

Governance: An Analytical and Conceptual Synthesis



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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide an analytical and conceptual synthesis on governance. Although governance is a vague term, in common parlance it resembles the action or manner of governing. Research scholars have defined 'governance' with the perspective of change and have given four broad meanings to governance in the literature, including a structure, a process, a mechanism and a strategy. Multinational organizations have portrayed governance as a mechanism of power exercise in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. However, governance is not simply about how government conducts business in its own sphere but also deals with how government interacts with civil society to encourage and facilitate people's participation not only in the delivery of services but also in the formulation, implementation and evaluation and monitoring of government performance.

The advantage of this article is that it not only describes what governance is all about but it also accentuates 'What governance is not?'. It has been concluded that governance has not been a unified approach to the study of politics, economics, and society as it lacks specific virtue of theory of causal relation.

Key words: Governance, Government, Participation, Democracy

Introduction

The concept of governance has gained high priority and widespread interest globally. Nepal is no exception. Generally, governance has been understood as the governing capacity of the state and its public institutions. The capacity here refers the service delivering functions of any form of government by responding to citizens' needs and demands in a democratic way. Several studies have shown that administrative systems of Nepal have been facing various governance and service delivery challenges (Acharya, 2011).

This article at first provides the academic definition of 'governance' followed by multinational and United Nations definition of governance.

Governance at a Glance

The concept of governance has originated from the Greek word 'Kybernan' meaning to pilot, steer or direct, which in Latin translated as 'Gubarnare'. Governance in common parlance is the action or manner of governing. Various literatures have asserted that governance is a vague

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concept, operates at every level, such as household, community, municipality, nation, region and globally. It is very difficult to delimit the scope of its application. However, governance refers to the way a society sets and manages the rules that guide policy cycle. Governance generally refers to the exercise of the power for the management of available resources for growth and development of the community and region.

Research scholars have defined 'governance' with the perspective of change which is needed or demanded in relation to the period of turbulence in the society. 'Governance signifies the change in the meaning of government, referring to new process of governing, or changed condition of ordered rule; or new methods by which society is governed (Rhodes, 1996).

Regarding the government, research scholars like Aiyede, E. R.(2023), has opined that the ultimate role of government is to make public policies, even if the idea come from outside government or through the interaction of government and non-governmental actors.

Governance can be generalized as "the process by which power and authority are exercised in a society in which different actors—government, the private sector and the civil society— try to communicate their interests; reconcile their differences and exercised their legal rights and obligations" (Fukuda-Parr and Ponzio, 2002).

Governance, much like government, has at least four meanings in the literature: a structure, a process, a mechanism and a strategy. "As a structure, governance signifies the architecture of formal and informal institutions; as a process it signifies the dynamics and steering functions involved in lengthy never ending processes of policy making; as a mechanism it signifies institutional procedures of decision-making, of compliance and of control (or instruments); finally, as a strategy it signifies the actors' efforts to govern and manipulate the design of institutions and mechanisms in order to shape choice and preferences" (Levi-Faur, 2012).

Jonas and Müller (2013) have opined that governance refers not just to the decision-making processes in the management organizations, but also to the processes and systems by which these organizations operate. It describes the mechanisms these organizations apply to ensure that their constituencies follow the established processes and policies of the organization. Governance therefore is an instrument for maintaining oversight and accountability in a democratic way within an organizational structure to achieve its goals.

According to Bevir (2013, p.1) "Governance refers to all processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market, or network; whether over a family, tribe, corporation, or territory; and whether by laws, norms, power, or language". He opined that literature on governance is diffused and is a much broader concept than government because it focuses not only on the state and its institutions but also on the creation of rule and order in social practice. Social theorists use "governance" to conceptualize abstract analyses of social coordination and organization. Governance is all about practices to reach collective decision-making; it is totally different with regards to sciences which are based on clear causal pathway. In the South Asian context, Jamil et al, (2013) have opined that 'all societies encounter numerous governance challenges and these become even more precarious in a democracy and South Asia is gradually introducing democratic practices in its search for better governance'

The World Bank (1997) has identified three distinct aspects of governance: (i) the form of political regime, (ii) the process by which authority is exercised in the management of the country's economic and social resources for development; and (iii) the capacity of governments to design, formulate, and implement policies and discharge functions (Parr & Ponzio, 2002., p.2)

From the above definitions it can be said that governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, to manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting and diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken for mass benefits. In order to guide public policy, governance need to be designed in the context of economic, social and political objectives. In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s when development was seen to be state led through 'planning' framework, strengthening public administration was the focus of what is today called governance. As the macroeconomic reform programs introduced in the 1990s, attention turned to question of why policy reforms were not implemented, and to obstacles such as lack of adequate legal frameworks for investors, weak institutions in enforcing law, corruption and ineffective administration. These governance proponents are concerned with creating efficient and effective institutions and rules that promote development and ensure public service delivery.

'Governance is a complex concept; it includes state institutions and structures, decision-making processes, capacity to implement and the relationship between government officials and the public' (Manasan et al 1999, p.4). As such, governance has both political and technical dimensions. It relates to a nation's political system and how this functions in relation to public administration. At the same time, it also involves the efficiency and effectiveness of public management. The key to improving the level of governance is to find rules and norms that create incentives for state agencies, officials and civil society to act in the collective interest at the least cost to society (World Bank 1997). In practice civil society organizations exist between the levels of household and state. Civil society ranges from small grassroots associations to the national associations and also includes large nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In the context of developing countries, several dilemmas arise about civil society organizations. Civil society is often largely excluded from interactions with government, its voice is often absent from political and policy processes which is preventing it from promoting and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of governance. Moreover, it has been seen in the Nepali context that civil society is mostly disorganized and there exists some kind of conflict in their role. In most civil society organizations, role ambiguity and lack of functional clarity and accountability persist. More precisely, governance comprises complex mechanisms, processes, relationships, and institutions through which groups articulate their interests. Therefore, governance is not just about how a government and social organizations interact. It is concerned with the State's ability to provide services to people and community

What governance is not

For analytical and theoretical purpose, more elaboration might be required of governance. Researchers also questions; what governance is not?

Firstly, governance is not a unified homogeneous and hierarchical approach to the study of

politics, economics, and society.

Secondly, it is not a theory of causal relation.

And thirdly, governance is not government. It may be considered as more than government, or an alternative to government but it is not synonymous with it (Levi-Faur, 2012).

Types of Governance

Nzongola-Ntalaja 2003 has broadly divided governance into three types.

1. Political or public governance

The authority of the political or public governance, is the State, government or public sector. It relates to the process by which a society organizes its affairs and manages itself. The public sector activities that are undertaken with public funds represent a direct transfer or are provided in the form of an implicit guarantee.

2. Economic governance

In economic governance, the private sector is the authority, and it relates to policies, processes or organizational mechanisms that are necessary to produce and distribute services and goods.

3. Social governance

In social governance, civil society is the authority, including citizens and non-for-profit organizations. It relates to a system of values and beliefs that are necessary for social behaviors to happen and for public decisions to be taken. Governance should not be reduced to government, as the three aspects of governance are interdependent in a society. Indeed, social governance provides a moral foundation, while economic governance provides a material foundation, and political governance guaranties the order and the cohesion of a society.

Likewise, Hufty, M. (2011) has developed four approaches to the concept of governance, including corporate governance, global governance, good governance, and modern governance.

In the South Asian context, governance is very weak and has failed to manage to fulfill the social and political needs of citizens. Diminishing level of trust in government and limited basic services provided by governments in South Asia show that South Asia is far behind developed nations (Jamil et al 2013). Governance describes the process of decision making and the way by which decisions are being implemented. It includes both formal and informal actors involved in decision making and in implementing decisions. Government is one of the actors in governance and the other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government.

It has been found in social science literature that the terms such as governance, good governance and people's participation are being increasingly used. Nowadays, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been emerging as robust actors on the demand

side of governance with potential to positively collaborate with governments. It is true that the degree and nature of collaboration with governments may vary based on the level of socio-economic and cultural development of the community, including the level of political awareness.

For instance, in the Nepali context, other actors may include religious leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and influential media persons among others. Governance has been defined 'as the body of rules, enforcement mechanisms, and corresponding interactive processes that coordinate the activities of the involved persons with regard to a concerted outcome' (Pokharel, R.K. and Tiwari, 2013). Additionally, governance is viewed as the bedrock on which economic growth, poverty reduction, and the improvement in the quality of life and social well-being, rests. The problems associated with achieving targeted goals are understood to be a result of poor governance. Governance may become "good" when it allocates and manages resources efficiently for providing goods and quality services to its people.. Policies that supply public goods are guided by principles such as human rights, democratization and democracy.

Level of Governance

In broad categorizations, governance can be examined at three levels global level, national level and local level. Governance whether global or local is about promoting a better understanding of the state's operations and its concern for the well- being of the society. It can be said that there is no one specific or particular theory of governance in public administration as social science scholars have used a variety of approaches to examine what is going on. So it is important, when reviewing the literature, to be clear about what criteria one is applying to select theories to study in more depth. In the a context of local governance, the issues and coverage of subject matter under the study have focused on specific geographical location. Broader than the local government, local governance is becoming a cross-cutting sector to address local accountability, transparency and participation of citizens. Transparency is the availability and clarity of information provided to the general public about government activity. 'Governments must not only provide information, but also ensure that as many citizens as possible have access to this information with the goal of increasing citizen participation' (United Nations, 2007). Strengthening accountability and improvement in the local service delivery are what must happen after the implementation of Citizens' Charter in Municipalities in Nepal.

In the case of local government, decentralization makes it an attractive target for fulfilling the needs and aspirations of local people by delivering public services. Hence, decentralization is of significant interest from a governance perspective. By bringing government closer to the people, decentralization in theory allows for stakeholders' representation and participation in planning, implementation and management of development programs. In carrying out local services, the local government is more efficient than the central government. When decision making is concentrated in the central government, it is believed that it is too remote and far-removed from the ordinary citizens, and lacks knowledge of the real problems and preferences

at the lowest level. When the functions and powers are transferred to lower levels, decisions can be taken that are more responsive to the needs of the people. Decentralization is commonly used to consider the powers, functions and authorities of the local government in improving its efficiency. That is one reason why federalism has been adopted as a major principle of governance in Nepal.

On the other hand, the quality of governance varies across South Asian countries ; some countries are managing better than others in terms of steady economic growth, human security and safety, and political stability. Others are lagging in ensuring and maintaining the basic tenets of democracy, despite the fact that most of these countries have adopted democracy as the form of governance (Jamil et al. 2013). Some South Asian countries are so beset with internal conflicts and confrontations amongst various groups and political parties that they may be termed as 'weak' or even 'failed states'.

In the Nepali context, the awareness of the importance of governance has been increasing. In reality, it has been found that there exists a big difference between the theory and the practice of governance in Nepal. It is obvious that governance is a complex as well as crucial procedure . It is very important to discuss the agenda and the whole policy cycle.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion that the term governance as such is vague, and it needs to be contextualized. However, in common parlance it is about the actions or manners of governing. This article has conceptualized 'governance' with the perspective of change in the social, cultural and political context and has discussed four broad meanings of governance: structure, process, mechanism and strategy. International organizations like United Nations have portrayed governance as a mechanism for the exercise of power in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. In reality, in today's globalized context governance is not simply about how government conducts business in its own sphere but also deals with how government interacts with civil society to encourage and facilitate people's participation not only in the delivery of services but also in the formulation, implementation and evaluation and monitoring of government performance.

It has been clarified that governance is not a unified homogeneous and hierarchical approach to the study of politics, economics, and society as there does not exist any specific theory of causal relations. Most importantly, governance is not just government; it is much more than that.

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