Urban Governance and 'Human' Development Challenges in India

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Abstract
The development process in the developing countries faces many challenges: poverty, illiteracy, violence, social conflicts, corruption, and the ever widening socio-economic gaps in the society. The government of these countries, through specific political institutions, laws, and policies tries to de-entangle the society from these ills. But in India it has been realized that in order to build a secure and harmonious society the 'governance process', other than the formal structures of government, needs to be given more space and opportunities. The major onslaught of these above mentioned challenges is increasingly visible in the cities thus calling for a newer and better urban governance agenda and people as 'active citizens' and 'affected human beings' need to be put at the heart of this agenda. Within the limited scope of this paper, the author proposes to investigate into the following areas:
a)   Is there a need to change the institutions/structures of governance in India or there is a need for inculcating a new vision?
b)   The goal of governance should only be to increase the pace of Human Development or also to change the 'face' of Human Development?
c)   What are the various expressions of Human development challenges in the wake of rapid urbanisation in India?
d)   Policy alternatives and plausible civil society actions.

Keywords: Urban Governance, Human Development, Challenges

Introduction

Over the past four decades, the world has witnessed many shifts on the politico-socio-economic front- the emergence of newly independent countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; the demise of USSR; the crash of Berlin wall; Globalization as a new global economic policy; recognition and wide acceptance of the agendas of environment protection, human rights and gender equality, and so on and so forth. These changes/shifts have been, unfortunately, accompanied by the ills of power centric uni-polar world, widening gaps between the rich and the poor, neo-colonialism, violence, ethnic-conflicts, terrorism, etc. How does a developing country (India) respond to these changes? Is it enough just to codify rules, regulations, policies, and procedures by the government or more participatory norms for better governance needs to be evolved? The major onslaught of these above mentioned challenges is increasingly visible in the cities, and more so in the cities in developing countries. Globalization, environment, gender, decentralization, poverty, and sustainable development (to mention few) are issues that call for newer and better urban agenda. The role of the government and the mode of governance at the urban level need 'rethinking'.

The term 'government' and 'governance' are often used interchangeably. Government is described as "the complex of political institutions, laws, and customs through which the function of governing is carried out in a specific political unit."[i] Governance on the other hand, is a process through which actors from the state, the civil society, and the private sector articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations, and mediate their differences. "Governance as a concept recognizes that power exists inside and outside the formal authority and institutions of government. Many definitions of governance include three principal groups of actors: government, the private sector and the civil society. Second, governance emphasizes 'process'. It recognizes that decisions are made based on complex relationships between many actors with different priorities. It is a reconciliation of these competing priorities that is at the heart of the concept of governance."[ii] Thus government is understandably one of the actors in governance. The present and the future demand that in order to build a secure, harmonious and livable society free from violence and terror the 'governance process' needs to be given more space and opportunities.

The already intricate task of governance becomes all the more obscure in the context of the present urban areas comprising mainly of cities with open boundaries, complete fluidity, and excessive population influx. According to 1991 census, 25.72% population in India was living in urban areas. It increased to 27.8% in 2001[iii] and to 32.5% in 2012[iv]. Although urban growth has slowed down in relative terms (3.8% in 1971-81 to 3.1% in 1981-91 to 2.7% in 1991-2001), its increase in absolute terms cannot be ignored. According to UN, by the year 2020, India will have close to 648 million persons in the urban areas, accounting for roughly 47% of its total population.[v] The problems created by rapid urbanization dazzle practitioners, scientists, activists and the city dwellers themselves because of their complexity, severity and urgency. Also, while the phenomenon of urbanization is widely accepted as being as inevitable by-product of development, there are many undesirable fall-outs also. For example, in India, rapid urbanization has resulted in housing, electricity, water, and sanitation problems; poverty; slums; regional imbalance; need for better town planning; crime; waste management; emerging markets and their management;

street vendors and their management; prostitution; traffic management; public security issues; etc.

Thus the importance of urban governance, generally in the developing countries, has increased enormously in recent years. "Urban governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manages the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens".[vi] The argument here is that the state alone cannot check the alarming increase in the problems ushered in by the rapid growth of the urban population. 'In place Governance Mechanism' including civil society participation as well as decentralization is an accepted policy recommendation in order to identify the diverse needs and demands at the local level.

Basic Features of Urbanization in India

The urban centers in India primarily depict cities inhabited, on the one hand, by a population who benefit directly from the economic growth and the resultant infrastructural development in that city and on the other hand by the people having no access even to food, water, health, housing, etc. Thus the challenge before the urban governance is not only of providing facilities for this mix of population but also of their social inclusion. It is important to highlight the basic feature of urbanization in India[vii]:

A.   Urbanization occurs without industrialization and strong economic base.
B.   Urbanization is mainly a product of demographic explosion and poverty induced rural-urban migration.
C.   Rapid urbanization leads to massive growth of slum followed by misery, poverty, unemployment, exploitation, inequalities, degradation, in the quality of urban life.
D.   Urbanization occurs not due to urban pull but due to rural push.
E.   Poor quality of rural-urban migration leads to poor quality of urbanization.[viii]
F.   Distress migration initiates urban decay.

Table 1.1 highlights the probable reasons of migration into the cities thus leading to numerous added responsibilities and challenges for the urban governmental setup:

Table 1.1
Rapid Urbanization and Challenge for Urban Governance

	Probable causes for migration into cities	Resultant pressures and problems	Challenge for Urban Governance
1.	Poverty induced migration of illiterate and unskilled laborers.	Slums, jhuggis, footpath dwellers, squatters; pressure on civic infrastructure like water supply, sewerage and drainage, solid waste management, etc; crime and illegal activities like electricity theft etc.	Challenge of Physical and Social Inclusion

2.	Migration of trained employable workforce	Pressure on existing infrastructure like housing, schools, etc.; increased demand for land use; reduction in green area, pollution, traffic jams, crowded public transport.	Spillover effect leading to 'extension cities'
3	Migration for better salary options	Increased usable money; consumerism; more waste generation-paper, plastic, e-waste; unsafe recycling practices-acid bathing, open burning of waste.	Major health and environmental challenge

Institutional mechanism, financial requirements and development needs have been the favorite agenda of almost all formal and informal structures and mechanisms involved in urban governance. But the human development challenge is the most complex agenda of urban governance.

Human Development Challenges

Nobel-laureate economist Amartya Sen, in an article 'Alternate Approaches to Development'[ix] expressed – "Certainly, development is concerned with progress of some kind – with enhancement of some good thing. The question is: What good thing? The plurality of possible answers leads to some alternative views of development. Is development to be seen as essentially an economic growth: the expansion of, say GNP or national income? Or should we go beyond all this and see development as enhancing the lives and freedom of people involved." The issue, according to Dr. Sen, concerns the relation between incomes and achievements, commodities and capabilities, between our economic wealth and our ability to live as long and as well as we would like. That is to say that development is a much wider concept, having more to do with the quality of 'life' of the people and the freedom to live the way they like. So apart from understanding Human development from the angle of 'economics of development', it is also essential to understand the 'humane' in development. Human development should be viewed not as an economic activity, linked with material prosperity and wealth/ income-growth concepts in the physical sense, but defined primarily from the point of view of moral and individual upliftment, self-realization through spiritual enrichment and a holistic approach towards the purpose of human existence.

Human development is first and foremost about allowing people to lead the kind of life they choose and providing them with the tools and opportunities to make those choices. Human development is also about building human capabilities – the range of things that people can do and what they can be. Our constitution provides numerous rights in accordance with the need of human development.
But in the specific context of urban areas or cities, these human development challenges take a distinct form –

A.   Character Culture: The character of the people is reflected in all activities – structural as well as functional. Because productivity, efficiency, growth, profit, etc., are not only related to material assets but also, and to a large extent, to the man – the wielder. It is he/she who acts, reacts, and enacts in relation to the material assets –

machine, plan, organization, implementation, administration, so on and so forth. His behavior, values, norms and beliefs has the potential to make or unmake, to do or undo and to create or destroy everything. Since it is the man where culture, ethics and character inheres; he should be treated as a means as well as an end. Critical focus should be on inculcation of moral values and generation of an environment where a culture of character can evolve. It cannot be imported, manufactured or imposed. A conscience effort, preferably informal, needs to be undertaken for this long awaited desire – character building.

This crash of character is more visible among city dwellers. Few reasons, among many, are:

i.   Eager acceptance of consumerism and materialism
ii.   Cultural onslaught
iii.   Expectation of unearned higher standards of living
iv.   Social acceptance of norm-deviation
v.   Politician-businessman-bureaucrat nexus
vi.   Easily available routes to speedy-money

Thus the tussle for acquiring unprecedented wealth through ill-gotten means, the 'imitate-west' culture and the 'urbanite' ego has left no space for values. Work culture, commitment towards values (family, society, and nation), ethics, and character are the worst casualties. Values, ethos, norms, behavior, character, and attitudinal aspects inherent to "citizen-ness" needs to developed.

B.   Capacity Building: It refers to improving the ability of the institutions – government, private and community based groups- and individuals within these institutions, to perform appropriate tasks and fulfill their roles effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Organizations and institutions are structurally and financially equipped to initiate formal capacity building programmes comprising of skill development, work place administrative training, understanding rules and regulations, public dealing, etc. But such training modules hardly focus on the behavioral and attitudinal aspects of the employees.

Apart from those who are staying in urban areas, such urban centers are constantly visited by people from rural areas also for multiple routine governmental tasks. Untrained employees perform poorly at such places and present a bad face of the city governments to the people. Therefore what is required is that the city governments should introduce a systematic program of training to develop the skills of employees and to enable them to deal with the public gently and efficiently.

C.   Overcoming crises of Confidence: The interface between the citizens and the government exhibits traits of non-responsiveness both ways. Institutional mechanism of the urban government is non-responsive to the citizens and vice versa. The urban local government today is alienated from the civic society. The residents, on the other hand, do not identify with it as it is perceived to be unresponsive and apathetic to civic problems. The citizenry and business enterprises have lost faith in the system because of its corrupt practices and hostile attitudes. People are unwilling to collaborate with civic authorities and are apprehensive and reluctant to participate in the new approaches initiated by government agencies.

Confidence building measures also need to be initiated because the ideas of decentralization, participation, accountability, and responsiveness cannot be substantially materialized in the absence of confidence and trust among the various participants in 'Governance'. Some suggestions are:

   i.   Ensuring cooperative participation in place of conflicting existence
  ii.   Grievance redressal mechanisms to be created and publicized widely
 iii.   Focus on minimalist agenda – for example, speedy delivery of justice, sanitation, health care, education.
  iv.   Identifying local leadership in order to achieve citizen's support, recognition, and satisfaction.
   v.   'Target sectors' should be the integral part of the feed-back mechanism.
  vi.   Programs for civilizing citizens.
 vii.   Strengthening local communities
viii.   Visible 'Governance' rather than governance on paper
  ix.   Identifying newer areas for developing interface between citizens and the government, for example, public libraries, citizen's education (political education, media education, market education, and spiritual education).
   x.   Building effective communication channels between the citizens, administration, and the political representative.

   Citizens need to be brought into the loop of decision making as well as of its implementation. The farther the government appears to be, the lesser effective will be its participatory avenues.

D.   Urban specific ill: A large populace enters the cities mostly as migrant workers, rickshaw pullers, and street vendors to earn a livelihood to sustain themselves and their families. They settle at the periphery of the cities as they find it economically viable and socially comfortable. This physical separation or 'self-chosen' or sometimes imposed isolation often gets translated into cultural and social exclusion also. The problem is aggravated when many a times criminals are traced to such settlements and they become the hub of all kinds of illegal activities thus eliminating any probabilities of their inclusion in the social set-up of the city life. "…the social environment of the cities is also under threat…Organized groups, gangsters, professional criminals and even youth and juveniles find crime as a short cut for a lavish life in these cities."[x]

The cities will continue to grow with the added attractions of malls, markets, recreation centers, decent housing, eateries, educational facilities, etc. Along with them the growth of such peripheral settlements is inevitable. Therefore the government needs to plan for their physical as well as social inclusion. Otherwise despite the availability of all physical and infrastructural comforts the quality of life of the city dweller will be persistently hampered by the unsatisfied, disgruntled, and discontented inhabitants of the periphery.

Conclusion

For many classical as well as modern writers, philosophers, and economists, a major subject of deliberation has been the 'quality and freedom of life of men' rather than the mere economics of "living". Aristotle noted: wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for, it is merely useful, and for the sake of something else.

So the challenge before the government is not to consider human development merely as an economic activity but to make livable areas inclusive, safer, humane and sustainable not only environmentally, but socially and culturally also.

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