

## **The Need for Good Governance in Multi-Ethnic Societies: The Case of Mauritius**

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*Mauritius is the most beautiful island in the Indian Ocean. People from different ethnic backgrounds get along easily in the society. Although ethnic tensions are quite common, yet they rarely degenerate into conflicts. Since independence, political leaders have taken bold decisions in the interest of the population, to bring socio-economic changes for the sake of modernity and development of the country. Today, Mauritius is on the top of the list as regards good governance in Africa. This paper will describe the different components of good governance. The study also aims to find out the extent to which there is good governance in the management of the society as regards to recruitment, distribution of income, political representation in the parliament, educational access, and empowerment of women. In this paper, both primary and secondary data have been used for the sake of reflections and analysis. An unstructured interview was carried out with a total of 30 participants in this study. Their views and opinions on governance of the society have been analysed and discussed. The majority of the respondents are of the view that the country has made enormous progress since independence. However, quite a large number of them are sceptical as to whether good governance exists regarding recruitment in the private sector and the parastatal bodies.*

### **1. Introduction**

Countries over the world are nowadays facing various types of socio-economic, political and environmental problems. Developed societies like America, France and England, have not been spared of the economic and financial crisis which have led their economies to bankruptcy levels. Besides, they have recently faced social instabilities and riots. The world has also noticed the Arab uprising which has led to the downfall of many powerful and omnipotent leaders. Latin American, Asian and African countries too, are making their best to manage their economies well but most of them are incapable to do so because of the current world economic situations. Given that we are living in a global world, what happens in one part of the world will have impact on the other parts. Therefore, there is a need to go for good governance of the whole world. Instead of having piecemeal and ad hoc types of solution, all country leaders should meet and decide what is best for the world and what needs to be done for everyone to be able to get at least the basic necessities each day.

Good governance is a concept that is cherished by all national and international institutions but how many country rulers and businessmen or multinational company leaders are really putting into practice what they preach each and every time they meet around big conference tables. These are interesting issues to uncover. For the sake of

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this paper, the author will limit himself to a description, analysis and examination of good governance in the management of multi-ethnic Mauritius.

In this paper, both primary and secondary data are used. Readily available information on good governance from books, internet and international publications, amongst others, has been instrumental for reviewing the literature. Primary data have been collected from 30 respondents in Reduit, where the University of Mauritius is situated.

The first part of this paper will deal with the literature review where the concept of good governance and its principles will be defined. The methodology used to carry out this study will also be described. The second part of the paper will report the survey findings which will be discussed. Finally, a conclusion based on the study will be stated.

## 1.1 Rationale behind the Study

In this global world, all developing and emerging societies have many goals like achieving positive growth rates, development of infrastructure, combating social ills and eradicating absolute poverty amongst others. Mauritius, too, wants to improve the standards and quality of life of its population. Besides, the Hon Prime Minister, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, has the vision of making Mauritius a developed island by 2030s. To achieve the Mauritian dreams, the state has to double its effort to design and realize relevant projects. Therefore, for modernization and development of the economy, Mauritius will continue to rely much on the foreign direct investment (FDI), international aids and loans from IMF, World Banks and other financial institutions. Thus, to attract aids and finance, it has to embrace good governance at all levels of management of the society. It is only when Mauritius will consolidate itself worthy of trust and confidence that major donors and financial institutions will provide financial and other aids, donations and loans. Therefore, this study will give an idea of where Mauritius stands regarding good governance.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review helps to summarise and synthesize relevant work, arguments and ideas of others (*writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/*). *Good governance is just like religion which is adored by all people, but each and every ethnic or cultural group views it from different angles.*

### 2.1 Good Governance and its 8 Principles

The term governance simple refers to *the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)* ([www.unescap.org/](http://www.unescap.org/)). The UNDP defines governance as the *exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs*. It is the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations, and mediate their differences."

Cleary and McConville (2006) argue that good governance occurs *when the state, free of abuse and corruption, conduct and manage public affairs and public resources efficiently*

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*and effectively.* Good governance means doing the right thing in the right way with due regard to the rule of law. According to the United Nations Commission, there are eight principles and practices of good governance. They are participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity and Inclusiveness, consensus oriented, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability.

### **2.2 Overview of Mauritius and Good Governance**

Mauritius is a democratic and multi-ethnic society. Different countries face the problem of managing diversity. Many are struggling and very few countries can be considered as success stories. Mauritius is one of them where Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Chinese live peacefully. Members from different ethnic groups can be seen together at workplace, in social gathering, restaurants and every public place. They get along easily and usually show much respect to each other. Mauritians are by nature a tolerant population. However, no one can deny the fact that ethnic tensions do exist in everyday life. Different groups are pretty well aware that they need to constantly manage ethnic tensions properly to avoid the degeneration of same into ethnic conflict which might paralyse the economy as were the cases of riots in 1968 and 1999. These two most tragic events in the history of the country, more particularly the 1999 riots, have been the main detonators for the Mauritian state to take cognisance of the importance managing diversity properly and in a just manner. It is perceived that Mauritian governments have changed their modes of operation after the 1999 dark episode. Several measures have been put into place to put people at the centre of development. Much emphasis has been laid on good governance. The state, more particularly the government, tries its best to operate in a transparent way to facilitate the lives of people by reinforcing the welfare state and combating poverty. The country has made enormous progress as far as economic development is concerned. Politicians have often called the population to join hands and work for the socio economic development of the country.

Nevertheless, the high level of tolerance, mutual understanding and effective social interaction among the four main communities namely Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Chinese in the country give much hope to the population that the country possesses all the necessary basic requirements that can be fully exploited in its attempt to inculcate the value of good governance in the population. High priority which has recently been given to good governance in all areas of development constitutes the necessary basic requirement for the construction, consolidation and sustenance of a just and fair society. Transparency and social justice should become part and parcel in politics and the development process so that no community, more particularly the minority ethnic group, feels being neglected and left outside the mainstream of development.

### **2.3 Mo Ibrahim Index on African Governance**

The Ibrahim Foundation is a well known African institution which carries out assessment of governance in Africa. It is a composite index measuring the level of governance in Africa. The index ranges from 0 (low governance) to 100 (high governance). Mauritius has been ranked 1<sup>st</sup> among the 53 African countries on good governance during all the last three assessments done in 2000/2001, 2004/2005 and 2008/2009. The perception

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index on corruption reveals much about governance in a country. Corruption includes bribery, fraud, nepotism and trafficking. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International is normally used to measure corruption at international level. The index measures the perceived level of public-sector corruption in different countries. It scales from 0 (high corruption) to 10 (no corruption). In 2005 the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for Mauritius was 4.2 as compared to 2010 index of 5.4. In terms of ranking, out of 178 countries in 2010, Mauritius ranks 39<sup>th</sup> as compared to its ranking at the 51<sup>th</sup> place in 2005. It has been found that CPI for Mauritius has deteriorated slightly even if it has improved its ranking. This shows that the Mauritian state has to review its strategies to combat corruption more rigorously.

### 2.4 Some Illustrations of Governance in Mauritius

The government of Mauritius has always cooperated and collaborated with the international institutions with a view to work for the benefit of both its population and also meeting the objectives of the different international organizations. When the world decided to combat terrorism at the beginning of the new millennium, the government of Mauritius did not hesitate to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 2002. It is important to note that the then President and Vice President of the Republic of Mauritius had to resign as they refused to give their assent to the bill, stating that the latter was undemocratic and against human rights. However, the government of Mauritius argued that such an Act was in the interest of the world population. The actual government is supporting the international community, even if it argued to be symbolic by many observers, to fight against piracy which is causing much harm in the Indian Ocean. The Hon. Prime Minister did attend the International Somalia Conference held in UK early this year which shows clearly the commitment of Mauritius to curb piracy in the region. This stand of Mauritius has been appreciated by the international organizations.

Regarding internal management of the society, the Mauritian state tries its level best to practice good governance. As far as participation is concerned, it has been found that there is consultation over issues that are of national interest. The population gets opportunity to voice out their opinions and views. For instance, when the Attorney General of the 2005-2010 government decided to bring a bill to legalise sodomy, there were much protestations from the public which forced the government to backpedal. More recently there have been much debate on the electoral reform and, more particularly on the Best Loser System (BLS), which is believed to guarantee the political representations of the minority ethnic groups in Mauritian Parliament. The Prime Minister made it clear in his speeches and interventions over the debate on the BLS that he would not go for a change if he feels any group, particularly the vulnerable one, will be victimized as a result of any amendment brought to it. Following the much heated protestation against any change to BLS from the public, mainly from certain intellectuals of the minority ethnic groups, it seems that the government will not touch the BLS so long it does not get an alternative that will be accepted by the population, more particularly by the different ethnic groups.

On the issue of equity and inclusiveness, the state has to ensure that all members of the society have an interest in the governance and no one is excluded. Besides, everyone

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needs to have the chance and opportunity to maintain and improve his or her societal or development positions. There has been a lot of improvement in the recent years regarding gender equality and equity in Mauritius. Women empowerment is quite successful as we can see women entrepreneurs, directors, ministers, permanent secretaries, and recently a woman has been nominated Vice President of the Republic of Mauritius.

Besides, a society should see to it that resources are fairly distributed among its population. Mauritius has a well established welfare state. Education is free from pre-primary to University level. Even the transport is free for all students. Everyone has access to education. Free health services are provided by the Ministry of Health to the population. Universal basic pensions are given to all those who reach the retirement age. The ageing population also enjoys free public transport. The government also has a social housing project where the vulnerable and poor meeting certain basic requirements benefit a decent place to live. Through its welfare policies, Mauritius tries to improve and ameliorate the plight of the population, particularly the needy ones. To further consolidate equity, inclusiveness, fairness and social justice, the government of Mauritius has passed the Equal Opportunity Act and has set up an Equal Opportunity Commission. The Prime Minister of Mauritius has made it clear that only a just and fair society will enable everyone a fair chance to succeed in life.

When we come to transparency and accountability, we find that although the society has made some progress yet much remains to be done. Transparency makes possible for information to be freely available to all, especially to those who are affected by decisions taken and their enforcement. Besides, all the state stakeholders, the government institutions, the private sector and the civil society, should adhere to accountability regarding their operations in all areas of management. Mauritius has quite a number of audit institutions yet it found that each and every year corruption and mismanagement continue to harm the society. The 2003 MCB/NPF (Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd and National Pension Fund) saga is still in the mind of the population. There was a mismanagement of the public fund, of about 880 million rupees, in collaboration with the private sector. The real culprits are still unknown. More recently, Mauritius has met with another big scandal in 2011 which is known as the Med Point saga. The purchase of a building for 144 million rupees to be served as a geriatric hospital was not done in the proper manner. Now each and everyone involved in the purchase and payment is shifting blame on the other. The case of alleged corruption has been reported to the ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption) and the population is awaiting patiently for the outcome.

### 3. Methodology

For Parahoo (1997), methodology simply refers to a plan that describes how, when and where data are to be collected and analysed. Haralambos and Langley (2003) state that after having selected a topic for study, a researcher must choose the appropriate methods to collect and analyse data. For the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. Secondary data have been easily available from national and international publications, books and internet sources amongst others. To

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get a more in-depth understanding of the topic under study, there was a necessity to collect some primary data. A sample size of 30 educated respondents aged 18 and above were questioned. Given that this is a qualitative research which will contribute to an understanding of the need for good governance, the non-probability sample was chosen. There was a combination of both accidental and purposive sampling methods that were used. Thus, only people who were in Reduit at the time and on the days when the interviews were carried out had the chance to be selected. Besides, the researcher deliberately chose to interview the people who work in Reduit. All potential respondents were informed about the study briefly and most of those who were approached gave their opinions and views on the questions asked.

### 4. Results/Analysis

Data received from the field work do not make much sense until they are teased out or analysed (Parahoo, 1997). The unstructured interview allowed me to probe and get further relevant information. Most of the interviews were in the form of interactions. Depending on the respondents, I chose to write down answers or rely on my memory for the answers obtained. Given that some people do not like giving interviews, in a few cases, I preferred to engage into conversation with the potential participants. Once the rapport was built, I diverted the conversation and I asked them about their views and opinions on the subject matter. On coming back to my office I had to write and rewrite the field notes properly and enter same on my personal computer on the same day so as not to miss any important information.

When queried about what they meant by good governance, the majority of the respondents stated responsible government, good leadership, transparency in recruitment and provision of services, youth empowerment, caring for street children and needy people. Only a few respondents were of the view that accountability is part of good governance. Three respondents were well informed of good governance and they gave very long answers which clearly show that people are aware of what is good governance. Thus, the state stakeholders need to inculcate the culture of governance in the politicians and the businessmen as they are dealing with an informed population.

On the question about recruitment in Mauritius, a large variety of responses were received. The majority of the participants argued that recruitment process in the country is not totally transparent. All the respondents agreed that government jobs are advertised by the Public Service Commission but quite a big majority had some reserves about the recruitment exercise. Not all of them felt that the most deserving candidates are given the jobs. However, regarding promotions at higher level jobs in government, some respondents said that nepotism seems to come into play during the promotion exercise. But when I probed further by stating that there is an Appeal Tribunal where aggrieved candidates may make appeals, a few respondents said that the authority has done a good thing to counter check the recruitment and promotion exercises in the government.

Regarding recruitment and promotion exercises in other sectors like the private enterprises, parastatal bodies and the civil society, particularly NGOs, most of the respondents pointed out that they have never or rarely come across any advertisement

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for vacancies in the such organizations. Some respondents even went further to say that they know certain companies where most of the employees are relatives. One participant stated that he had recently heard that one of his friends got a job in a well known private bank. When he inquired about the advertisement for the jobs, he was given to understand that his friend has an uncle who works for the bank. This shows clearly that recruitment in certain sectors need to reviewed and transparency should prevail. The respondents were also of the view that given para-statal bodies like the District councils, Municipalities, Air Mauritius and civil society organization like NGOs received financing and grants and other aids from the central government, there is a need for more transparency in their operations at all levels. For instance, the government should initiate policies for the organizations and make it legal for them to advertise the vacant posts and also provide their detail expenses for organizations of workshops or other related activities.

On a question about the Equal Opportunity Act and the Equal Opportunity Commission, most of the respondents appreciated that the government has done a good job. However, the majority of them said that it is only after some time that Mauritius can evaluate the performance of the Equal Opportunity Commission. Therefore, the Commission has the daunting task of living to the expectations of the population in the months or years to come.

Given that there are about seven thousand poor families in Mauritius, a question was asked on the income, salaries and wages paid to workers. The majority of the participants stated that there is a mal distribution of income in the country. Some were of the view that absolute poverty is caused by the lack of sufficient amount of salary. One young respondent, who has just joined the labour market as clerical officer, earning Rs 15.000 monthly, said that he always run short of money by the end of every month. He added that one needs to imagine how the people, having a family, earning a lesser amount can survive. He proposed that the authority needs to come up with a minimum monthly salary of Rs 15, 000 at least. Many other respondents also proposed the introduction of a minimum salary. Quite a large number of the respondents argued that good governance on the part of the state necessitates concrete action to alleviate the absolute poverty.

On a final question about what they propose the state to do in relation to good governance, a variety of answers were received. Some argued that Mauritius needs to ease ethnic tensions in the country. For others, the state has to work as a family and everything needs to be done in transparency. Government or any authority should not try to hide important information from the public. The majority of the respondents were of the view that the tax payers' money should be judiciously used by the government and the NGOs. For a few, the private enterprises have to make contributions for the welfare of the people as they are the ones who get the prime lands to operate their businesses. Some answers were also related to youth and women empowerment. The state has to socialize and educate its youth in the proper manner. Teaching of good values should be introduced in the schools. Nearly, all respondents stated that Mauritius is a good place to live and the politicians should avoid doing harm to the social fabrics. One respondent said that politicians need to develop and modernize the society as they are paid for their labour.

## 5. Conclusion

Good governance on the part of all stakeholders of the state is a sine qua non for development, peace, stability, tolerance and mutual understanding in any society. In this study, there has been a description and analysis of the principles of good governance. The various examples given in this paper help to understand the functioning and roles of the state and also policies undertaken by it regarding governance in Mauritius. Although, Mauritius is regarded as one of the best managed societies in Africa given that it has been ranked first by the Mo Ibrahim Index for three times yet from the findings of the survey it is found that still much remains to be done to improve further governance as regard recruitment exercise in the private sector and the parastatal bodies. Therefore, the principles of good governance need to be adhered to by the government, the private sector and the civil society in order to consolidate a just and fair Mauritian society.

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