

Introduction

Ishtiaq Jamil, Steinar Askvik and Tek Nath Dhakal

Introduction

The pursuit for better governance has recently assumed center stage in developmental discourse. Multilevel as well as new modes of governance are changing the traditional governance models of nation states. It includes attempts to restructure central state agencies, reform initiatives of all organizations working for the public welfare, and improved service delivery for responding better to citizens' needs and demands. South Asian nations too have embarked on a number of efforts to streamline its public administration and policy making process. However, governance has not managed to respond to the social and political needs of citizens much to their dissatisfaction and their diminishing trust toward governments in South Asia (Askvik et al. 2011).

The book is a collection of essays that analyze South Asian strategies and experiences for improving governance and effectiveness of public institutions. These essays are a combination of theoretical discussion and empirical research of governance in South Asia, in particular, and developing countries, in general. As empirical studies the focus is mainly on four countries in South Asia namely Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and the Maldives. It also includes an essay on China.

Governance is at cross-roads in South Asia. Its history has been turbulent, unstable, hostile, and violent, ripping ethnic and religious groups apart, increasing

I. Jamil (✉) · S. Askvik
Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen,
Christiesgt.17 5007 Bergen, Norway
e-mail: ishtiaq.jamil@aorg.uib.no

S. Askvik
e-mail: Steinar.Askvik@aorg.uib.no

T. N. Dhakal
Central Department of Public Administration, Tribhuvan University,
Kantipath, Kathmandu 1509, Nepal
e-mail: dhakaltn@gmail.com

distrust between these groups, and denial of political and social rights. This has led to civil war, war between nations, and disrupted economic growth plunging these nations into poverty, insecurity, massive unemployment, and deterioration of quality of life. It has resulted in hopelessness among people and less accessibility to basic services like health and education leading to mass migration into cities and migration of the educated to foreign lands in search of employment and better life.

In the last few decades except India which has been a democracy since its independence in 1947, the wave of democratization has now also reached South Asia with a promise to make democratic governance better and turn the odds for a better future. This means state formation is still ongoing and taking different shapes from federal to unitary system of governments under both presidential and parliamentary forms. The democratic practices, however, vary substantially from one country to another, and in general governance has been poorly managed, even in a matured democracy like India. Problems and challenges of governance are many and so pervasive that some states may be dismissed as failed states (Islam 2001, p. 1336). This is a clear indication that the actual functioning of democracy has been far from ideal; however, democratic institutions in India have demonstrated great resilience and adaptability (Rizvi 1994, p. 594).

South Asian governance is a puzzle to many because the countries are poor, densely populated, and aid dependent. Basic services are limited and far below the quality compared to other developed countries. Corruption is pervasive, yet economic development is soaring with a steady growth in the last decades. How is this possible? Because the equation defies the usual format of good governance related to positive economic growth. The recipe preferred by international development agencies such as the WB, UNDP, and the IMF has coined bad governance as the major obstacle to economic development (Moore 2002, p. 286; Kochanek 2000, p. 530). The South Asian case, however, depicts a different scenario. Despite poor political governance, the economic governance has been effective and successful which may suggest that governance is not a pre-condition for economic development, rather, it may be the other way round as we observed in the case of the East Asian nations.

Governance Indicators in South Asia

Governance indicators published in different reports by the UNDP, WB, Transparency International (TI), and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) show that South Asia is lagging behind on a number of issues like human development, corruption, effectiveness of government, voice and accountability, regulatory quality, rule of law, and level of poverty. These are putting daunting challenges to these nations which have experienced violent and undemocratic forms of governments in the past (Table 1).

These indicators show that South Asia is not doing well in terms of the above indicators. As regards Human Development Index, South Asian nations, except the

Table 1 HDI, CPI, WB's world wide governance indicators, and Oxford poverty and human development initiative indicators in South Asia

	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Human development index: 2011 ^a (UNDP)	146	141	134	97	157	145	97
Corruption perception index: rankings 2011 ^b (TI)	120	38	94	134	154	134	86
Worldwide governance indicators: 2011 ^c (WB)							
1. Governance effectiveness	19.9	70.6	54.5	44.1	22.7	22.3	52.6
2. Voice and accountability	37.1	32.4	59.2	41.8	31.5	26.3	31.0
3. Political stability	7.1	73.1	12.7	39.6	6.1	0.5	28.3
4. Regulatory quality	22.3	10.9	40.3	37.4	25.6	29.9	50.7
5. Rule of law	28.6	59.6	52.6	44.1	17.4	20.7	53.1
6. Control of corruption	16.1	73.9	35.1	30.3	23.7	15.6	40.8
Poverty Index 2011 ^d percentage of population with income \$2.00 a day or less (%)	81.3	49.5	75.6	12.2	77.6	61	39.7

^a Ranking of nations among 187 countries, Human Development Report UNDP, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/> accessed on 14 November, 2012

^b The scale varies from 0 to 10, where 0 denotes highly corrupt and 10 as clean. The numbers in parentheses is ranking of nations among 180 countries, <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/> accessed 14 November, 2012

^c World Wide Governance Indicators of World Bank, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>, accessed 17 November, 2012

^d Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), www.ophi.org.uk accessed 14 November, 2012

Maldives and Sri Lanka, are at the bottom among 180 nations included in the UNDP study. In the corruption perception index of TI, all South Asian nations except Bhutan score high depicting that corruption is widespread.

In the worldwide indicators of governance of the WB, the story is not different from the above. However, we see that there are huge regional variations; while Bhutan scored the highest, i.e. best in four indicators out of six in South Asia, Pakistan scored the lowest in three indicators of WB's governance indicators. It is interesting to note that Bhutan is the only country in South Asia with a monarchical rule with the monarch wielding absolute power.

In the poverty index, more than three-fourths of people in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have an income below two dollars a day. This means poverty is pervasive in South Asia and in fact is the region where the proportion of poor people is higher than in any other region in the world. However, in the Maldives, the percentage of people in poverty is significantly less (12 %) compared to other parts of South Asia.

Wealth and Health Indicators in South Asia

Despite these disastrous indicators of governance, there are also lights of hope to these nations spearheaded by the rise in economic growth. The growing economy has created enormous enthusiasm among the new generation of citizens to take on the task and responsibility of development challenges. In addition to steady economic growth and export, and increasing per capita income, there has been enhancement of women's status and income, high enrolment of girl students in schools, huge increase in agricultural production from cultivating two crops a year, increasing remittances from South Asian diaspora constituting almost the major share in foreign currency earning of these nations, and more political consciousness and social awareness among citizens on many issues including environment disaster and sustainable development organized under the banner of civil society. The famous expression by the former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger dismissing Bangladesh as a "bottomless basket case" may no longer be appropriate for the country and other South Asian nations which have progressed markedly in the last decade (Table 2).

South Asian economies have achieved impressive rates of economic growth since the 1980s. Output for South Asian countries (especially in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, India, Bhutan, and Bangladesh) has grown more rapidly since 1980 than for any other region except East Asia. Maldives is already in the category of middle income countries, soon to be followed by Sri Lanka and Bhutan. India's high economic growth is turning the nation into a "developmental state."

In terms of health indicators South Asia has done well in spite of limited economic resources, which The Economist (2012, p. 20) coined "impressive" in spite of being poor. We present health indicators for the five largest South Asian nations in (Table 3)

Table 2 Wealth indicators in South Asia

South Asian countries	GDP growth (%)		GNI (PPP) per capita ^a (US\$)	
	2000 ^b	2011 ^c	1990	2011
Bangladesh	6.0	6.7	540	1,940
Bhutan	6.9	11.8 ^d	1,280	5,480
India	4.4	6.5	860	3,620
Maldives	4.4	7.5	2,500 ^e	8,540
Nepal	6.0	3.9	510	1,260
Pakistan	3.9	3.0	1,220	2,880
Sri Lanka	6.0	8.3	1,450	5,560

^a World Bank (2011)

^b Asian Development Bank (2012a)

^c Asian Development Bank (2012b)

^d Data from 2010

^e Data from 1995

Table 3 Health indicators in South Asia

Indicators	Years	Bangladesh	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Life expectancy at birth	1990	59	58	54	61	70
	2011	69	65	69	65	75 ^a
Child (aged <5) deaths per 1,000 live births	1990	139	114	135	122	29
	2011	46	61	50	72	13
Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births	1990	800	600	770	490	85
	2010	194 ^b	200	170	260	35
Infant immunization rate %	1990	64	59	43	48	86
	2008	94	66	82	80	99
Female (aged 15–24) literacy rate %	1991	38	49	33	49	96 ^d
	2008	77	74	77 ^c	61	99
Underweight children % of total	1990	62	60	44 ^f	39	29 ^h
	2007	36 ^e	44	39 ^g	31	21

Source The Economist (2012, p. 20), WB (2011)

^a 2010

^b 2011

^c 2009

^d 2001

^e 2011

^f 1995

^g 2006

^h 1987

Table 3 is a clear indication of larger nations in South Asia having done well in improving the health of its population since 1990. Sri Lanka already had a well-developed healthcare system. Bangladesh and Nepal have made huge progress in terms of reducing maternal and child deaths, and increasing female literacy rate. The progress in Bangladesh is remarkable in a span of two decades. With its 160

million people crammed in a small land, the country (Bangladesh) “Has done better than most countries at improving the basic standard of living of its people” (The Economist 2012, p. 20).

Despite weak political governance in South Asia, Tables 2 and 3 display that the region is getting more wealthier and healthier. In order to sustain its economic growth and social improvements, the region needs to improve its politics and administration. As we shall see from the different contributions to this book South Asia is a melting pot of different reform measures initiated by different trends from structural adjustment programs to New Public Management (NPM). Influenced by numerous actors such as international development agencies, the private business sector, and civil society organizations, the traditional top-down and all-encompassing monolithic statist centered governance models are now under challenge from entrepreneurial, neoliberal, and private managerial trends suggesting for a minimal state coupled with more involvement of different stakeholders in the process of governance (Haque 2003, p. 942). This entails expanding the role of civil society and including them in the process of decision making and use of public resources. Given the numerous reforms in the public sector, what is the best or appropriate way to govern these nations?

In spite of reinvention of state in the current age of globalization and NPM, patron-clientelism is still an important part and parcel of governance in South Asia. This has perforated almost all public institutions making up a severe challenge to neutral, social welfare-oriented and common good policies. The questions are to what extent states in South Asia have coped with both traditional and modern trends? What measures and reforms have been initiated to accommodate demands for policy transfer and change? What are the experiences with policy implementation and what learning has taken place? Have public institutions been able to generate more trust in the citizens? These are some of the questions this volume intends to address.

According to Torfing et al. (2012, p. 1), all societies encounter numerous governance challenges and these become even more precarious in a democracy. South Asia is gradually introducing democratic practices in its search for better and good governance. Coupled with globalization and market liberalism, South Asia is now well connected to the global village. The question is what are the challenges to democratic governance in South Asia? How to formulate common and citizen friendly policies? The region is performing remarkably well in terms of economic governance but does this foster democratic performance as well? According Pierre and Peters (2000, p. 1), “thinking about governance means thinking about how to steer the economy and society, and how to reach collective goals.” Formulating collective goals require inclusion and participation of people that would allow them to directly involve in the process of governing.

Contents of the Book

This book presents different experiences of policy making and implementation in South Asia. Making appropriate policy for change and development has always been challenging but now even more than before because of involvement of multiple actors at different levels. This calls for an understanding of the South Asian context as regards its culture, political, and administrative development from the Mughal, British Raj to their independence, and now to their contemporary scenario. This understanding could lead to more relevant governance mechanisms, forms, and structures for achieving common goals.

These are some of the major thematic areas of the proposed book. It intends to focus on challenges and constraints of governance in the South Asian region as well as what opportunities in the midst of adversity exist. In this regard, it highlights processes that enhance the level of capacity building, promote innovative and creative measures, and stimulate adaptive strategies to cope with challenges of governance.

“[Understanding Governance in South Asia](#)” by Ishtiaq Jamil, Steinar Askvik, and Tek Nath Dhakal argues that in order to understand the system of governance in South Asia, one needs to understand how it developed historically and what were the normative sources for its present state of affairs? What is most characteristic of South Asian governance is extreme centralization of the authority combined with personalized leadership and patriarchy that have great implications for the system of governance from policy making to interpersonal relationships. The development of governance in most of South Asia may be analyzed along two dimensions. The first dimension refers to how governance systems may be divided into informal and formal authority systems, i.e., to what extent means (rules, technology, individual behavior) and ends (organizational goals) are systemized, routinized, and regularized. The second dimension focuses on to what extent authority is top-down and is concerned with maintaining stability of the existing power structure or whether authority is polycentric, more flexible, and shared as well as contested by other actors allowing for change and innovation. A cross-classification of these dimensions produces four ways of governance in South Asia, viz., paternalism, administrative state, alliances, and reinventing state.

According to Goran Hyden in “[Improving Governance: Lessons Learnt](#)” giving an account of the evolution of the governance concept draws four important lessons: (1) institutional transfers of good governance are difficult, (2) countries of the South have their own institutional legacies, (3) context makes a difference, and (4) good governance as aid conditionality has outlived itself. Looking to the future and the challenges it contains for researchers in helping to improve governance, it addresses the following three questions: (1) is governance really an independent or dependent variable? (2) how do we get a better understanding of what governance interventions can accomplish? and (3) do we want to study governance using process or outcome variables? It concludes by recognizing the role that researchers play in highlighting shortcomings as well as identifying alternatives, because so

much is being decided based either on political faith or on consulting reports that are narrowly based on terms of reference set by the commissioning agency.

In “[Good Governance and the Global Economic Crises: A New Opportunity for UNDP? Comparing WB and UNDP Good Governance Rhetoric](#)” Tor Halvorsen analyzes multilateral organizations in terms of their criteria of governance. It is argued that there is a competition between the WB and UNDP about whose good governance counts. The WB favors more economic governance, while the UNDP favors more democratic governance. The WB has, since the topic of good governance was introduced, tried to reconcile two lines of arguments; on the one hand that democracy is a precondition for economic modernization, on the other hand, that “economic globalization” is conditionality for states to develop. The UNDP, on the other hand, has made democracy a precondition for its governance programs. When the WB now talks of economic governance it is thus more in line with the central policy of the organization; the dictates of the economy, and less about democracy as a means for economic growth. However, due to the critics of global liberalization and neoliberalism, we see a growing support of the UNDP’s democratic governance programs. UNDP seems to be able to claim a stronger jurisdiction of this field of development, while the neoliberal policies of the WB is challenged by the critics of neoliberalism.

In “[Failed States and the Lack of Good Governance: A Causal Explanation](#)” Haroon Khan focuses on failed states that may cause enormous sufferings to its people directly. A failed state can become a haven for terrorists bent on attacking other countries, especially the western world. Academics and policy makers are interested to know the reasons for the failure of the states. The chapter argues that by providing good governance, many of the reasons for the failure of the states can be eliminated. On the basis of causal analysis, the author seeks to establish empirically the relationship between failed states and good governance.

In “[The Quest for Better Governance: A Case Study of India](#)”, Randhir B. Jain argues that India since independence from the colonial rule in 1947, and the adoption of a democratic Republican Constitution in 1950, has been striving to reform its administrative structure for better governance to suit the new conditions and meet the aspirations of the people. A spate of reform measures followed the independence for better governance inspired by globalization and the New Public Management trends. The chapter reviews these reform efforts, particularly after the 1980s, and points out some further directions of reforms which are immediately needed in public management systems in order to meet the new challenges of better governance in modern India.

Bharat Gautam in “[Application of Performance-Based Management A Case of Nepalese Civil Service Reform](#)” analyzes the introduction of a performance-based incentive program in the Nepalese civil service and what factors affect its implementation. Rewarding high performer employees in organization is the main thrust of the application of performance-based management. Inspired by the NPM, this approach has been a popular reform agenda from 1990 onwards and was gradually introduced in a number of ministries. Looking at both the failure and success of this program, this study found that there are four major factors that

influence effective application of performance-based management in the Nepalese context. These are political will, especially of the concerned minister in the ministry, second, bureaucratic commitment of those working in the ministry, third, the financial factor where the monetary reward based on employees' performance is required, and finally, strong monitoring of reform agenda is required to monitor organizational performance and incentive policies on a regular basis.

In “[An Independent Institution of Governance? A New Statutory Civil Service in the Maldives](#)”, Mohamed Faizal and Rob Laking examine the adoption and implementation of the first Civil Service Act of 2007 in the Maldives, which was part of a major program of reforms to governance in the country, including a new Constitution and the introduction of multi-party democracy. They argue that the Maldives version of the model has, on the one hand, largely removed the control of the elected government over civil service employment, enabled widespread application of merit principles in appointment, created a more politically neutral civil service, and successfully implemented a retirement age and a contributory pension scheme. On the other hand, there are still tensions between the Act's basic principle of political neutrality and the loyalty of civil servants to the elected government and between the centralized administrative model and the decentralized political governance model. Furthermore, the government has tried to reduce the scope of the provisions of the Act by removing significant numbers of civil servants from its coverage.

Ishtiaq Jamil and Steinar Askvik in “[Citizens' Trust in Public Officials: Bangladesh and Nepal Compared](#)” focus on citizen's trust in the civil service in Bangladesh and Nepal. It asks to what extent assessments of trust in the civil service are linked to how citizens perceive the roles of public officials in these countries. According to the relevant literatures trust in public administration is primarily a function of the trustworthiness of civil servants, i.e., that they act in accordance with certain ‘Weberian’ role responsibilities and appear as reliable, neutral, honest, and competent. The findings confirm that certain characteristics have explanatory power in relation to how much citizens trust the civil service. In particular, the more friendly and helpful the civil servants are, the more they are trusted, and this is also the case if they are considered to be prompt and efficient. On the other hand, trust diminishes when public officials are perceived to be corrupt. Comparing Bangladesh and Nepal, also reveals one very interesting difference: in Bangladesh assessments of whether public officials are corrupt affect citizens' trust in the civil service, while in Nepal no such effect may be seen. The latter type of findings indicates that what makes up a trustworthy civil servant may differ from one national context to another.

Narendra Paudel in “[Does Decentralization Matter for Reproductive Health Policy Implementation in Nepal?](#)” identifies factors that affect the reproductive health policy implementation in two local bodies in Nepal—one urban and the other rural. The decentralization process in Nepal has not transferred adequate power and authority to local bodies to make decisions. Central-local relations are still characterized by central domination in policy planning and design. In the case of reproductive health policy, it is formulated at the central level, sometimes with

ambitious goals. The rural local government finds it difficult to implement the policy because of lack of expertise, too high target set by the central government, and less motivated employees. On the other hand, the urban local government manages better to implement the reproductive health policy than the rural local government.

Pranab Panday in “[Women’s Political Participation in Bangladesh: The Role of Political Parties](#)” argues that policy making is a process where a multitude of heterogeneous actors get involved to influence the agenda and design of policy. Like many other policies of the government, a number of actors have co-influenced the enactment of the Local Government (UPs) (Second Amendment) Act of 1997, through which women’s political participation has increased sharply in Bangladesh. The paper explores the role of one obvious actor—the political parties championing women’s socio-economic-political rights—in the process of the enactment of the Act. Drawing on both survey data and in-depth interviews with political leaders, the paper investigates the means and processes through which political parties exerted their influence on the making of the Act.

In “[Governance at Grassroots—Rhetoric and Reality: A Study of the Union Parishad in Bangladesh](#)”, Salahuddin Aminuzzaman reviews Bangladesh’s experiments and experiences with a number of decentralization efforts to strengthen the quality of governance with reference to rural local government, especially the lowest tier called the Union Parishad (Union Council). A range of institutional and political barriers and challenges severely affect the state of local governance in Bangladesh. Under different policy regimes, the central government has remained apathetic towards the rural local government in terms of strengthening its local revenue base as well as allocating central grants. During the last decade, central grant comprised less than one percent of the national development budget. This has severely constrained the capacity of Union Parishads to provide quality services to citizens. The nature of poor governance has tinted the “credibility” and “institutional image” of the institution of the Union Parishad.

In “[Governance in China: An Analysis of Two Cases in Kunming](#)”, Mei Li examines interactions between strong state and a growing civil society in policy implementation in China. On the basis of two cases in the Yunnan Province, the study identifies institutions and actors beyond government in tackling policy issues, their shared, yet limited responsibilities compared to government, and their not-fully recognized power dependence on the relationships between them. A lack of autonomous, self-governing networks of actors and a heavy dependence on government in policy process are two challenges for China on its way towards network governance. This paper, therefore, argues that China is experiencing a transition of governing style from government to governance.

In the “[Challenges of Democratic Governance in South Asia and Beyond](#)” Ishtiaq Jamil, Steinar Askvik, and Tek Nath Dhakal analyze challenges to democratic governance in South Asia. The major challenges are lack of democracy in parties that govern leading to patron-clientelism, inter-party feud making long-term policy making a problem, and excessive centralization of power leading to policy domination by iron triangle—a group of people joined by familial and

kinship linkages. These issues are also highlighted in different chapters. The way forward for better governance in South Asia is to establish rule of law and return of Weberianism to install merit and professionalization in public institutions coupled with accountability and transparency. In this regard, political will is highly essential.

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