

GOOD GOVERNANCE: THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF SOUTH ASIA — IS THERE A WAY FORWARD?

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Introduction

The paper discusses the concept of governance and issues related to it from South Asian perspective. Governance has presently gained immense importance in development discourse and is considered a crucial element in formulating any development strategy. Apart from its universal acceptance, theory of governance is still passing through a development phase, as its concept defined by different scholars more or less varies.⁽¹⁾ Similarly, in the media and public discourse the concept remains underdeveloped, hence open to diversity of interpretations. According to the World Bank, governance refers to the manner in which power is exercised in managing a country's social and economic resources to provide public goods and services. The key dimensions of governance the Bank explores are: public sector management, accountability,

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the legal framework for development and information and transparency.⁽²⁾ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as a neutral concept encompassing the mechanisms, processes relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences.⁽³⁾ However, governance is a simple concept at heart: good governance is good government. The concept is related to the quality of the relationship between government and the citizens whom it exists to serve and protect.⁽⁴⁾ Governance is not about the study of the institutions, organs and actors involved; it is about the assessment of quality and performance expressed through accountability, transparency, efficiency, empowerment, participation, sustainability equity and justice.⁽⁵⁾

South Asian countries have had democratic governments installed but the state of governance has become a matter of serious concern nowadays. The region, home to over one-fifth of the world population, is the region with about 437 million people living below one dollar a day and 80 per cent of the population survives below two dollar a day. South Asia's share in the global income is only 7 per cent while its share of global poverty is about 43 per cent.⁽⁶⁾ In the field of education, South Asia has shown a little progress; the literacy rate has increased from 47 per cent to 58 per cent. However, the pace is slower compared to other developing countries including Sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, 212 million people are without access to safe water and the number of people without access to basic sanitation has even increased from 830 million to 897 million. South Asia still has the highest proportion of malnourished children in the world.⁽⁷⁾ According to the Human Development Commission (HDC) Report, South Asia is one of the most poorly governed regions of the world, with the exclusion of a voiceless majority, unstable political regimes and

poor economic management. The system of governance has become unresponsive and irrelevant to the needs and concerns of the people.

Decades of political instability, rise and the fall of military options, rampant corruption, lawlessness and insecurity has left the region behind in many fields. However, all these are just the symptoms of one greater disease — poor governance. The problems in South Asia are so huge that they present a defining challenge not only to the region itself but also to the international community. What happens in South Asia will affect the global community in the decades ahead.⁽⁸⁾ These challenges call for immediate steps on the part of the governments of the region to devise a comprehensive system based on transparency and accountability. In simplest terms, South Asia needs to implement a system of good governance at grass-roots level. What is the system of good governance and how to implement it in South Asia? Will South Asia be able to deal with the governance-related issues? To discuss this, the paper is divided into three sections. The first section defines the concept of governance and explains how to judge a country's progress on the basis of governance principles? The second presents an overview of governance-related issues confronting South Asia, and the third section concludes the discussion with suggesting a way forward to overcome the perennial governance crisis.

What is good governance?

The notion of good governance first appeared in a 1989 World Bank Report on Africa, which defines it as the “exercise of political power to manage nations’ affairs. Good governance includes some or all of the following features: an efficient public service; an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts; accountable administration of public funds; an independent public auditor, responsible to a representative legislature; respect for the law

and human rights at all levels of government; a pluralistic institutional structure, and a free press.” In 1992, the World Bank reconfirmed its initial managerial approach described in *Governance and Development* which treats good governance as “synonymous with sound development management.” Later, World Bank’s annual report for 1998, *Governance in Asia: From crisis to Opportunity*, presented a more cogent concept of good governance. It defines governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s social and economic resources for development. The report elaborates four key components of good governance: accountability, transparency, predictability and participation. Accountability is the capacity to call officials to account for their actions. Transparency entails low-cost access to relevant information. Predictability results primarily from laws and regulations that are clear, known in advance and enforced uniformly and effectively. The fourth component, participation, is indeed reliable information and to serve as a reality check and watchdog for government actions.

The European Union (EU) on the other hand defines “good governance” as the management of affairs in a transparent, accountable, participative and equitable manner, showing due regard for human rights and the rule of law.⁽⁹⁾

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as a neutral concept encompassing the mechanisms, processes relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Good governance according to Martin Minogue, is both a broad reform strategy, and particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the task of making government more accountable, more open, transparent and more democratic.⁽¹⁰⁾

The SAARC Human Resource Development Centre's report on good governance defines certain major characteristics of good governance. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law.

Figure 1

Characteristics of Good Governance

Accountable	Consensus Oriented	Participatory
Responsive	GOOD GOVERNANCE	Transparent
Follows the Rule of Law	Effective and Efficient	Equitable and Inclusive

Source: Report on Good Governance, SAARC Human Resource Development Centre (SHRDC), Islamabad, 2004

According to the report, participation is the cornerstone of good governance. It ensures freedom of association and expression. Besides this, the report makes the following points rule of law: fair legal framework and its impartial enforcement results in credibility. It builds confidence into the system. Transparency: availability of information and direct access helps in acceptable decisions and their enforcement. Responsiveness: institutions and processes should serve all stakeholders. Consensus Orientation: good governance mediates

differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interests of the group. Equity: all men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being. Effective and efficient: processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources. Accountability: decisions-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public as well as to the institutional stakeholders.

Despite the variety of interpretations, a common underlying assumption of good governance has been thought of comprising three main components, or levels: systemic, political and administrative. From systemic perspective, the concept of good governance signifies more than its institutional or decision-making interpretation to include both internal and external political and economic power and inter-relationship between the two to indicate the rules by which the productive and distributive life of a society is governed. From political point of view, it implies a state enjoying both legitimacy and authority derived from a democratic mandate and would normally involve a pluralist polity with representative government and a commitment to protect human rights. From administrative perspective, good governance means an efficient, open, accountable and audited public service which has the bureaucratic component to help design and implement appropriate public policies and with an independent judicial system to uphold the law.⁽¹¹⁾

Apart from definitions, evaluation of good or poor governance in any country is indeed important. In this regard, Rehman Sobhan suggests five major measures to evaluate the state of governance:

- The extent of deprivation
- The representative nature of institutions

- The level of decentralization of governing bodies
- The realization of fundamental and basic rights
- The protection of security of life and liberty

Furthermore, the recent World Bank Governance Indicators (WGI) is a more refined form of assessment criteria. It measures the governance of any country on the basis of voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. Having discussed the interpretational part of good governance, the following section shall present an overview of governance in South Asia.

Good governance: the Achilles' heel of South Asia

To begin with, good governance entirely depends on effective and representative democratic institutions. Such institutions require independent and autonomous functioning of the legislature, judiciary and executive. These three pillars of governance must work in harmony to ensure that the entire system is functioning on the principles of accountability and transparency. The democratic process in the region has always been the victim of intemperate exchanges, horse-trading, periodic walks-outs by the opposition and even resort to violence on the floor of the House. In Sri Lanka, the presidential system undermined the ability of the parliament to control the executive. In February 2004, as a result of power struggle between the president and the prime minister, the former dissolved the parliament four years before the end its term. Similarly, in Nepal, parliament was dismissed by the king and the prime minister several times in the 1990s. In Bangladesh, since the nation's transition to democracy in 1990, state of governance remained poor. Practically all the organs of the state have been

politicised even in the times of Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government with a two-thirds majority. The government is accused of amending the Constitution to suit their political interests. Similarly, President Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka made changes in the Constitution under the 18th Amendment, which according to the International Crisis Group gives him a very real chance to remain in power indefinitely.⁽¹²⁾ This Prolonged practice of such tactics has led to the degeneration of democratic institutions in South Asia.

The executive branch, which is composed of prime minister, cabinet and civil servants, plays an important role in running the administrative affairs of the state. In every South Asian country, the balance of power has always been in favour of the executive. In the case of Pakistan, it is evident from the tenures of successive prime ministers from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto to Nawaz Sharif. Prime minister Nawaz Sharif prior to his overthrow in 1999 possessed absolute power under the guise of the *Sharia Bill*. In the case of Bangladesh, all governments from Mujibur Rahman to, though to a lesser extent, the two successive regimes under Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajid had considerable *de facto* powers.⁽¹³⁾

Concentration of absolute power in one hand points to the weakness of political parties and ministers who prefer to hold office less on the basis of their own political legitimacy and performance and more owing to the patronage of the chief executive.⁽¹⁴⁾ Their purpose primarily is to safeguard the interests of those in power. This political malaise has crippled the government institutions. Political parties in South Asia have never adopted any uniform pattern of evolution or development on the basis of their ideologies/philosophies, policies and programmes. Instead, there is a culture of personal loyalty and opportunism. Almost half the parliamentarians in India and Pakistan are

landlords. Once in power, they lose touch with the people, some of them do not even care to utilise the special budget allocations for the socio-economic development of their constituencies. ⁽¹⁵⁾

The culture of power politics in South Asia has gradually undermined the legitimacy of governments which is considered a fundamental aspect of good governance. The South Asian countries have somehow managed to establish democratic dispensations, though there are numerous challenges ahead. For instance, in India, a parliamentary federation, there have been secessionist movements in states like Nagaland, Tripura, Mezoram, Assam, and Punjab. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Moreover, India has been facing problems of extreme marginalization of disadvantaged sections of society such as Dalits. Pakistan, on the other hand, is struggling for a legitimate political order to counter centrifugal pressures from within, sectarian and ethnic tensions and religious extremism. It has been under military rules for long periods of time and has only recently emerged as a republican democracy. Similarly, Nepal's short-lived democracy, beginning in the early 1950s as constitutional monarchy, was interrupted by monarchical intervention with the help of the army. The country has suffered great political turmoil and instability in the last few years and is now ultimately emerging as a nascent democratic republic. ⁽¹⁷⁾ In the recent past, towards the close of the country, Maoist rebels gained control in many rural districts during an armed uprising from 1996 to 2006 before they finally captured power through the ballot. Bangladesh, too, has been grappling with political instability, growing religious extremism and ethnic tensions. It has had democracy interrupted by periods of military rule. The situation varies in other countries but the problems of legitimacy continue to exist.

If we look at the state of democracy in South Asia, we find that though democracy is getting strengthened in the region, yet the state of political rights and civil liberties remains depressing. The following table shows that apart from Maldives, Bhutan and India, the rankings of Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka went down over the past ten years in terms of civil and political liberties.

Table 1

Ranking in terms of Civil Liberties and Political Rights in South Asia, 1999-2007						
1999				2007		
Country	Political rights rank	Civil liberties rank	Freedom	Political rights rank	Civil liberties rank	Freedom
Pakistan	5	4	Partly free	5	6	Not free
India	4	2	Partly free	3	2	Free
Bangladesh	4	2	Partly free	4	4	Partly free
Sri Lanka	4	3	Partly free	4	4	Partly free
Nepal	4	3	Partly free	4	5	Partly free
Maldives	6	6	Not free	5	6	Not free
Bhutan	7	7	Not free	5	6	Not free

Source: *Human Development in South Asia 2007: A Ten-Year Review*, HDC Report, 2008

Note: Rank 1 means most free and 7 means least free

There is widespread support for the promotion of democracy; however, there is no matching commitment towards or satisfaction with the institutional form of representative democracy. Constitutions provide equality of political citizenship, but fail to deliver on the promise of democracy that most people want. Political parties remain unable to act in a democratic and transparent

manner or offer meaningful choices to voters. This has resulted in a low level of trust. (18)

Transparency is the second fundamental aspect of good governance. In relation to South Asia, lack of transparency and absence of effective monitoring of public spending is a major factor contributing to the poor governance. Corruption in South Asia is persistently on the rise. Transparency International ranks Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Nepal among the highest in corruption perception index (see table below).

Table 2

South Asian Countries Rank in Corruption Perception Index 2010

Country Ranking	Country	Score
36	Bhutan	5.7
87	India	3.3
91	Sri Lanka	3.2
134	Bangladesh	2.4
143	Maldives	2.3
143	Pakistan	2.3
146	Nepal	2.2

Source: Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2010, Transparency International (www.transparency.org)

Note: The ranking is based on a scale from 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 10 (perceived to have low levels of corruption)

Earlier, India was ranked 84th in CPI with a score of 3.4 in 2009. But the recent corruption charges in the Commonwealth Games has led it down to 87th position. This decline indicates that the country continues to be perceived as more corrupt than in the past. However, India seems more honest in comparison with other countries' ranking in the region. According to Transparency international estimates, corruption has cost Pakistan more than Rs. 3 trillion

during the last three years — more than a trillion rupees per annum with 15-20 per cent annual increase. In 2008, the CPI ranked Sri Lanka at 92nd position out of 180 countries with a score of 3.2. In 2010, the score remained static at 3.2 with a position of 91st and clubbed with countries such as Bosnia, Guatemala and Zambia. The score remained stagnant due to the absence of independent institutions in the country to address corruption-related issues even the Bribery Commission is not functional. Bangladesh is the third most corrupt country in the region with a score of only 2.4 out of 10. It keeps on scoring low and is clubbed with countries such as Nigeria, Togo, Sierra Leon and Zimbabwe. Last but not least, Nepal got the top position with a score of 2.2 in the region. It falls in the range of “highly corrupt” countries with Iran, Yemen, Libya, Cameroon, Haiti, Paraguay and Ivory Coast sharing the same score. Comparatively, results from 2009 and 2010 indicate a downward movement.

The rule of law is a basic tenet of modern democratic state and central to delivering on good governance. It requires a stable political system including independent legislature, strong executive, free judiciary and good policing. Unfortunately, a weak tradition of rule of law is a major barrier in South Asia’s path towards good governance. Years of political instability and autocratic governance has compromised the independence of both the upper and lower judiciary. The appointment of judges in the upper judiciary has not been without executive influence. All countries have sought to insulate appointments; however, it has not prevented the executives from trying to hire particular judges on loyalty basis.⁽¹⁹⁾ Similarly, the lower judiciary is suffering from inadequate separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary. A basic deficiency of the judicial system has been the lack of effective access to justice for a large section of population. Justice is also delayed for reasons such

as bribery, inadequate facilities in the courts and lack of moral sense in the judicial authorities.

The malfunctioning of the legal system has led to the accumulation of a backlog of cases. According to HDC Governance Report, South Asian countries had a huge number of pending cases in the courts: India 22.0 million, Nepal 0.08 million, Bangladesh 6.5 million, and Pakistan 0.75 million.⁽²⁰⁾ The situation is no more different in jails. A large number of prisoners awaiting trial, mostly belong to the poor class, and often serve long sentences without ever being convicted.⁽²¹⁾ Pakistan's high courts and district courts are suffering from severe shortage of judges and court staff. There is a lack of training for judges and effective judicial administration is missing. Similarly, there is widespread judicial corruption in India. In Bangladesh, the independence of the judiciary is still vulnerable to government interventions.

However, there are signs of increasing judicial activism in many South Asian countries, particularly in Pakistan following the successful 'lawyer's movement'. In 2006, for the first time a serving cabinet minister of India, who was also a key ally of the Congress party, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. In 2005, King Gyanendra of Nepal ordered creation of a Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC) which was a roadblock for the anti-corruption movement. The Supreme Court took action and ruled the RCCC unconstitutional and ordered its abolition. Despite these developments, the common man's life has not changed. The lower courts are largely inaccessible to the poor. Law in South Asia from a common man's perspective 'is a rich man's resource to be used, along with the police, as instruments to oppress the poor, undermine their democratic rights and perpetuate an unjust and inequitable social order.'⁽²²⁾ The police, which has a vital role in

maintaining internal law and order and establishing the rule of law in a country, is now increasingly becoming a negotiable commodity all over South Asia.

The system of good governance cannot be complete without the accountability of the elected representative. Government institutions, private sectors and civil society organizations, all must be accountable to the public and their respective institutional stakeholders.⁽²³⁾ Unfortunately, South Asia continues to carry its imperial legacy where the government was not answerable to the people but to the colonial power.⁽²⁴⁾

In a framework of good governance, the maximum participation by the people must be ensured. In this regard, decentralization of power is one tool among the others. It can shift real power — legislative, financial and administrative — from the bureaucracy and narrow-interest groups to the people.⁽²⁵⁾ Quality of governance can be improved if governance is brought closer to the governed. In South Asia, despite advances both in terms of devolution and delegation, the local government system is generally weak. Its effectiveness from district to the village level is compromised due to its dependence on the province, even the centre, for resources. The local government system lacks managerial expertise, appropriate knowledge and information and resources to perform within its domain. Approaches to decentralization usually consist only in the delegation of some administrative functions, which often tend to be declaratory in nature or are implemented with no great determination. Apart from reluctance regarding delegation of power, governments in South Asia, given the nature of ethnic, religious and regional variety of their countries, fear that decentralization may pave the way for centrifugal forces or secessionist movements.⁽²⁶⁾ The problem lies in dealing with these forces not in the system.

In order to assess the state of governance, Dr Mahbub ul Haq Development Centre, Islamabad, in 1999 worked out governance assessment of 58 countries using the Humane Governance Index (HGI), later published in its annual report. According to the report, South Asia was one of the most poorly governed regions in the world with lowest HGI values. Out of 58 countries, India was ranked 42, while Pakistan 52, Sri Lanka 53 and Bangladesh 54. In 2002, a pilot testing of 16 countries was conducted under the new governance indicators by the World Governance Assessment (WGA) Project. Only two countries, India and Pakistan, were taken from South Asia. On a scale of 7 points, India scored 3.27 and Pakistan got only 2.17. There was no sharp difference observed in these two findings; from 1999 and 2002. The progress remained poor. The recent World Bank Governance Indicators (WGI) is a more refined form of assessment criteria. It measures the governance of any country on the basis of voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. WGI analyses voice and accountability by capturing the perception of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in electing governments, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of the media. Political stability and absence of violence is measured through the perception of the likelihood that government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means. The third indicator, government effectiveness, analyses through perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of civil service, and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation and the credibility of government. Regulatory quality is measured from perceptions of the quality of the government to formulate and

implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development. Rule of law in any country is measured by capturing perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. The last indicator, control of corruption, is judged by capturing the perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as capture of the state by elites and private interests. In all of the above mentioned indicators, the region South Asia is lagging behind. Following table adapted from the WGI shows ranking for the year 2009.

Table 3**World Governance Indicators**

Country	Ranking						
	Voice and Accountability	Political Stability & Absence of Violence	Government Effectiveness	Regulatory Quality	Rule of law	Control of Corruption	Average
Bangladesh	35.1	7.5	16.7	23.3	27.8	16.7	21.1
Bhutan	29.4	71.2	64.8	13.8	59.4	75.2	52.3
India	60.2	13.2	54.3	44.3	55.7	46.7	45.7
Maldives	44.1	39.2	42.4	37.1	52.8	29.5	40.8
Nepal	30.8	5.2	18.1	23.8	17.9	25.2	20.1
Pakistan	20.9	0.5	19	33.3	19.3	13.3	17.7
Sri Lanka	32.2	11.8	49	43.3	53.3	44.8	39

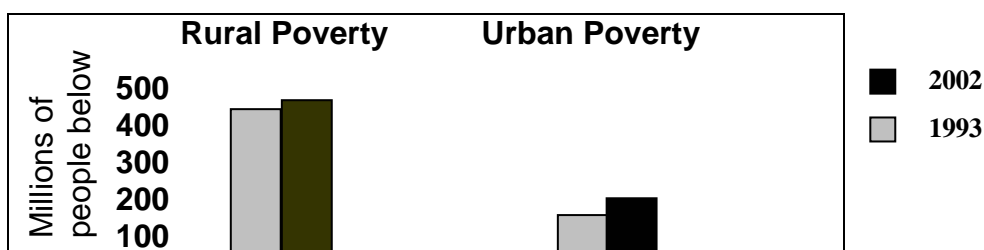
Source: *World Governance Indicators (WGI)*, 2009

Any country's progress in delivering good governance can also be judged by its ability to reduce poverty. Unfortunately, misgovernance in the region has resulted in failure to alleviate poverty, which is widely considered a breeding ground of terrorism and extremism. South Asia's share in the global

income is only 7 per cent while its share of global poverty is about 43 per cent and share in the world population is 22 per cent. Per capita income is \$594, which is the lowest in comparison with any other region in the world — even Sub-Saharan Africa has a bit higher figure (\$ 601) than South Asia. South Asian countries, which have the largest concentration of the poor in the world, have little to no safety net. Human development balance sheet for this region, 1993-95 to 2004, shows that South Asia's share in world population remains the same 22 per cent as it was in 1993-1995, but its share in world's absolute poor has increased from 40 per cent in 1993-95 to 47 per cent in the year 2004. In education, South Asia has shown a little progress though; the literacy rate has increased from 47 per cent to 58 per cent. However, the pace is slower compared to other developing countries including Sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, 212 million people are without access to safe water and the number of people without access to basic sanitation has even increased from 830 million to 897 million. And though the percentage of malnourished children has declined to 46 from 52 per cent, South Asia still has the highest proportion of malnourished children in the world. Maternal mortality ratio rose to 510 per 100,000 in 2004 from 430 per 100,000 in 1993-94.

Figure 2

Number of the poor rose in South Asia from 1993 to 2002



Source: *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*, The World Bank
Country-wise statistics (1993-95 to 2004) show that

In India:

- The level of inequality is rising; the income share of the richest 20 per cent to the poorest 20 per cent has increased from 4.7 to 4.9 per cent.
- 33.5 per cent of the total population is living below a dollar a day.
- 292 million adults are illiterate, the same as in 1995.
- 4.5 million children are out of school (third highest in world ranking).
- 47 per cent of children below age 5 are malnourished. The UN children's agency, UNICEF, says India has the highest rate of child malnutrition in the world. And at 46 per cent, it is higher than Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, estimates are that a further 1.5 million Indian children could now suffer increased levels of malnutrition.
- 5.7 million people with HIV/AIDS live in India, which accounts for 97 per cent of the total South Asian AIDS patients.
- 152.2 million people have no access to safe water.
- 67 per cent of the total population is without access to sanitation.
- The share of females in the total labour force declined from 32 per cent to 28.3 per cent.

In Pakistan:

- 73.6 per cent of the population is still living below two dollars a day.
- The level of inequality has declined as the income share of the richest 20 per cent to the poorest 20 per cent has declined from 4.7 to 4.3.
- Half the adult population is still illiterate; 76 per cent of the female adult population is illiterate.
- percentage of the rural poor has increased to 35.9 from 31 per cent.
- 15.5 million people have no access to safe water.
- 41 per cent (72 million) of the total population is without access to sanitation.
- 6.5 million children are out of school (second highest in world ranking)
- 9 million (38 per cent) children under the age of 5 are malnourished.
- 85 thousand people are with HIV/AIDS.
- The share of females in the labour force is 26.5 per cent.

In Bangladesh:

- 82.8 per cent of the population is living below two dollars a day.
- The level of inequality has worsened as the income share of the richest 20 per cent to the poorest 20 per cent has increased from 4.0 to 4.6 per cent.
- 11 thousand people are with HIV/AIDS.

- 34.8 million people have no access to safe water.
- 61 per cent of the total population is without access to sanitation.
- 48 per cent of children under the age of 5 are malnourished.
- 59 per cent of the total adult population is illiterate.
- The share of females in the total labour force declined from 35 per cent to 12 per cent.

In Nepal:

- 68.5 per cent of the population is living below two dollars a day.
- The level of inequality has worsened as the income share of the richest 20 per cent to the poorest 20 per cent increased to 9.1 per cent in 2000 from 4.3 per cent in 1981-93.
- 4.3 million people have no access to safe water.
- 65 per cent of the population is without access to sanitation.
- 51 per cent of the adult population is illiterate.
- 45 per cent of children under the age of 5 are malnourished.
- 75,000 people with HIV/AIDS live in Nepal. (The percentage has gone up to 0.5 per cent from 0.24 in 1997).
- The share of females in the national labour force has declined to 63 per cent in 2004 from 68 per cent in 1994.

In Sri Lanka:

- 41.6 per cent of the population is living below two dollars a day.
- The level of inequality has worsened as the income share of the richest 20 per cent to the poorest 20 per cent has increased to 5.1 per cent from 4.4 per cent.
- 4.6 million people (21 per cent of the total population) have no access to safe water.
- 9 per cent of the total population is without access to sanitation.
- School enrolment rate has worsened to 63 per cent in 2004 from 66 per cent in 1993.
- 1.5 million adults (about 9.3 per cent) are illiterate.
- 29 per cent of children under the age of 5 are malnourished.
- The share of females in economic activities has gone down to 45 per cent in 2004 from 54 per cent in 1995.

The region is evidently faced with inadequate nutrition and food insecurity that is reflected in declining per capita calorie consumption. The number of undernourished in the developing countries is estimated at 815 million (20 per cent of the population) for the three-year average 1990-92. This was the base year used by the 1996 World Food System in setting the target of halving the numbers undernourished in the developing countries by 2015 at the latest.

Table 4**Incidence of Under-nourishment in Developing Countries**

	1990/91	1997/99	2015	2030	1990/92	1997/99	2015	2030
	Percentage of population				Million persons			
Developing countries	20	17	11	6	815	776	610	443
Sub-Saharan Africa	35	34	23	15	168	194	205	183
excl. Nigeria	40	40	28	18	156	186	197	178
Near East/North Africa	8	9	7	5	25	32	37	34
Latin America and Caribbean	13	11	6	4	59	54	40	25
South Asia	26	24	12	6	289	303	195	119
East Asia	16	11	6	4	275	193	135	82

Source: World Agriculture: Towards 2015-2030, An FAO Perspective.

The above table shows that only East Asia has made progress and is on track in achieving the target of halving the numbers of the undernourished in developing countries by 2015. While two other regions, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are with highest incidence in relative terms. Both registered increases in absolute numbers affected. If these trends continue, the halving target will certainly not be achieved and whatever reductions take place in other sectors will further accentuate the differences among regions and countries.

Similarly, the health profile of South Asia is not satisfactory. However, there is progress in terms of key health indicators as life expectancy has increased from 62 to 64 years; infant mortality rate is showing a downward trend from 80 to 62 per 1,000 live births; adult mortality rate has also declined to 197 from 214 per 1,000 persons. Despite the improvements, the infant mortality rate remains one of the highest in the world. About 185,000 women die annually due to pregnancy — and childbirth-related complications. The region continues to be the most malnourished in the world, with a rate higher

than even that of Sub-Saharan Africa. Like the education sector, South Asia's spending on health is less than one per cent of GDP as compared to other developing countries' 2.8 per cent on average. Ironically, the poverty-stricken region is one of the most militarised regions in the world.

The way forward

It is widely acknowledged that good governance is a vital adjunct to successful development efforts and economic prosperity of a country. However, each nation's path towards good governance may differ depending on geography, culture, physical and administrative traditions and economic conditions. Despite contrasting values, they share more or less the same responsibilities to provide goods and services, protect and administer the rule of law and advance social equity.⁽²⁷⁾ The role of the state in governance remains pivotal. For instance, strong and stable governments with clear roles have been a feature of East Asia's development over the past half century. They have set the economic targets, pushed businesses towards achieving them and work with other governments to spread economic growth across the region.⁽²⁸⁾

The situation is somewhat different as compared to East Asian countries. South Asia has had to contend with violent conflicts that have necessarily reduced the priority given by societies to day-to-day governance issues. Furthermore, frequent changes in political regimes have caused disastrous consequences for political, economic and social governance. The governments in power whether they come through the democratic way or a military coup, discontinued or slowed down the implementation of policies and projects of previous governments. This practice has gravely hampered the progress of institutions, resultantly; it takes a very long time for the institutions to become mature. Markets, which have stakes in the governments and government-led

institutions, gradually lose the confidence. Stakeholders with a sound profile start shifting their businesses out and some of them with a low or medium profile succumb to the prevalent instability in the markets. To sum up, the institutional problems are more entrenched in the region as compared to other regions in the world.

To promote good governance in South Asia, the focus should primarily be on institutional and administrative reforms that include: judicial reforms to bring an independent and effective system of judiciary; constitutional reforms to ensure state's foundations and structures respect human rights and the rule of law; administrative decentralization at the grass-roots level to promote democratic structures, encouraging the development of a free and independent media, and measures to prevent fraud, corruption and favouritism and strengthening civil society. The political process must be inclusive in which people are able to raise their concerns and participate in the overall decision-making process. Every state must identify the areas of weaknesses and then work out the strategies accordingly, under the guidelines provided by good governance mechanism given below. In line with this thinking, for instance, Dr. Ishrat Hussain has proposed the agenda for governance and institutional reforms in Pakistan such as improving the quality and performance of civil services; restructuring the organization of federal, provincial and district governments; revamping the mechanism for delivery of basic public goods and services; strengthening key institutions engaged in economic governance and introducing checks and balances in the system by building up the capacity and authority of certain institutions of restraint.⁽²⁹⁾

There is a dire need to establish performance-based criteria regarding the delivery of public goods and services. The judiciaries and parliaments must be

examined both individually and in relation to other pillars of the state. It is a fairly established fact that parliaments are the ultimate source to force the governments to remain transparent in dealing with the people of their countries. Despite increasing levels of openness in parliaments' proceedings the working of parliamentary committees is an area where secrecy continues. South Asian countries can enhance their capacity to serve the people better by strengthening government accountability through active parliamentary committees, improving parliamentary research and information services, and increasing media coverage of proceedings. Parliamentarians on their part must exercise the legislative powers with greater responsibility. To enhance accountability and transparency, laws need to be adopted to ensure that all parliamentarians have declared their financial and criminal antecedents. These declarations must be accessible to all. There must be attendance record of every MP. They are supposed to play their role in holding the executive accountable for its policies and actions by raising questions. The details of the question hour must be made public. To make the system more participatory, citizens should be allowed to attend the parliamentary discussions except in extraordinary situations. The media has become a strong instrument in promoting transparency. The civil society is using the access to information to expose corruption and secure the rights of the poor. Bureaucrats have become more cautious. However, the excessive misuse of the freedom by some sections of the media in assassinating the character of political leaders or public servants without evidence may damage the cause of transparency and accountability.⁽³⁰⁾ The media is required to play a more responsible role by doing its homework before highlighting any report or information.

The judiciary can be progressive by enforcing higher penalties to mitigate corruption within the courts and by educating people about their rights under the law. The law must be clear and accessible to all and must protect fundamental human rights. Ministries and public officers must exercise the power conferred on them in good faith. South Asia has accomplished the task of separating the judiciary from the executive, though there are numerous challenges ahead. In Pakistan, there is an inadequacy of judges and courts staff in high courts and district courts. A large-scale induction of judges and court personnel is required to make justice available to all within a short period of time. Civil judges lack experience in dealing with the criminal cases; hence they need regular and comprehensive training that can improve their competence and professionalism.⁽³¹⁾ In India, efforts must be made to address the widespread judicial corruption. South Asia should develop a system of regular monitoring, inspection and evaluation of courts.

There is an urgent need for an accountable, transparent and efficient police service that ensures the safety and well-being of the citizens. They need regular training for getting equipped with the modern techniques to counter present-day challenges. It will help enhance the professional competence of police. In order to bring accountability in the system and to minimise external influence an independent commission needs to be established to oversee police functioning. Community policing has gained immense importance across the world and is becoming a norm in many democratic countries. It is entirely different from traditional policing system. (See the appendix). It not only supports building confidence in the police but also ensures that the police is accountable before the law and the community it serves. In community policing, law-enforcement agency, the police and the law-abiding citizens work together

to prevent crime, arrest offenders, solve ongoing problems and improve the overall quality of life.⁽³²⁾ The objective behind this idea is to minimise the gap between police and citizens through ensuring community participations in policing. There are two examples of successful community policing initiatives: the Janamaithri Project of India, and the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee of Pakistan. Unfortunately, these and other initiatives such as Town Defence Party of Bangladesh and Citizen's Committees in Sri Lanka, lack governments' support and consequently the system has not yet been developed in an organized way. The governments of South Asia need to take the matter seriously and strengthen 'community policing.' That would ensure the initiative makes its contribution to good governance.

The quality of governance can improve if governance is brought closer to the governed. Decentralization, if it is implemented in a true sense, can serve as one of the chief instruments of people's participation for advancing good governance. Governments of South Asia need to pay more attention towards the function and purpose of the local government system rather than its structure and administrative control. The local government system must be capable enough to address the changes in immediate needs and demands at the grassroots level. The developed countries spend 25 per cent or more of the total government spending at the local level. Unfortunately, in South Asia the system is much more centralized, with the governments delegating below 10 per cent of budgetary spending. What is needed is enhancing budgetary allocation to empower local government system. This increase must be bound with accountability of funds and annual audit through independent auditors. Local bodies, on their part, instead of relying exclusively on the state for finance, must explore multiple resources.

In order to eradicate poverty, which is not only a cost of misgovernance but also a constraint in good governance, a multidimensional holistic approach is needed most. The following measures can help in strengthening good governance for poverty alleviation in South Asia.

Firstly, there is a dire need to strengthen the agriculture sector by increasing investment. The focus should be on increasing agriculture production; Introduce a more knowledge-based agriculture system; Adopt proper mechanism to halt the decline in the agriculture sector's labour force; Support small farmers, providing them maximum incentives and opportunities; Support the poor in their small businesses with funds and interest-free loans. Currently, governments have actually cut down investment in agriculture by cutting back spending on infrastructure, on agricultural research, and in rural areas. This lack of investment, especially in rural infrastructure and in the development of new agricultural technologies, hampers the ability of producers to respond to the market and, therefore, affects the prospects of overall agricultural growth. The downward trends in public investment by governments and development agencies in smallholder agriculture over the past decade have not been matched by a concomitant rise in private investment. Similarly, there is little private research and development — and fewer incentives for it — relating to food crops, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture systems important for food security and poverty alleviation in rural South Asia.

Governments of South Asia should take the responsibility of ensuring social safety net for the poor; the task should not be left to the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community organisations. In this regard governments need to identify sections of population that are marginalised and face discrimination on grounds of gender, economic status, and vulnerability as

single parents or widows heading households, disability and illness. They must have the protection of food security. In this regard there is a need to establish and strengthen public distribution systems that target food support to these segments of society.

Governments should initiate or support public employment guarantee schemes, such as “food for work” or “cash for work” schemes; ensure well-functioning health systems with maximum availability of essential quality medicines and vaccines to the poor free of cost; ensure access to basic sanitation. Increase the share of spending on education; ensure a well-functioning uniform education system, with maximum attention being given to the rural areas and maximum enrolment of both genders at the primary level at least. Last but not least; continuity in development programmes is essential. It should not be disturbed with the change of governments. In this matter strong commitment from institutions is required.

The global community can play an important role in implementing good governance in South Asia through increasing the level of surveillance on issues related to governance. This task can be done through human intelligence network, academics, scholars, research cooperation and interaction with civil society think tanks. Trade or aid should be bound to certain compliance requirements particularly in aid; the donors must adopt people-centric approach and remain aware of deception and diversion tactics of governments.⁽³³⁾ To sum up, the table below presents the path towards good governance for South Asia. It highlights areas where reforms are needed most and sets targets accordingly.

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Table 5**Way to Good Governance**

Area	Targets	Strategies
Delivery of public goods and services	Efficient system for delivery of public goods and services	Through computerization and establishing performance-based criteria for delivery of basic public goods and services
Parliaments	Openness Transparency Participatory	Through increasing media coverage; Proceedings must be made public and easily accessible to all; People must be allowed to attend except in extraordinary circumstances
Judiciary	Mitigating corruption within courts Educating people about laws Improving competence of judges	Through enforcing higher penalties Through the media Through regular training
Police	Improving professional competence Bringing accountability in the system and minimise external influence Bringing change in traditional policing system	Through modern training to counter present-day challenges An independent commission should be established to oversee police functioning Strengthen community policing system
Local Government	Improvement in functioning	Through maximising people's participation Laws must be made to minimise administrative control of the state. Through increasing budgetary allocation Search for the multiple sources of income instead of relying exclusively on the state Accountability over funds and annual auditing through independent auditors
Participation	Maximising people participation at all levels both for men and for women	Through public awareness about the system and their role and importance in it. The task can be done well by the media.
Continuity	Protecting continuity in development programmes	Laws must be made at the institutional level to safeguard the continuity of development programmes which often are disturbed with the change of governments

Source: Designed by the author.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
What is good governance?	3
Good governance: the Achilles’ heel of South Asia	7
The way forward	23
Notes and references	30
Appendix	34