I am frequently asked whether PAC is making any impact at all on governance. This is partly because our mission statement says that PAC's objective is to influence the quality of governance in the country. More often than not, the question is about the impact of our “report cards”, the most visible activity of the Centre.

A straight answer to this question is that though we do monitor what happens after our report cards and advocacy campaigns, we do not have precise knowledge about their impact. Much of what we know is documented and information is readily available to anyone interested (See my book, Holding the State to Account, Books for Change, Bangalore, for some of the evidence). But we also recognize that what we are engaged in are very small efforts, and we should not be presumption to assume that our actions will have quick and decisive impacts.

When PAC was established, I used to remind our small band of colleagues that a civil society initiative is launched not because we are certain about the outcomes, but because civil society needs to speak out and challenge abuses and demand accountability of the state and its agencies. If no impact is made, I believe that we should continue and repeat the critique. At the very least, civil society will learn how to monitor the state's functioning and engage in collective action. This is an important attribute and strength of a truly democratic society.

One reason why impacts cannot be predicted is because, as the old saying goes, it takes two hands to clap. We can prepare report cards, publicise the results and even engage in dialogues with public agencies. But for reform and action to follow, the state must respond. It should change its policies, internal systems and make its staff more responsive to the people. It is only then that the public at large will experience impacts in the real sense of that term. But such impacts cannot be programmed. In some cases, results may come sooner than in others. Often, no significant outcome may follow.

In Bangalore, several surveys have shown that public services have improved somewhat in the past few years. Public agencies have certainly become more proactive in their dialogues with citizen groups. But how much of this is due to the earlier report cards and advocacy work of civil society here is difficult to judge. There is no doubt, however, that these initiatives had preceded the improvements and changes one now sees in the public agencies here. Thus the Bangalore Agenda Task Force set up by the Chief Minister, for example, followed in the wake of our second report card.

Impact can also be judged at least in part by whether other groups and organizations emulate the idea or approach. People pick up an idea because it makes sense and shows them a way forward. They do not necessarily wait to see it working on the ground in some other setting. Here we can say that other groups have experimented with report cards in other cities such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad. They have also achieved some results, though modest in scope. Surveys need funds and some technical skills and not all groups are well equipped for survey work and advocacy. What is pleasantly surprising, however, is the adoption of our ideas and methods in other countries.

Soon after the first report card in Bangalore, an Institute in Kiev, Ukraine (former Soviet Union country) expressed strong interest in doing report cards on the public services in their cities. They covered three cities in the first round and managed to introduce reforms in collaboration with their mayors and local NGOs. They raised one million dollars for this initiative. Now we understand that they have managed to find three million dollars to

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cover many more cities in the next round. They achieved their first wave of reforms when Bangalore had not even responded to the first report card’s challenge! Should impact include the power of an idea and its adoption by others? Since then, such report card initiatives have emerged in the Philippines, Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Peru, Uganda, and a wide range of countries. These initiatives reflect the conviction of many civil society groups, donors and governments that user feedback on public services and decisions can be a powerful aid to stimulate reform. Some day, I hope some one will assess what these initiatives have accomplished. A box highlighting some of these cases is given below.

Samuel Paul

REPLICATION OF REPORT CARDS:
WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE

Praja, Mumbai

Praja is a citizens’ group in Mumbai that is devoted to the improvement of local governance in the city. It has used the report card approach to highlight the problems with the Mumbai Municipal Corporation’s civic services. The survey covered 10 departments of the Corporation and its findings were widely publicized.

Praja’s dialogue with the City Corporation resulted in the design and adoption of a citizens’ charter covering the main civic services (such as roads, solid waste management, public health, etc.). It has also worked with the Corporation on the design of a new grievance redressal system. It is to Praja’s credit that it pulled together the skills, funds and clout necessary to accomplish these complex goals. Praja has acknowledged the Bangalore report card as its source of inspiration.

Kiev, Ukraine

The International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS) in Kiev, Ukraine heard about PAC and its report cards through international donors. A small team from ICPS visited PAC to learn about the approach and took some initial help from PAC before launching the report card in Ukraine. ICPS was able to raise the needed funds to survey the services in three cities where NGO networks were also established through this project. A positive development was the active interest shown by the city mayors in this exercise. They welcomed citizen feedback and created a forum for their officials to work with citizen groups and the media to respond to the problems identified by the report cards.

In a period of three years, this project was able to catalyse a variety of reforms in the three cities. Their problems, of course, are different from those of the Indian cities, given the traumatic changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union. A major achievement is the creation of civil society groups, a new phenomenon in the country. The project is now being expanded to cover several other cities and towns in Ukraine.

The Philippines

In the Philippines, the Government and the World Bank were the catalysts for the use of the report card approach in monitoring the poverty reduction programmes of the country. PAC provided initial guidance in the design of the report card survey. The exercise was much larger than PAC’s usual surveys in cities. Given the complexity of the poverty reduction programmes, the questionnaire was also much longer. A local survey agency assisted the Government in this effort. The findings of the survey were widely disseminated and commented upon in the media. Government has acknowledged the value of the study in diagnosing and correcting the problems of its programmes.

The Minister for Poverty Programmes in the Philippines has expressed appreciation to PAC for its assistance in this endeavour. This is an unusual case of a government adopting the report card approach to strengthen its monitoring function. If more governments were to systematically seek citizen feedback, the advocacy load on civil society groups could, to that extent, be reduced.
RESEARCH

REPORT CARD ON SERVICES OF BHOOMI CENTRES

The Department of Revenue, Government of Karnataka, has set up computerised land record kiosks (Bhoomi centres) in taluk (sub-district) offices to provide farmers with the Record of Rights, Tenancy and Cultivation (RTC). The Bhoomi project was expected to speed up delivery of RTCs, without delays, harassment or bribery. This empirical assessment was carried with the support of the Governance Knowledge Sharing Program of the World Bank, Washington D.C., and highlights the benefits that accrued to users of Bhoomi Centres. The assessment made use of the Report Card methodology using feedback from users to carry out the assessment.

The Government launched a scheme of computerisation of land records in the year 1991. Gulbarga district in Karnataka State was one of the pilot districts chosen by the federal government amongst 24 districts in the country. By 1996, the project for computerisation of land records was extended to cover all the districts of the state of Karnataka. However, the project fizzled out without achieving its objective. The breakthrough came when the Government of Karnataka mandated that Bhoomi computerisation of land records would have to be undertaken and finished in all sub districts (taluks) by March 2002. The result is the evolution of a transparent and effective land record delivery system, which fully addresses the insecurities and concerns of the farmers, and which is now in operation in all the sub districts of Karnataka.

The Department of Revenue of the Government of Karnataka has set up computerised land record kiosks (Bhoomi centers) in 176 plus 1 taluks (sub districts) covering all 27 districts. These kiosks provide farmers with the record of rights, tenancy and cultivation (RTC). The computerisation has covered 20 million records of land ownership of 6.7 million farmers in the state.

Records of land ownership are required to facilitate sale and inheritance, or to provide proof of ownership to avail credit. Upon sale or inheritance of a land parcel, requests to alter land records had to be filed with the Village Accountant. Previously, farmers had to seek out the Village Accountant to get a copy of the Record of Rights, Tenancy and Cultivation (RTC), in which there were the inevitable delays, harassment, and payment of bribes. The Village Accountant could afford to ignore or delay action on these “mutation” requests and delay the requests for certificates. Land records in the custody of the Village Accountant were not open to public scrutiny. Over time, several inaccuracies crept into the old system through improper manipulation by the Village Accountant and/or other revenue officials, particularly with respect to government land. In practice, it could take 1-2 years for the records to be updated. The time to provide RTCs, without a mutation, used to take 3 to 30 days, depending upon the importance of the record for the farmer and the size of the bribe.

The situation has changed considerably. In August 2002, for a fee of Rs.15, a printed copy of the RTC could be obtained online at computerised land record kiosks (Bhoomi centers) in all 176 plus 1 taluk offices. Copies of land documents can be obtained for any land parcel in the taluk by providing the name of the owner/cultivator or the survey (plot) number. A Village Accountant is available full-time at these kiosks. Since land records lie in the public domain, farmers can get an RTC for any parcel of land in 5-30 minutes from a Bhoomi center. Any record can be viewed through a touch screen at 7 kiosks. There are plans to use the Bhoomi kiosk for disseminating other information, such as lists of destitute and handicapped pensioners, families living below the poverty line, ration card holders getting food grain at concession prices, wholesale market prices and weather information.

How was the study carried out?

The Report Card on the Bhoomi initiative sought to assess benefits derived by users of Bhoomi Centres in relation to improved quality of service and satisfaction. A sample survey was carried out with citizens who have used Bhoomi kiosks as well as a non-bhoomi sample of those who have
used non-computerised land record providers. Quality of service and user satisfaction was compared across these two groups, to derive conclusions on the impact and benefit from the Bhoomi initiative. Data was collected from six districts reflecting geographic regions of Karnataka, and two Bhoomi kiosks were selected through sampling (weighted by intensity of use) among the kiosks operating in each district. A total of 198 respondents were interviewed across the Bhoomi kiosks. For the non-computerised facility user sample, four taluks were selected and 59 respondents interviewed. A team from AC Nielsen – ORG – MARG carried out the field survey and preliminary analysis.

Findings from the survey with users of Bhoomi kiosks:

Ease in use of the Bhoomi kiosks: Many users (66%) were able to utilize the Bhoomi kiosks with no help, in contrast with 25%, in the case of the manual system. Most users of the Bhoomi system (80%) found the system to be very simple. Many of the Bhoomi users (68%) had also made use of the manual system in the past; a majority of users (78%) who had past experience with the manual system found the Bhoomi system more simple.

Complexity of procedures: Most users (78%) of the Bhoomi kiosks did so without having to meet any official except the Bhoomi counter staff. In contrast, in the manual system, almost 80% of non-Bhoomi users had to meet between 1-4 officials, other than the Bhoomi staff. The extent of complexity is reflected in the fact that 61% of the users of the manual system had to meet two to four officials for their work. Legacies of the manual system have not completely faded away. About 18% of Bhoomi users reported that their document was not signed by the appointed village accountant, operating the kiosk. 6% reported that they filled out an application form for issue of an RTC.

Errors in documents received: Users indicated that the Bhoomi kiosks provided error free documents to more users (74%), in contrast with 63%, in the case of the manual system. Among those reporting errors, wrongly spelt names were the most frequent error (81% in case of manual system, and 53% in the Bhoomi system). However, major errors in land details were the issue for 31% of those who reported errors in the manual system, in contrast with 4% in case of Bhoomi users.

Rectification of errors: Given that errors are not unusual at this stage of development of the Bhoomi system, how efficient are the response systems? Almost all users of the Bhoomi system had the confidence to complain and sought rectification. 93% of those who had errors in their land documents sought rectification as compared to less than half (49%) in the manual system. Half the complainants (58%) got timely response in case of Bhoomi, while such response was reported by only 4% of those using the manual system.

Cost of service: All users of the Bhoomi facility who wish to receive a hard copy of the RTC are to pay a fee of Rs. 15/- each and receive a receipt for the same. A large segment of users (66%) reported that they did not get (collect?) a receipt for the payment they made.

Hidden costs: Citizens also incur hidden costs of time and effort to secure these certificates. 42% of the Bhoomi users reported a minimal waiting time of 10 minutes or less in the queue. The bigger issue is the number of times a citizen had to visit these offices to get the certificate. While most users (72%) got the RTC in one visit to the Bhoomi kiosk, only 5% got it that fast in the manual system.

The most serious issue is that of corruption and bribery. Two thirds of the users of the manual system paid a bribe - 66% of them reported having to do so very often. In contrast, only 3% of the users of the Bhoomi system reported paying bribes. What is significant here is that 95% of the Bhoomi users, who went through the complex activity of getting a modified RTC after mutation, did not pay a bribe.

Staff behaviour: While technical capacity of the system plays an important role in its success, the approach of people who handle the task is of critical significance too. Most Bhoomi users (85%) rated staff behaviour at the Bhoomi kiosks as ‘good’, none of the users of the manual system rated staff behaviour as ‘good’.

Overall Assessment

The benefits accruing to the Bhoomi user are of two kinds:

Tangible benefits: Bhoomi kiosks have significantly reduced the time that users spend on getting the certificate. A weighted average of the number of visits made for obtaining an RTC works
out to 1.51 for the manual system and 1.16 for the Bhoomi kiosks. The benefit in terms of man days saved is approximately 2.1 million man days per annum, leading to savings of Rs.105 million per annum in wages. The weighted average value of bribe paid in the manual system was Rs. 152.46 per person, while that in Bhoomi was Rs. 3.79. Even if we reduce the saving by the fee that they have to pay, of Rs. 15, the net saving is Rs. 133.67, and translates to a saving of over Rs. 895 million annually.

**Intangible benefits:** The users of Bhoomi also benefit from shorter durations spent in queues to get documents. Around 42% of the users of Bhoomi kiosks were able to complete their work in less than 10 minutes. Bhoomi kiosk users also had to meet lesser number of officials (weighted average of 1.43) when compared to users of the manual system (3.25). Similar benefits also accrued to Bhoomi users on timely response to complaints (58%) vis a vis users of the manual system (3.6%). A large proportion of Bhoomi users (85%) rated staff behaviour as good while none of the users of the manual system rated staff behaviour as good (63% rated it average).

Based on the above, one can conclude that the Bhoomi project has made a significant difference to the people who use it. It provides a single stop service with minimal waiting time and, to a large extent, has helped reduce corruption. Most important, it works toward ensuring error-free documents. However, to ensure the long term success of the programme, the statutes and procedures of the Bhoomi project need to be protected from any kind of interference.

(For further details contact Mr. Albert M. Lobo at PAC)

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**CITIZEN ACTION**

**THE VOICE OF CHILDREN IN THE WATER FESTIVAL**

**Objective of the water festival**

Water is becoming a scarce resource owing to its widespread mismanagement. Lakes filled with debris and filth, polluted rivers and dry wells speak of the neglect of this resource, while the thirst of the city grows. How do urban societies relate to water? How do children see water in the urban environment? Who owns water? What is the past, present and future of water in our city? What will be the status of lakes and ponds? What will be the fate of open wells in Bangalore? What happens to communities linked to water?

The Water Festival “Water in the City – Water of the people” was an effort to answer these and many more questions. Organized by Max Mueller Bhavan in collaboration with Public Affairs Centre, Swabhiman and Civic Bangalore, the overall objective of the nine days water festival was to initiate a dialogue on the issues of water in the city, and look at the various socio-cultural dimensions apart from the technical and economic dimensions of water in a growing city.

**Children’s participation**

One major highlight of “Water in the city – Water of the people” was children’s participation in the event. The Water Festival offered Civic Club members from the Children’s Movement for Civic Awareness (CMCA) an opportunity to interact with a varied and experienced group of people – exchanging ideas and absorbing information on water.

As a prelude to the Water Festival, CMCA volunteers conducted weekly sessions on water, and over a thousand children became messengers of the need for a change in people’s attitude towards water. Through campaigns in their schools and surveys conducted by them on the awareness levels amongst Bangalore’s citizens, CMCA spread the message on the need to use water responsibly.

Civic Club members participated in the festival in various other ways. Poignant photographs and posters submitted as entries in contests conducted by CMCA spoke of children’s perspectives, on water. Their message was clear and addressed to all adults:

*Manage water responsibly or we will have none!*

*The poor are without water – distribute water to all!*

*Stop polluting our water bodies!!*
The 25 best entries in photography and poster contests held by CMCA were displayed in Max Mueller Bhavan.

Representatives from the civic clubs participated in a water workshop, where they tested the quality of different samples of water in the city. The findings of this quality testing were also presented in the water seminar.

For CMCA, the Water Festival was just the beginning. Water will continue to be a part of our sessions in schools on a sustained basis. Children will continue to be vehicles of change, creating awareness in schoolchildren and parents alike on Water in the City – Water of the People.

The highlights of the water survey are presented below:

**Objectives of the survey**
The manifold objectives of the survey revolved around the crucial question of urban water. The survey aimed to enhance both children’s and citizen’s awareness of urban water issues, and the need for water conservation in Bangalore. It was also designed to shape children’s perspectives on this vital issue, where it could provide a conduit for children’s outreach to the community. Last but not least, the survey intended to identify the extent of ongoing conservation efforts at the household level.

**Methodology and Sample**
Questionnaires, comprising 50 questions each, were designed and administered by the children themselves. Separate questionnaires were designed for households and commercial establishments, which were then translated into Kannada.

Around 1000 children, in teams of three, from 35 CIVIC Clubs participated as field investigators, including 85 children from AVAS, a voluntary organization working with the urban poor in Bangalore. The children were trained and oriented by CMCA volunteers, who in turn had been trained by CMCA resource persons.

The children covered as many as 200 different areas in Bangalore, including 3 slums - Koramangala, Sanyasikunte and Anarjyothi. In all, they interviewed around 1250 households, including 141 households from the slums and 400 hotels/industries. Thus, it was ensured that they were carefully spread across the city, both in terms of geography and socio-economic groups.

The survey was completed in a span of three weeks during the period of October –November 2002. As part of the survey, an awareness leaflet was designed and distributed to each household and commercial establishment at the end of the interview.

**Key findings of the water survey**
The total number of respondents surveyed (N) was 1634. Out of these, 1107 were general households, 141 slum households, and 386 commercial establishments.

- Only 18% are aware that the rivers Cauvery and Arkavathy are the two sources of piped water to Bangalore.
- Only 13% are aware that Thorekadananahalli and Thippegondanahalli are the two main villages from where water is pumped to Bangalore, and that water travels long distances of 95 and 35 km respectively from these two locations to reach the city.
- Only 10% are aware that BWSSB incurs a cost of Rs. 20 per every kilo litre of water it supplies to Bangaloreans.
- More than 80% of the people stated that they knew Bangalore is facing a water problem and that there is a need to save water.
- 88% of the people said that they close their taps when brushing their teeth or shaving. However, responding to another question, only 58% said that they are making efforts to save water, of which 44% stated they are reusing wastewater.

**Conclusions:**
Lack of awareness of the need to conserve water has led to its irresponsible use among a large percentage of the city’s population. Most Bangaloreans are also unaware of the difficulties that the authorities face in supplying piped water. The people who are most hard-hit are those living in slums and other low-income neighborhoods, who now face a severe water crisis in terms of adequacy, cost and quality.
Some other important findings:

- 20% have no sewage connection. This brings to the fore the disturbing question, where does all the sewage water go?
- 27% of households say there are no roadside drains, which inevitably leads to drainage water overflooding our roads.
- 30% of those who do have roadside drains say they are blocked.
- 50% of these say garbage is dumped indiscriminately.
- 38% say flooding is a problem.
- 53% of the total number of people interviewed say SWDs are for dumping garbage or sewage, as against the 84% of slum dwellers who say so.

(For more details please contact Vrunda Bhaskar / Geetha B.S. at PAC)

WIDE ANGLE

ABOUT BEST PRACTICES FOUNDATION

The Best Practices Foundation (BPF) is a Bangalore-based NGO that documents and disseminates best practices in the fields of development, governance and gender. It conducts innovative research in partnership with practitioners and implementing agencies of the state and civil society. Through participatory monitoring, evaluation and documentation techniques it aims to build a strong knowledge base and serves to provide policy inputs based on gaps identified, best practices documented and recommendations from the field.

The BPF has documented case studies and published books documenting best practices of NGOs within Karnataka, nationally and globally. It has also worked with local and state government institutions to shape policy and forge partnerships for future sustainability of development projects. Through its in-depth documentation with organizations and the government, BPF engenders and provides feedback to development initiatives. Globally, BPF is committed to the documentation and dissemination of best practices of community-based organizations, and enabling gender-sensitive legislation and policies. Its founder has been selected for an award for the work being done through the Best Practices Foundation by the Guild of Women Achievers.

Gender and Governance is one of the key Projects of the Foundation.

One thematic concern of the Best Practices Foundation is local governance within India as well as globally. In particular, BPF has researched and published works on good practices in urban and rural governance and gender and local governance.

BPF has conducted studies on the positive impact of the 73rd amendment in the area of gender and governance. The Government of Karnataka commissioned the BPF to write a policy paper on women's self help groups for its Women and Child Development Department. Similarly, CARE commissioned a Strategy Paper on how to begin work as a national institution and funder in the field of Local Governance. In keeping with its commitment to gender in governance, the Director of BPF is also the co-chair of the Karnataka State Council of The Hunger Project on gender and local governance.

The Huairou Commission

The Best Practices Foundation is a part of the secretariat of the Huairou Commission (HC), a partnership entity between the United Nations and six global networks committed to grassroots community development. Through the Huairou Commission, BPF participates in global campaigns and programmes on best practices in community development and policy.

As part of the Huairou Commission secretariat, BPF acted as the global moderator for an egroup on gender and local governance in 2002. For the HC, it published a book on gender, governance and development, presented a paper on urban governance at the UN Habitat Expert Group Meeting on Urban Policies and Enabling Legislation, and was commissioned a paper by the UNDP on capacity building, local governance and poverty alleviation. Globally, the fastest growing movements today are located within communities led by grassroots women, which have proliferated as a response to globalization and because increasingly communities see their role in development as integral. The 1980s and 1990s saw an explosion of such movements with women's leadership as central working on survival issues, development, rights and governance. This has generated a vast amount of knowledge that has not spread and remains insular and invisible, despite the scale and number of organizations involved.
CAMPAIGNS

UPDATE ON THE PROOF CAMPAIGN

The previous issue of the Public Eye (September 2002) carried details on the launch of the PROOF (Public Record of Operations and Finance) campaign.

Since then...

The campaign has gathered momentum after the first Public Debate held on 17th August 2002. An in-depth analysis of the financial reports of the first quarter of the BMP was done for this debate. VOICES, one of the PROOF partners, then started anchoring the community meetings called the PROOF Energy Centre or the PEC. Citizens from different walks of life were brought together at fortnightly meetings to understand and internalise the performance of the BMP in the first quarter. Citizens who wished to participate in the PROOF campaign were enrolled as PEC Members. They actively participate in different activities, including a short 15-minute Radio programme on the Kannada FM channel called “PROOF Pattana”.

Through interviews with popular personalities, the programme is being effectively used to generate greater awareness and interest in the PROOF campaign. Besides this, VOICES, with the help of the PEC, is also reaching out to citizens, including the vast student community.

The Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS), another partner in the PROOF campaign has put together a user-friendly training kit. This is primarily to enable the layperson to easily understand government financial statements. A series of bilingual training programmes are underway as an integral part of the campaign till the end of March 2003. There is no doubt that these training sessions are providing communities the basic framework for understanding government financial statements. Soon it will be extended to Corporators and other stakeholders.

Side by side, the campaign has also worked on developing Performance Indicators for the Education and Health services provided by the BMP. Starting September 7th, four workshops were held on developing Performance Indicators for the BMP, in which representatives from the BMP, communities and private sector organizations participated. Based on the interactions during these workshops, Performance Indicators were developed for the departments of Health and Education.

Thereafter, the PROOF team collected the data related to Performance Indicators from the BMP Primary and Secondary Schools. After analysis and debate, indices were calculated to arrive at the ranking of the schools on the basis of the Performance Indicators. Management discussions with the BMP, the school staff and community groups have resulted in the launch of the pilot campaign to improve the performance of five BMP schools that had not been performing well according to the indicators developed by the PROOF campaign. The sister-school concept, for adoption of each of these five BMP Schools by a private school, is also underway. Data collection is in progress for Health Indicators.

At the second PROOF public debate held on 7th December 2002, it was the citizens who presented their analyses of the Q2 data. It was they who raised questions on budget allocations, receipts and expenditure. The PROOF Campaign lauds the BMP for being one of the first government agencies in India, perhaps in the world, to provide quarterly financial reports of its performance. It is certainly no easy task to provide this information. Again, it must be reiterated that this has been made possible mainly because of the Fund Based Accounting System (FBAS) recently introduced in the BMP. The Commissioner and his team of senior officers from the BMP were present for the Q2 debate, in which the newly elected Mayor of Bangalore City also participated.

Recently, the BMP has released the Q3 financial statement to the PROOF campaign and communities are analysing, debating and understanding issues they had earlier thought to be beyond their ken. And it is with great enthusiasm that all of us are looking forward to the Q3 discussions slated for mid March 2003.

(For further details please contact Sheila Premkumar at PAC)
GOOD GOVERNANCE – AN INSIGHT

THE CONCEPT OF “GOVERNANCE”
The concept of “Governance” started gaining prominence in the development debate and agenda of the early nineties of the last century. However, the concept is not new; dating as far back as the earliest human civilizations. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) defines governance simply as “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).”
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sees governance as “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.” Thus, governance “includes the state, but transcends it by taking in the private sector and civil society.”

The challenge for all societies is to create a system of governance that promotes, supports and sustains human development, especially for the poor and marginalised sections. The UNDP has been at the forefront of the growing international consensus that good governance and sustainable human development are indivisible.

The UNDP draws a clear link between governance and sustainable human development, whereby the state, private sector and civil society together play a critical role in sustaining this development. “The state creates a conducive political and legal environment. The private sector generates jobs and income. And civil society facilitates political and social interaction - mobilising groups to participate in economic, social and political activities.”

With governance being increasingly linked to human development, any improvement in the human condition anywhere has been attributed to good governance.

What is “Good Governance”?
This brings us to the concept of “Good Governance”. The importance of good governance for countries at all stages of development has been widely recognised by the international community, which has linked bad governance to the upsurge of various societal maladies, including corruption, poverty and violence.

The UNDP defines good governance as addressing the allocation and management of resources to respond to collective problems. Notwithstanding the diversity in the definitions and paradigms concerning governance, the following characteristics seem to emerge as a common basis of understanding of the concept:

- **Equity and justice in public decision making:** All men and women have equal opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness of public actions:** Processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while also making the best use of resources.

The processes and mechanisms that are prerequisites for instituting these characteristics are:

- **Participation** - All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests.
- **Rule of law** - Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws on human rights.
- **Transparency** - Transparency is built on the free flow of information.
- **Responsiveness** - Institutions and processes try to serve the needs and interests of all stakeholders.
- **Public Accountability** - Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organisations are answerable to the public for their decisions and actions.

Achieving the ideal
That good governance builds a strong foundation for sustainable development is now clear. But how does one work towards achieving this goal? Good governance is affected by a number of factors, including the quality of civil society, political participation and decision-making, and responsible and reliable governance. Civil society’s advocacy role can go a long way in improving the quality of governance of a country. Though an empowered civil society is an essential ingredient in promoting and safeguarding good governance, it is ultimately state-civil society synergy that holds the key.

Judging by its characteristics, it is easy to see that good governance is a complex ideal, one, which very few countries and societies have come close to achieving in its entirety. However, to ensure sustainable human development, action must be taken to work towards this ideal with the aim of making it a reality.
NEW RELEASE

ABC OF VOTING - A VOTER'S GUIDE

Public Affairs Centre has been advocating the need for electoral reforms through innovative experiments involving civil society institutions. ABC... of Voting, A Voter's Guide is an attempt to help citizens overcome information gaps and motivate them to participate effectively in the electoral process. The Voter's Guide has been conceived on the basis of a thorough assessment of needs and problems faced by citizens and designed in a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) format with graphic illustrations.

Key issues addressed in the book

- Registration by eligible voters
- Revision of electoral rolls
- Voting procedure
- Electoral grievances and redressal mechanisms

WHY A GUIDE FOR VOTERS?

We the people - these are the most important words in our constitution. Everything depends on us- the voters, who have an opportunity and the right to choose our representatives, demand accountability and determine the direction of growth and governance of the country. Several problems have surfaced in the gigantic task of conducting elections in India and to ensure that elections are free and fair. With each passing election, the educated citizens of our country seem to have grown ignorant and apathetic about the electoral process and elections. The result has been a steady deterioration in the standards and practices of political parties reflected in rampant corruption and the reckless use of money and muscle power to win elections.

Active participation of citizens is an absolute prerequisite to make the electoral system more representative, fair, transparent and free from all the other ills.

Copies of the Guide are available in English and Kannada at PAC. Orders may kindly be placed with us either by mail or through our website.

E-GOVERNANCE

According to the Official Website of the Department of IT & Biotechnology, Government of Karnataka, “E-governance or electronic governance may be defined as delivery of government services and information to the public using electronic means. Such means of delivering information is often referred to as information technology or IT in short form. Use of IT in government facilitates an efficient, speedy and transparent process for disseminating information to the public and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities.”

CORRUPTION IN INDIA

AGENDA FOR ACTION

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