Challenges and Prospects of Aid Agencies' Models of Governance in South Asia

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Why governance situation in South Asian countries is not improving is the big question from the scholars. However, this million dollar question is sometimes suppressed by a counter question: is good governance a must for development in typical South Asian context. This study addresses these two apparently contradictory but complementary questions in the unique sociocultural and political traits of South Asia. With the help of the latest researches and statistics, this exploratory study tries to unfold the current challenges behind the failure towards ensuring development-oriented governance in South Asia. The study finds that long existing socio-economic and political problems are still posing big challenges towards implementing good governance.

1. Introduction

Aid agencies are benevolent organizations originated in the developed world and came into discourse for their role after the end of cold war. These organizations were primarily involved in relief and humanitarian activities in the developing world (Slim, 1997). These organizations are working in different areas in the developing countries (Martens, 2005). However, there prevail debates on the successes of the programs supported by the aid agencies, especially those by the multilateral aid agencies' (WB and IMF) (Gilbert, Powell and Vines, 1999). These agencies at the early phase of activities mainly contributed in infrastructure development, health, food, education, etc. sectors (Martens, 2004) but in the next phase, beginning in 1989, started giving highest emphasis on 'improving governance' in the developing countries. For aid agencies the notion 'improving governance' refers to replicating the principles of governance and their best practices, being followed in the western democratic and developed countries, in the developing countries. This new phase, where good public management was a precondition for development assistance strategies for developing countries started with the observation that bad governance in the Sub-Saharan African countries was creating underdevelopment (Kaufmann et al., 2003).

The principles of good governance are some social norms practiced in the western developed countries. Nevertheless, these principles, incorporating the variances stemmed from cultural contexts of countries and regions, are now accepted as standard norms and practices of governance in every region of the world (Ray, 1999; Campos and Nugent, 1999).

However, incorporating the elements of the aid agencies models of governance has not improved governance scenario in South Asian countries (Jamil et al., 2013)

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endorsing the big debate whether governance models of the aid agencies succeed in delivering better service to South Asian people. Scholars opine that all the aspects of good governance grown up in the western world should go through the local contextualization process before application in this part of the world.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews literature on governance scenario and challenges of the South Asian countries. Methodology used in the study is presented in section 3. Results of the study are discussed in section 4. Here, the overall governance scenario in the South Asian countries along with challenges and prospects of governance found in the study are presented here. Lastly, in section 5 we have shown timeliness and implications of our study. Also, we have given suggestions for future studies in this field. This paper finishes with some of the limitations we faced during the study.

2. Literature Review

Governance scenario of the South Asian countries has always drawn the attention of both local and international scholars. Voluminous numbers of studies have been performed to understand unique sociocultural contexts. Studies have also focused on finding remedies to overcome the deadlock of poor governance in this region.

Except Nepal and Bhutan South Asian countries are originated from the British colony (Brass, 2010). The similar historical and cultural heredity of the South Asian countries have created a set of general features of governance practice in these countries (Jamil et al., 2013). They have identified four problematic features of governance in South Asian countries: paternalism, the administrative state, alliances and networking and reinventing states.

However, other studies have found some other sociopolitical features unique creating major challenges of good governance in these countries. For example, the administrative system the South Asian countries were established during the British regime with the purpose of collecting revenues only. The sociopolitical system is attributed to the fusion of administration and politics, colony based governance system, a control of the state over the development activities and subordination of the private sector to the state (Haque, 2001). Another problematic area in the South Asian countries is corruption, which is sometimes nourished by nepotism existing in informal administrative practices (Islam, 2001; Khan, 2000). Their studies observed that corruption is related to increase in poverty, reduction of efficiency, distrust between public offices and the citizens. Also, family leadership in political parties is a key feature of political practices in these countries (Jamil et al., 2013). Studies have observed that local governments in these countries are not strong. The old system of Panchayat Raj was introduced in the 1950s but it had to wait up to 1993 to constitutional legality (Jain, 2001).

However, studies observed unstoppable quests for good governance in the societies of the South Asian countries. In line with this quest, these countries are giving special effort on improving law and order system (Cheema, 2005; Chowdhury, 2001; Desai, 2000). However, according to Malik (2012) some other preconditions like violent free politics, the rule of law, people's participation in decision-making and Constitutional supremacy need to be insured for this purpose. Besides, the causes of regional tensions should be addressed for regional development (Raja & Hussain, 1987).

However, earlier studies seem to overlook the root of good governance existing since long. Centuries beyond democratic practices some traits of good governance existed in this region. In this study, the authors tried to find whether these traits of good governance can lead to

building well-governed societies in the long run. Is there any hidden potential in these societies which will drive the society to overcome the current poor scenario of governance? And if any, how to make the most of the potential of the society to improve governance?

3. Methodology

This is an exploratory research. Data sources are journals, research articles, books, newspapers, reports of different organizations, concept papers. These data helped to understand the sociocultural, historical and political contexts characterizing the unique South Asian style of governance. Along with finding the governance challenges and prospects the study addresses these two apparently contradictory but complementary questions: 1. Why are not the governance situations in South Asian countries improving? 2. is good governance a must for development of South Asian countries? The present study analyzes the contexts of good governance to find the answers of why and how the aid agencies got involved in improving governance in the developing countries.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Governance Scenario in South Asia

An understanding of the roots of good governance is essential here within the common perception that governance has its roots only at the western civilization. However, two schools of scholars claim two different roots of good governance (Harsh and Asif, 2004, p 8). The first school claims that it is western liberalism, through being accepted as the norms, evolved into the idea of good governance. For example, the constitution of the USA has included many democratic principles of the political system North American Indians (the political system is called Haudenosaunee). On the other hand, the second school argues some aspects of good governance e.g. tolerance and 'noninterference of the state in personal affairs' are practiced also in the nonwestern countries, even when the west was demeaning these aspects. For example, when pope introduced judicial procedure against heresy from the 12th century to early Renaissance period in Europe, King Akbar of Mogul dynasty of South Asia declared religious tolerance in the 16th century. Also, some Buddhists kings and emperors of Asia gave emphasis on 'freedom and tolerance' on 'a clear philosophical basis'. In contrast, though modern ideas of governance evolved from Greek civilization, it was limited only for few selected men. They were the citizens of the society (Harsh and Asif, 2004).

The countries in South Asian region have a common British colonial legacy, though Nepal and Bhutan were not proper colonies (Brass, 2010). The administrative system in the colony formulated by the British just worked for collecting revenues from such a society, where the fusion of administration and politics, absence of elected governing bodies, a paternalistic approach of the state to all types of growth activities and subordination of the private sector to the state were fostered (Haque, 2001). In the same way, with the strengthening of the administrative system, political, social and economic systems of the colonies did not grow up congruently as these did not serve the interest of the lord country. Surprisingly, the weaknesses of these systems are still reflected in the practicing administrative systems and the modalities of rational public administration in the western countries have not developed in South Asian countries (Jamil et al., 2013) for colonial legacy.

A strong local government is one of the key features of good governance. Even after regular pursue by the aid agencies for a strong local government, it is still to become a strong and

effective institution for development in South Asia. However, the capabilities of the rural people in South Asian countries in providing inputs for taking decisions, especially on technical issues like the budget, is not beyond question. In the same way, it has been found that local government leaders in Bangladesh do not represent the local people after they are elected (Sarker, 2006a).

Aid agencies' models of governance give emphasis on increasing participation in all governance arenas and measure them with certain indicators (Rahman, 2005). But the modalities of participation in South Asia are not out of the debate. Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz rightly argued, 'participation does not refer simply to voting … [but] requires that individuals have a voice in the decisions that affect them' (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007). Conversely, studies found that only participation of the rural people in the decision-making process of development programs cannot make sure good governance (World Bank, 1998). In rural areas where most of the people do not get enough quality education, an effective participation of the local people to make sure good governance is unlikely.

The interrupted democratic regimes are one of the main historical features of South Asian countries, except India in the post-independence period (Jamil et al.,2013). For example, among South Asian countries, democratic practices are mostly affected in Pakistan. Besides, Bangladesh experienced military regimes twice. For Nepal, a country not properly colonized by the British has gone through games of power between monarch and democratic regimes. Though Nepal has now opted for democracy, a conflicting situation among the political parties for formulating a new constitution poses hindrances to practice democracy and governance there. Sri Lanka, one of the two island nations has come out of civil war and now apparently moving towards political stability. And the other island nation, the Maldives experiences democracy since independence, though to some extent it is a controlled democratic country. However, the governance issue in Bhutan is different from other developing countries. Bhutan is the only country in South Asia which is still run by the monarch. But the country has political stability even after some ethnic clashes (Jamil et al.2013) and gained control over corruption (World Bank, 2014).

Yearly published World Governance Reports of the World Bank repeatedly show a poor quality of governance in South Asian countries. According to the World Governance Report (2014), the governance percentile of South Asian countries on six governance indicators are mostly below 50 indicating a poor quality of governance. Four countries got percentile above 50 in some indicators (details in Table-1).On the other hand, the governance percentile of all the indicators in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan do not present any satisfactory picture.

Table 1: Governance Percentile on the World Governance Indexes (2014) for South Asian Countries

Governance Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Bhutan	
Voice and Accountability	33	61	37	33	27	28	44	
Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism	18	14	79	22	34	35	83	
Government Effectiveness	22	45	42	20	22	57	63	
Regulatory Quality	18	35	40	21	28	50	15	
Rule of Law	26	54	37	28	24	52	68	
Control of Corruption	19	39	55	36	22	47	88	
Total	**136**	**248**	**290**	**160**	**157**	**269**	**361**	

Source: World Bank, 2014

UND Pproduces a Human Development Report every year based on the Human Development Index (HDI) on three components: life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and GNI per capita. Overall, South Asian region falls at the bottom of the group of countries with medium human development in Human Development Report (2014). Table-2 shows that South Asian countries have stepped down in the global ranking of human development since 1998.

However, development, for which the aid agencies recommend their models of governance for the developing countries, may be correlated with Governance Indices (Table-1). However, the so-called relation of development with good governance does not fit Bhutan. Bhutan, which apparently got the highest total governance percentile in the World governance Index (Table-1) in South Asia, ranks four in the Human Development Index (Table-2). The mismatch in the case of Bhutan is inquisitive and may evoke again the debate that whether better governance can make sure better development.

Table 2: Human Development Indexes (2014) of South Asian Countries

Country	HDI (0.453)	Rank in South Asia (2014)	Rank in the world (2014)	Rank in the world (1998)
Sri Lanka	0.750	1	73	84
Maldives	0.698	2	103	89
India	0.586	3	135	128
Bhutan	0.584	4	136	142
Bangladesh	0.558	5	142	146
Nepal	0.540	6	145	144
Pakistan	0.537	7	146	135

Source: UNDP 2014 and 1998

4.2 Challenges

To understand the general scenario of governance in South Asia, Jamil et al.(2013) have identified four problematic faces of governance, there: paternalism, the administrative state, alliances and networking and reinventing states. Besides, there are some unique sociopolitical aspects, which are deeply rooted in South Asia, are the major challenges of good governance in South Asia.

Poverty is a great problem for South Asian countries as it poses a huge challenge to good governance. The frustrating scenario of poverty in this region comes up in the UNDP's Human Development Report. According to its 2014's report about 44.4 percent of the population live on \$1.25−\$2.50 a day (UNDP, 2014). Whereas poverty has a relationship with lack of education facility, South Asia has the highest inequality in education. The HDI values are in South Asia has been 0.588 just above Sub-Saharan Africa with HDI value 0.502. Moreover, whereas inequality in income is gradually reducing in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, it seems to increase in South Asian countries, where 24 percent of workers still earn less than \$1.25 a day per person (UNDP, 2014).

A weak practice of the rule of law is a big challenge to good governance in South Asian countries. Equality for all before the law is not expected in this region. Though the Constitutions of several South Asian countries encompass rule of law for their citizen (Rahman, 2013), the practice of the rule of law in these countries is far from reality. According to WJP (2015) the Rule of law Indices of South Asian countries are not satisfactory (details in table-3). For example, KR Narayanan, former President of India, in an address to the nation on August 14, 2000, states'…At every social and political level, there is a crying need to speak out against crimes and violence of all kinds, but every such rhetoric is absent in India today'(Sangroula, 2010). Similarly, for Bangladesh Sobhan (2004) and Shelley (2004) argue that unlawful and political killing has become rampant due to an absence of the rule of law.

Table 3: Rule of Law Index of South Asian Countries (2015)

Country	Rule of law Index	Global rank
Bangladesh	0.42	93
India	0.52	59
Sri Lanka	0.51	58
Nepal	0.53	48
Pakistan	0.38	98

Source: WJP, 2015

Though corruption is accepted as a universal problem, its level and types are not similar in all countries or regions (UNDP, 2005). Corruption practice in South Asia has its own uniqueness with state level corruption is increasing unchecked every year (Zafarullah and Akhter, 2001; Khan, 2000). Islam (2001) and Khan (2000) observe that corruption, which is also sometimes fostered by nepotism in South Asia, contributes to increasing poverty, reducing efficiency, distrust between public offices and the citizens, are severely affecting good governance in this region. Most of the South Asian countries rank at the bottom, as usual, in the Corruption Perception Index 2014 (detail in Table-4).

Table 4: Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International-TI (2014) in South Asia.

Country	Country rank
Bangladesh	145
India	85
Sri Lanka	85
Nepal	126
Pakistan	126
Bhutan	33

Source: TI 2014

In South Asia, a region of high power distance societies, paternalism is a deeply rooted social value in interpersonal relationships. Family leadership is at the centre of activities of the top political organizations in South Asia, such as, the Nehru-Gandhi family in India, the Mujib and the Zia families in Bangladesh, the Bhutto family in Pakistan, the Bandaranaike family in Sri Lanka, and the Koirala family in Nepal (Jamil et al., 2013). The political parties have not grown up on their own ideology, rather on absolute loyalty to the upper-level political leadership with a culture of opportunism. Moreover, elite members of the society control the politics in these countries. In the case of Bangladesh, the number of parliamentarians with the business background is increasing each term. In the first parliament less than 17 per cent of the MPs were business persons, but now the figure is 59 per cent (Financial Express, 2014). Even Constitutions do not let the parliamentarians opine against the party's highest leader or the party decision. For example, in Bangladesh, parliamentarians may lose their membership of the parliament for 'floor crossing' (Jamil et al., 2013). Kochanek (2000) cited Bangladesh as an example of patron-client relationship and informalities.

Governments in South Asia heavily rely on bureaucracy as the lords did during British colony. The civil services in South Asian countries originated from the Indian Civil Service of British regime (Jamil et al., 2013). Depending so much on bureaucracy gives more share of authority to it. Against this backdrop, reform measures refer to 'unhappy' reduction of the authority of bureaucracy in South Asian countries. This has been reflected in research by Wood (1980) who found 'that public servants, especially senior ones in India, bemoan the decline in their status and authority and look back fondly to the position of their predecessors'.

Two types of alliances are found in South Asia: alliances between the political parties and a politics-business nexus. Recent political history of South Asian countries shows that no single party has obtained enough majorities to form the government; so forming coalitions of the political parties to win the elections has become a norm in South Asia. There severe disliking between the alliances (Jamil et al.,2013), which reflects the existence of fault lines in the societies. Besides political alliances, the nexus between the business community and political parties is a predominant political attribute in South Asia. In Bangladesh, top business people are interested in joining political parties (Jamil et al., 2013) to augment opportunities for the venture. The business people consider the spending for the political parties as an investment and want to draw benefit out of the political investment. Jahan and Amundsen (2012) found that 24% parliamentarians in South Asia in 1973 were business person whereas in 2008 the share of business person among the parliamentarians has been increased to 56%.

Though the concept of governance refers to an increased interaction among state, market and civil society, increasing the capacity of the private sector and civil societies, along with public organizations has not been properly addressed in South Asian countries. Moreover, corruption, nepotism, the politicization of public institutes, low wages along with weak

managerial capacity and control system are throwing challenges towards good governance in South Asia. Besides, the huge gap in salaries between the public and private sector employees creates a gap in understanding of the uniqueness of the two sectors.

4.3 Prospects

Good governance appears to be a far-reaching goal in South Asia at the first glance of governance, but countries and societies in this region have not yet left hope in quest of good governance as it is believed to be the key tool for development. The values of aid agencies' model of governance may differ from the prevailing cultural and institutional values in South Asia. But the governance models of both aid agencies and South Asian countries, as a whole, have the same responsibilities, i.e., providing public goods and service, ensuring the rule of law and social equality, etc. (Hussain, 2011). The journey for good governance of a society may be eternal, however, South Asian countries are making progress (though the pace is slow) towards being successful in fulfilling these responsibilities. South Asian countries are adopting basic reforms for better governance. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal have given special attention to improving law and order system (Cheema, 2005; Chowdhury, 2001; Desai, 2000). South Asian countries have taken institutional measures to curb rampant corruption. But there is concern about the effectiveness and implementation capacities of these institutions. However, with a gradually heightening awareness about corruption in the citizenry and a watchdog role of the media and civil society with the support of information technology, a high tendency of corruption may lessen gradually.

The governance models proposed by the aid agencies differ in context from the governance norms and practices in South Asian countries. But the reflections of governance values like human rights, tolerance, private property rights, social welfare, women empowerment, etc. now found in the developed countries have not been achieved in one shot, rather the countries have gone through phases of turmoil before they have reached a level of improved governance. As well, the practitioners of aid agencies models of governance, i.e., the developed countries have a long way ahead to be absolutely free from corruption, nepotism, violence, human rights abuse and even poverty. However, some countries (mostly Scandinavian countries) have gone too far in some of these issues. Turning to South Asia, laden with politico-socioeconomic and administrative issues, like a weak presence of the rule of law, poverty, poor human rights condition, corruption, nepotism, violence, etc. the region are now going through the same phase of turmoil, that developed countries passed hundreds year back. To improve governance, the politico-socioeconomic and administrative issues need to be addressed in the context region and individual country, but not with the knowledge and experience of the developed countries.

For the proper running of a state mechanism, good governance is an unavoidable alternative for anywhere in the world. For South Asian countries violent free politics, the rule of law, people's participation in decision-making and Constitutional supremacy need to be insured for this purpose. The whole nation should be unified shunning all sorts of differences in society (Malik, 2012). Likewise, Acemoglu and Johnson (2003) argue 'good institutions guarantee two enviable outcomes that there is a somewhat equal access to economic prospect (a level playing field) and that those who offer labor or capital are suitably rewarded and their property rights are sheltered'. Moreover, globalization has created some added impetus to improve the quality of governance in South Asian countries to pick the opportunities of markets, trade and commerce, investment, knowledge and manpower globally. On the other hand, for making the development policy effective in South Asia a balance among human, environment resourcefulness and development activities, with a sense of equity, fairness and justice need

to be reached. Reaching a balance will not only contribute to harmonic and inclusive development within a country boundary but also in mitigating regional problems and tension among countries South Asia. For South Asia, regional development without erasing the causes of regional tensions is like a muse (Raja and Hussain, 1987). Besides, media as the fourth pillar of the state can create opportunities for people to participate in the decision-making process through the uplifting people's voice. Media can be a powerful instrument for improving governance of South Asian countries, where other institutional measures of accountability are ineffective and weak (Mazhar and Goraya, 2015).

5. Conclusion

Governance scenario of the South Asian countries does not present a satisfactory situation. The sociopolitical culture and conditions are considered to be at the deep root of this situation. There has been prolonged supports and assistance, especially since the second half of the 1990s, from the western developed countries for improving the governance scenario in these countries like many other developing countries in the world. Still, good governance appears to be a far-reaching goal in South Asia at the first glance of governance, but countries and societies in this region have not yet left their hope in quest of good governance. To reach to a certain governance standard in South Asia, formulation and implementation of the policies and planning demand utmost care and attention. Over the years, scholars delved into the reality to comprehend the grounds that has created the uniqueness of governance in this region. With the help of the latest findings and statistics, this exploratory study tries to unfold the current challenges behind the failure to make sure development-oriented governance in South Asia. We find this endeavor very important at the present scenario. Besides, it studies the involvement of development partners for improving governance in South Asia. Governance in the South Asian countries has been studied in previous studies. Still, there are gray areas. For a better understanding of the challenges, in-depth studies should be performed to explore those gray areas.

6. Limitations

The authors relied only on secondary sources for writing this paper. Collecting primary data from all of the South Asian countries was not possible due to inadequate of budget and time. Besides, even though there are cultural and social similarities among the countries, there are dissimilarities as well. These dissimilarities were not analyzed in the study. Because one of the objectives of the study is to present a general scenario of governance for this reason. For this reason, this study is done on the basis of cultural and political similarities not the dissimilarities. In addition to that volume of literature on this topic is huge and it was not possible to investigate all of them.

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