of 55 per cent in the elections that have been held thus far.⁸ Voter turnout largely depends on the education level of the electorate and its economic condition. Data show that the voter's income has a strong and positive correlation with polling turnout that literacy rate does not have, but on the whole, the Pakistani

⁴ The Constitution of Pakistan, "Fundamental Rights and Principles of Policy," <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/part2.ch1.html> (accessed February 20, 2012).

⁵ Adnan Sattar and Rabia Baig, "Civil Society in Pakistan," NGO Resource Centre, August 2001, <https://www.civicus.org/new/media/pakistan.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2012).

⁶ Nikhat Sattar, "A Divided Civil Society," *Dawn*, May 7, 2012.

⁷ Ibrahim Khan, "Pakistan's Voter Turnout Conundrum," *Express Tribune*, March 29, 2012.

⁸ "Voter Turnout Data for Pakistan," IDEA, http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=PK (accessed May 3, 2012).

population believes in the democratic process and is keen to exercise its right of franchise. Gallup Pakistan survey indicates that as many as 57 per cent believe in elections as a way to bring about change compared to 33 per cent of the population who rather resort to street agitation.⁹

Role of Reform-Oriented Entities in Pakistan

People's role in governance in Pakistan seems limited at first glance but on a closer look it seems to be growing considerably. There have been instances where the people have been vocal and stood up against the policies of the government. Here is how different segments of society have been participating in the governance process.

NGOs

A study on civil society concluded that civil society is doing much to address issues of poverty and development in Pakistan. NGOs in Pakistan are of three types: welfare and charity-oriented; community-development-oriented and; sustainable development and advocacy focused. A large number of these NGOs are welfare-oriented while the advocacy-oriented are the least in number.¹⁰ Due to the poor performance of the government, many charity organizations are filling in the void such as the Edhi Foundation. There are other organizations that carry out community development programmes such as the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme¹¹ which has developed a community-based rural development system which is trying to bring about change in the lives of 1.3 million villagers. The advocacy-focused NGOs are not only promoting sustainable development but also striving for social and economic change. They are highlighting the plight of women, children, labour, minorities and the underprivileged and also striving for their rights. Issues ranging from rights of the landless, oppression against women, inhuman customs practices to bigger agendas such as promotion of democracy, improved governance, human rights, and freedom of speech are advocated by these NGOs. Women's rights' activists have been successful in increasing awareness of women issues. It was also because of these activists that the

⁹ Gallup Pakistan, "Gilani Weekly Poll Cyber Letter," Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com.pk/News/CyberletterIssue57.pdf> (accessed February 18, 2012).

¹⁰ Ayesha Khan and Rabia Khan, "Civil Society and Social Change in Pakistan," The Collective for Social Science Research, March 2004, http://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/Civil_Society_And_Social_Change_In_Pakistan.pdf (accessed February 17, 1012).

¹¹ "Agha Khan Foundation: Development in Rural Areas," Agha Khan Development Network, http://www.akdn.org/rural_development/pakistan.asp (accessed February 22, 2012).

present government has passed legislations on issues pertaining to women's rights such as establishment of the National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) whose aim is to ensure respect for women's rights and to enforce gender equality, and laws against sexual harassment, domestic violence, acid-burning and denial of inheritance etc.

Lawyers

In March 2007, President General Musharraf dismissed the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. The legal community resisted this action and the lawyers launched a strong movement which ended in the reinstatement of the higher judiciary. This movement was greatly strengthened by the active participation of various segments of the civil society including the media, human rights activists and even common people.¹² It also brought together different political parties. A petition asking for the restoration of the judges was signed by ten million people, called the "Ten Million Signature Petition." In a rare show of power, thousands of people joined the sacked Chief Justice and lawyers on a long march towards parliament in Islamabad. Never before, the people had participated on such a wide scale in protests and rallies for a single cause. The higher judiciary was reinstated after two years of struggle in March 2009. The restoration of judiciary was a good sign. It showed that the people can stand up for a cause and bring a positive change. It was the backing of the common Pakistanis that made the judiciary stronger in Pakistan. This is evident in the suo motu notices taken by the judiciary on issues overlooked by the elected government with the goal of improving governance.¹³

Media

The role of the media in Pakistan has made profound progress in its short history. Apart from the mushrooming of the media outlets in the last decade or so, the media has also become very bold in Pakistan.¹⁴ Paradoxically, it was

¹² Marco Mezzera and Safdar Sial, "Media and Governance in Pakistan: A Controversial Yet Essential Relationship," Initiative for Peace Building, October 2010, <http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/pdf/pakistanOct.pdf> (accessed February 17, 2012).

¹³ The Article 184 (3) of Pakistan's Constitution allows the Supreme Court to take suo motu action if there is violation of fundamental rights as mentioned in Chapter 1 and 2.

¹⁴ A report states that "Pakistan has a vibrant media landscape; among the most dynamic in South Asia." "Between Radicalization and Democratization in an Unfolding Conflict: Media in Pakistan," International Media Support, July 2009, <http://www.i-m-s.dk/files/publications/1491%20Pakistan.final.web.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2012).

the government of President Musharraf which gave freedom to the media. Although he tried to curb it later on by banning certain television channels, but the media stood committed to its role and played a major role in bringing down the Musharraf regime. The media is playing a positive part in bringing up the problems of governance, exposing corruption and strengthening democracy. The news channels frequently invite government representatives to talk shows and scrutinize their performance which provokes a public debate on the concerned issues. The freedom of the media can also be gauged by the way government is openly criticized in political satires on Television and the theatre. Media also gives wide coverage to crimes that has at times led to the Supreme Court taking suo moto action on them. The media has helped in shaping public opinion and creating a socially and politically aware and active society in Pakistan and bringing about some change in the political culture of Pakistan. Catering to its commercial interests, the media sometimes do not act responsibly and sensationalize certain non-issues at the cost of crucial ones. Given its scale and reach, media can play even more effective role in enhancing the quality of governance in Pakistan.

New Instruments of Political Articulation and Participation

The media, both print and electronic, remain by far the main instrument of political articulation in Pakistan. Christine Fair at RAND believes that the media has done a great job in Pakistan and hopes that it will continue to mobilize people.¹⁵ Dr. Aijaz Shafi Gilani of Gilani and Gallup, Pakistan, credits the new means of communication, particularly the media for the new sense of empowerment amongst the people. The people have high trust in media. As much as 58 per cent of the population feels that they have greater freedom to speak now than ten years ago. The possibility of a digital revolution seems remote as only 10.9 per cent of the 187 million population use internet. The number of social networks users such as Youtube,¹⁶ Facebook¹⁷ and Twitter¹⁸ remains limited. Apparently inspired by the Arab Spring, people took to the streets and held mass demonstrations against the NATO attack on a Pakistani check post on the Pak-Afghan border and the price-hike in gas and petroleum products. Though protests and rallies are

¹⁵ "Between Radicalisation and Democratisation in an unfolding conflict: Media in Pakistan."

¹⁶ "There are 6.8 Million Youtube Users in Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, <http://tribune.com.pk/multimedia/videos/188561/>

¹⁷ "Total Facebook Users in Pakistan are 6078780," Pakistan Facebook Statistics, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/pakistan>

¹⁸ There are 1.9 million twitter users in Pakistan. "Pakistan Needs to Tweet More," *Dawn*, July 11, 2011, <http://www.dawn.com/2011/07/10/pakistan-needs-to-tweet-more.html> (accessed March 3, 2012).

something new in Pakistan but they have gained tremendous strength in recent years.

Findings: People's Say in Governance

The failure of the government to provide basic services such as education and health has led NGOs to fill in the void. The charity organizations are looking after the needs of the people. The charity donations in Pakistan make for five per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it is one of the highest rates in the world.¹⁹ When it comes to basic service provision and welfare, the people are generally more contributive in meeting obligations of the society as compared to the government. The Pakistani people generally have the tendency to show their best during crisis situations. It was witnessed in the 2005 earthquake and the floods of 2010 and 2011. The spirit shown by the people in welfare efforts was exemplary. Many believe that NGOs in Pakistan have mainly been occupied with welfare or service provision activities and have not been able to play any significant role in the transformation of the society. With the increase in the number of advocacy-focused NGOs and media outlets, the role of the people in governance is growing. The civil society is increasingly articulating ideas and also influencing constitutional reforms particularly on women's rights. The media is also shaping public opinion on policy issues. Regardless of the military rule and curtailing of civil liberties by the civilian and military regimes alike, the process of political development goes on. The constitution of Pakistan allows active participation in governance by the people but an effective participatory culture has yet to develop. It is a long way to go before people become active participants and have an effective say in the governance process. Nevertheless, the people in Pakistan are generally moving in the right direction to ensure good governance.

Recommendations

- The literacy rate should be increased to create increased awareness among people and developing alternative approaches to the issues.
- The media sometimes indulges in commercialism and sensationalism. The media should play a responsible role to spread awareness. Awareness campaigns should be launched by the civil society and media.
- Enhanced community services to check issues like hygiene, education and other social services.

¹⁹ Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 126.

- The civil society must be strengthened through developing horizontal linkages i.e., greater collaboration and cooperation with each other.
- The civil society must speak with one voice on common issues as witnessed during the Lawyers Movement. It will effectively improve governance.
- Enhanced collaboration between civil society and government can provide guidance to the government in identifying problems and forming sound policies.■