

Chapter 43

Telecentres as a Medium for Good Governance in Rural India

Gaurav Mishra

Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology (DA-IICT), India

ABSTRACT

It has been established in literature that “good governance” has major implications for poverty reduction, equity, empowerment, and quality of life. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is seen as potentially very influential for the cause of good governance. E-governance is seen as means to achieve tenets of “good governance”. E-governance addresses core components of good governance by seeking to improve efficiency and effectiveness of government, relationships with communities, businesses, citizens, and NGO/civil societies for better provision of services, accountability, transparency, and social development. In the beginning sections of the chapter, ideologies behind good governance are discussed because e-government initiatives are presumably embedded in the “good governance” thinking in development. The chapter also focuses on the relevance of e-governance as a means to achieve “good governance.” In rural areas e-governance services are mostly provided through telecentres; hence, the chapter also discusses the role and issues related to telecentres for e-governance service delivery.

INTRODUCTION: GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good governance is a term widely used in public administration, political science and development literature. Good governance has become a political and economic conditionality for multilateral financing and programs for developing countries (Brillantes Jr & Fernandez, 2013; Weiss, 2000). There has been increased focus on good governance which is seen as important by major aid donors (Moore, 2006). According to Hyden,

(2001), improvement of the political setups of developing countries is seen as a pre-requisite for development.

Governance can be understood as the government’s ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services (Fukuyama, 2013). Governance refers to the institutional underpinnings of public authority and decision making (Grindle, 2012). ‘Good governance’ as a concept shows a positive connotation in relation to political systems. The opposite concept i.e. ‘poor/bad governance’ implicit a problem that countries need to avoid

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(Grindle, 2012). The consequences of non-performing government or poor governance can be wastage of resources, undelivered services and denial of social, legal and economic protection to citizens (Grindle, 2004). Poor governance can affect the countries socio-political, environmental and economic sustainability (Hellström, 2011). In literature, there is no clear consensus on what actually constitutes 'good governance'. There are varied dimensions on the concept of 'good governance'. According to Chandra and Yokoyama (2011), good governance should include a legal system that is effective, impartial and transparent. In addition, it should protect property and individual rights. The system should have public institutions that are stable, credible and honest; and government policies that favour free and open markets (Chandra & Yokoyama, 2011). Parameters, like, voice and accountability, political stability, absence of violence, effective government, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption constitutes integral part of good governance (Ott, 2010). Good governance definitions differ in the degree to which they imply particular policies or policy outcomes, for example, stable macroeconomic policy, reduction in poverty, openness to trade, decentralization, efficient revenue collection, widespread participation in development decision-making, or strong legislatures (Grindle, 2011). Concepts, such as accountability, transparency, participatory monitoring, voice, democratization, rule of law, access to information, social inclusion, women's empowerment, and civil society capacity development have been used as components of good governance in designing programmes in various sectors like infrastructure, environment, health and public sector reform (Bhargava, Cutler, & Ritchie, 2011). According to Weiss (2000), good governance tries to remove two undesirable characteristics of governance: the unrepresentative character of governments and inefficiency of non-market systems (Weiss, 2000).

As seen in the above paragraph, there are multiple dimensions on what constitutes good governance. However, largely there is consensus on the parameters of human rights in the development debate. This approach makes it clear that the poor have the right to a decent life and those rights are vehicles for empowerment (Hyden, 2001). Citizen engagement is held to be important for good governance as recognized by development actors (Bhargava et al., 2011). Good governance is considered problematic as a guide to development or poverty reduction as it covers many areas of the public sector, from institutes engaged in policy making to organizations which manage administrative systems and deliver goods and services to citizens (Grindle, 2004). Grindle (2004) believe that good governance requires change in political organization, representation of interests and a process for policy and decision making. When good governance is seen as means for poverty reduction these aspects are to be taken into consideration. According to Grindle (2004), reforms in judicial systems, public administration, public expenditure management, anti-corruption and decentralization are means to achieve good governance.

There are critiques to good governance which focus less on principles like accountability or equity but more on the ways these principles are achieved. Universal models developed by western donors are often questioned for their viability in different socio-economic, historical and cultural contexts (Grindle, 2011). Good governance has often been linked with aid criteria and developing countries are sometimes burdened with loans to meet these criteria for the further release of funds (Grindle, 2004). In some cases donors ignore violations of good governance to meet their objectives. Global funding organizations sometimes favour strong stakeholders and also may not follow principles of good governance. Weiss (2000) argues that although good governance has been on the radar of the international agenda, it has also been critiqued by UN systems. Effective political environment and open markets

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