



Reforming Governance

Yogesh Suri

The avowed objectives of “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas and Sabka Vishwaas” and the Prime Minister’s clarion call of achieving a 5 trillion dollar economy by 2024-25 necessitates putting in place a whole set of initiatives towards good governance. As many as 7 out of 41 chapters of the “Strategy for New India @75” document released by NITI Aayog, focussed exclusively on governance while in remaining chapters, most had emphasized on good governance for better service delivery and more effective outcomes. This article intends to highlight how recent measures for reforming governance can potentially transform India into a high growth economy capable of fulfilling the aspirations of people and facilitating achievement

of not only Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, but also help in India emerging amongst the most developed countries by 2047 i.e. the 100th year of Indian Independence.

Cooperative and Competitive Federalism

Ever since the inception of NITI Aayog w.e.f. January 1, 2015, there has been a renewed thrust on Centre-State relations through cooperative federalism recognising that strong States make a strong Nation. A number of initiatives have been taken to foster cooperative federalism through structured support initiatives and mechanisms of engagement with the States/Union Territories (UTs) on a continuous basis. These include meetings between Prime Minister/Cabinet Ministers with all Chief Ministers; sub-groups

of Chief Ministers on subjects of national importance; sharing of best practices; policy support and capacity development of State/UT functionaries; Aspirational Districts Programme for development of 115 most backward districts; theme based extensive engagements in various sectors; framing model laws for land leasing and agriculture marketing reforms; and area specific interventions for North Eastern, Himalayan States, and Island development.

A unique feature of this new strategy is to improve States’/UTs’ performances by encouraging healthy competition through transparent ranking in various sectors with a handholding approach. Some of the indices launched include Health Index, Composite Water Management Index, SDG Index and Performance

Dr. Yogesh Suri is Senior Adviser, Governance, Research and State Coordination, NITI Aayog.

of Aspirational Districts. Dynamic ranking portals have been put in place to facilitate States/UTs to feed data and monitor their performance in various sectors vis-à-vis other States/UTs, including third party validation of data. Once districts compete amongst themselves, States would emerge stronger and when States compete amongst themselves, the nation becomes stronger. This is one of the key elements of governance in a pursuit towards transforming India.

Direct Benefit Transfer and Use of Aadhaar

With Aadhaar now firmly in place especially in targeted delivery of subsidies, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) continues to make major inroads into policy and service delivery framework of the country. Currently about 439 schemes across 55 Ministries are covered by DBT. Cumulatively about Rs. 7.66 lakh crore has been transferred to beneficiaries through DBT mode with estimated gains of Rs. 1.42 lakh crore. Of this, DBT in LPG alone has contributed Rs. 59,599 crore (42% of total savings by deleting 4.23 crore duplicate/fake connections) while Public Distribution System (PDS) has contributed Rs. 47,633 crore (34% of total savings by deleting around 3

crore ration cards) (Figure-1). In 2018-19 there were 59 crore beneficiaries of DBT who got benefits in cash while more than 70 crore beneficiaries got it in kind (for instance, food and fertilizers).

On July 23, 2019, the President of India has given his assent to the Aadhaar and other Laws (Amendment) Act 2019 providing a strong regulatory framework for operation of Aadhaar and its voluntary use. States can also use Aadhaar for implementing their schemes. With 124 crore people having Aadhaar numbers, New India is expected to make increasing use of Aadhaar along with mobile numbers for better delivery of benefits in a leakage proof manner.

Outcome Based Monitoring

Over the last few years, there has been a structural change in the budget making process with removal of Plan/Non-Plan distinction and rationalization of Centrally Sponsored and Central Sector schemes. A major step in this direction is introduction of Outcome Based Budgets since Union Budget 2017-18. This is in contrast to earlier mechanism of merely focusing on financial outlays, expenditures and outputs. This is a major step in improving governance as the thrust is on meeting the expectations of the

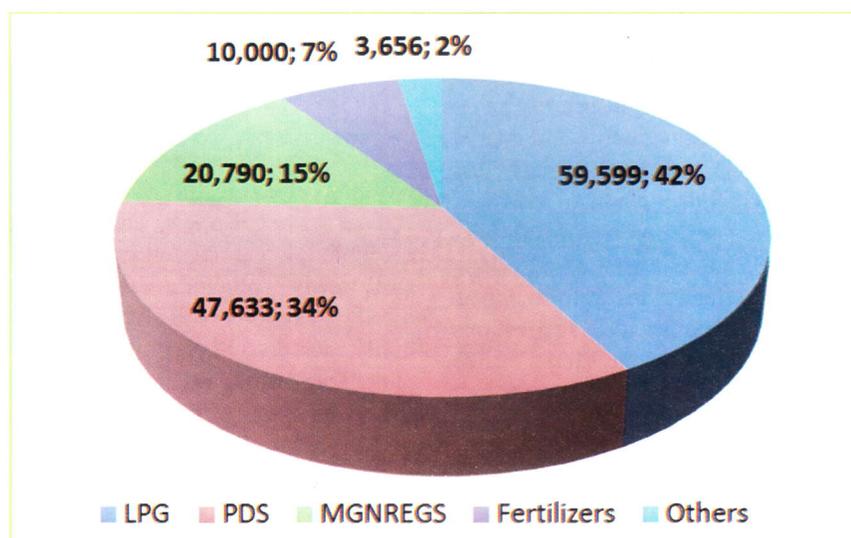
people by focusing on outcomes and not merely on how much expenditure has been incurred under the respective schemes. The Outcome Budget 2019-20 presented in the Parliament covers 163 major central sector/centrally sponsored schemes covering 95% of the outlays of the total of 591 schemes for which outcome budgets have been prepared by NITI Aayog and Ministry of Finance in consultation with the Ministries/Departments. Currently, a major exercise of independent evaluation of 28 Centrally Sponsored Schemes with budgetary allocation of about Rs. 3.3 lakh crore in 2019-20 is underway in NITI Aayog. At implementation level also, for various schemes, there is greater thrust on creation of dash boards providing on-line and real-time data on schemes and their beneficiaries.

E-Governance

With advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) coupled with penetration of Aadhaar and mobile phones, it has been possible to provide many public services through online modes. Starting from biometric attendance of Government employees, digitizing database of beneficiaries across all schemes, seeding with Aadhaar numbers, using PoS machines for beneficiary authentication and finally transferring the funds to Aadhaar linked bank accounts, various initiatives have made marked improvements in the way services are delivered to the public.

Digital India programme being implemented by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is covering multiple projects of various Central Ministries/Departments and States/UTs. The programme is centered on three key vision areas viz. Digital Infrastructure as a core utility; governance and services on demand; and digital empowerment of citizens. Key elements of this programme include connectivity for all 2.5 lakh Gram

Figure 1: Estimated Gains from Direct Benefit Transfer (Rs. Crore; % of Total Gains) Cumulative (March 2019)



Panchayats through BharatNet, providing Aadhaar numbers, setting up Common Service Centers including in each Gram Panchayat, Digital Lockers for every citizen, digital life certificates, DBT, digital payments, and so on.

Besides, portals such as Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), the Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG) and MyGov are in place providing information to citizens seeking feedback and resolving grievances. The extent of successful penetration of E-services in India can be gauged by the fact that under Electronic Transaction Aggregation and Analysis Layer (E-Taal), more than 3700 services across Central Ministries and State Governments have been integrated and more than 2000 crore transactions have taken place since January 1 to August 3, 2019, (4,200 crore in 2018) i.e. more than 9 crore per day.

Administrative Reforms

Administrative Reforms are a key component to facilitate Transforming India. Reforms in civil services are a continuous process and several initiatives have been undertaken, such as introduction of a multi-stakeholder feedback performance evaluation, dispensing with interviews for lower level positions, introduction of online mechanisms for appraisals and filing of various returns by employees, implementation of e-office, and strengthening training and merit-based postings. NITI Aayog has taken the initiative of inducting highly motivated Young Professionals and Consultants on contractual basis in its workforce so as to provide a fresh perspective in the way Government thinks and operates. The same is also being replicated in a few other Ministries/States.

The Strategy for New India

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@75 document of NITI Aayog has proposed transformative measures, such as improving teeth to tail ratio, promoting officer oriented culture, bringing down number of civil services and allocating candidates as per competencies, encouraging lateral entries and specialization, bringing down entry age, strengthening municipal cadres, training and skill assessments, institutionalization of goal setting and performance evaluation, greater suo motu disclosures, protection of civil servants, E-initiatives and probity. Measures have also been proposed to improve governance in cities besides data led governance without compromising on the data security for citizens.

Law and Order

Legal and judicial reforms would need to be attended on priority so as to ensure safety of people and ensure access to justice in a timely and effective manner. Though law and order is a state subject, Government of India would need to continue engaging states to reform their policing. Some of the suggestions include adoption of the Model Police Act of 2015, filling up vacancies and greater representation of women, reforms in FIR system with greater usage of IT, training/sensitization of police personnel and inducting a

separate cadre for cyber-crimes, cyber threats and fraud.

In the area of judicial reforms, there is again a significant scope for improvement especially with the use of IT. There is a need to reduce criminalization by compounding of minor offences with steep penalties that act as a real deterrent. Focus needs to be more on arbitration so that most cases get resolved out of court. The court processes all across the country need to be automated with electronic court and case management. Redundant laws need to be repealed and new laws need to be written in a simple manner. Forensics and ballistics testing need significant improvements. Besides an All India Judicial Services examination on ranking basis, an Indian legal service may also be considered. The focus needs to move from litigation driven to creation of a law abiding society by sensitizing citizens right from the school level.

Summing Up

Transforming India, as a mandate, is by no means an easy task. It requires clarity of vision, well thought out strategy and action plans dovetailed to achieve that larger vision. The Sustainable Development Goals, of which India is one of the signatories, lay out the roadmap for all countries including India, to achieve by 2030. Accordingly, India is also aligning its goals and targets to achieve SDG objectives. While good governance is pervasive across all goals, Goal 16 specifically deals with access to justice and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. This cannot be done by the Government alone and needs collaborative approach of all stakeholders be it judiciary, civil society, corporates, think tanks, academia, media or citizens themselves. Only then the objective of Transforming India can be achieved in its truest sense. ■

Email: yogesh.suri@gov.in