

Good Governance and Administrative Culture Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract: *The paper attempts to examine the existing administrative culture and its influence in good governance. At the same time it attempts to focus on level of good governance which is being prevailed in public management arena of Bangladesh. The prime objective of the paper is to analyze the role and influence of administrative culture in the process of achieving good governance of the country. The paper tries to illustrate the underlying cultural barriers to good governance in public administration of Bangladesh. The paper also analyzes elaborately the prevailing cultural and administrative practices and tries to make relationship between bad-culture and counter-productive administrative system in Bangladesh. Finally attempts have been made to suggest some recommendations to overcome the barriers that are the negative outputs of administrative culture, and which impede the process of achieving good governance in Bangladesh.*

1.0 Introduction

Ensuring good governance has become the most important challenge for public administration in the new millennium all over the world especially for the developing countries. A sound public administrative system acts as one of the essential propelling forces for achieving good governance. Both the actors of public administration-political decision makers and civil servants are directly involved in the process of achieving as well as ensuring good governance. At the same time, the existing administrative culture has immense influence on the actors that play a significant role in the process. Bangladesh is not an exception. The administrative cultures have become important factors that have influenced the actors a lot and thus play a vital role in the process of good governance.

1.1 Objectives of the Paper

The present paper attempts to highlight the existing administrative culture of Bangladesh. At the same time it attempts to focus on level of good governance which is being prevailed in public management arena of Bangladesh. The prime objective of the paper is to analyze the role and influence of administrative culture in the process of achieving good

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governance of the country. Finally attempts have been made to suggest some recommendations to overcome the barriers that are the negative outputs of administrative culture, and which impede the process of achieving good governance in Bangladesh.

2.0 Good Governance and Administrative Culture as concepts

2.1 Good Governance

"Good Governance" has almost become an obsession in current debates about development (Williams and Young, 1994: p.84). The World Bank treats good governance as "synonymous with sound development management" (cited in Archer, 1994: p.9; Leftwich, 1994: 372). According to the opinion of the UNDP, governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. In its opinion, the main challenge for all societies is to create a system of governance that promotes supports and sustains human development (UNDP, 1997: 1). Good Governance is participatory, transparent and accountable. It promotes rule of law. It is also effective and equitable. Good Governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and it tries to ensure the participation of the poorest and the mass people in decision making over the allocation of development resources.

There are three elements of governance: economic, political and administrative. Economic governance includes the decision making processes that affects the economic activities of a country and it has implications for poverty, equity and quality of life. Political governance includes the decision making process to formulate public policy and implement of those decisions. Administrative governance relates institutional mechanism and decentralized system which actually ensures effective, efficient and responsive public service delivery to the citizen. Encompassing all these three elements of governance, good governance defines the process and structures that guide political and socio-economic relationships (ibid pp. 2-3).

In addition to the above definitions, the UNDP has also identified fifteen elements as core characteristics of good governance. These are:

- Participation: All men and women have a voice in decision making either directly or through legitimate institutions that represent their interest. Such broad participation is built on

freedom of associations and capacities to participate constructively.

- Rule of Law: Legal frameworks are fair and enforced impartiality; particularly ensuring that the human rights respected and safety and security are maintained at the highest level.
- Transparency: Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are made accessible to those who are concerned and enough information is provided to understand and monitor the whole process.
- Responsiveness: Institutions and processes serve all stakeholders. The civil servants are supposed to serve the clients with proactive mentality.
- Consensus Orientation: Differing interests are mediated to reach broad consensus on what is the common best interests of the organizations, community or country and where possible, on policies and procedures.
- Equity: All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being and the vulnerable are targeted to provide security of well-being to all.
- Effectiveness and efficiency: Processes and institutions produce results that meet the actual needs of the citizen while making the use of resources. Value for money must be ensured at all levels of public finance management.
- Accountability: Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to taxpayers and specific constituencies, as well as to institutional stakeholders.
- Strategic Vision: Leaders and the public share a broad and long term perspective on the prosperous society and accepted level of human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development.
- Legitimacy: Authority is legitimate in terms of the established legal and institutional framework and especially in terms of the accepted institutional criteria, processes and procedures.

- **Resource Prudence:** Resources are managed and used with a view to optimizing the well being of people and ensuring public values.
- **Ecological Soundness:** The environment is protected and regenerated to ensure sustainable self-reliance.
- **Empowering and Enabling:** All actors in society are empowered to pursue legitimate goals and enabling them to optimize their success and the realization of the well being of all.
- **Partnership:** Governance is seen as a whole system responsibility that cannot be discharged effectively alone, but involve institutionalized mechanisms and processes for working in partnerships of public and private actors in conducting the business of governance at all levels.
- **Spatially grounded in communities:** The multi-level nature of human system with the principles of self and self-organizing embodied at each level is recognized as the basis of governance that put people at the top and empowers them to be self-reliant, self-organizing and self-managing (ibid p.4).

2.2 Administrative Culture

Culture can be considered as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society" (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1972: 527). It can also be defined as "the body of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits constituting a distinct complex of tradition of a racial, religious or social group" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary). In other words, cultures is a complex typical of behavior, or standardize social characteristics peculiar to a specific group, occupation, profession, sex, age, grade or social class. Thus beliefs, behavior, norms, values that shared by the members of a society which are distinctive to that particular group can be considered as culture.

Within such a culture, there are various sub- cultures and administrative culture is a part of them. In other word, administrative culture is a part of the total culture of a country. Administrators or bureaucrats is a professional group consist of persons involved in the managing the administrative affairs of the country. They have their own beliefs,

thinking patterns, behavioral patterns, work attitudes and value system which are called as the administrative culture. Administrative culture refers to norms and values that shape and influence bureaucratic attitudes, interpersonal relationships, and performance. Such norms influence among others bureaucracy's relationship to politics and to society in general (Jamil, 2007: p.2). In other word, by administrative culture one should understand "those characteristics or conventional ways by which administrators, politicians and citizens in a given country think, act and interact as they relate themselves to various facets of their administrative system" (Lee H.B. and Abelardo G. S. 1970: p.23). It has also been defined "as the totality or not only the consciousness structure, the way of thinking, the value system and attitude of the administrative bureaucrats, but also the attitude of the people towards the administration" (ibid p.86). F.W. Riggs identified administrative culture as an "umbrella term" which includes shared beliefs and practice, shared attitudes, knowledge and improvements of the administrative body (Riggs, F.W., 2002: p.3). Thus it can be said that the administrative culture of a country consist of the thinking pattern, attitude and belief system of the three actors-administrators, politicians and people at large towards the administration. So each country has its own administrative culture based on its own social, economical, political and historical background.

2.3 Existing Administrative Culture in Bangladesh

Loyalty of bureaucrats: In Bangladesh, the loyalty of civil servants is mostly cadre based rather than organization based. In Bangladesh, once recruited to a particular service, a civil servant's career is organized within the service. His attachment is career-long. As a result of such attachment and loyalty toward his own cadre coordination among the members of different services is jeopardized. At the same time a feeling of superiority of one cadre/service over the other and a lack of commitment to organizational policies are found. Besides, there is also a strong loyalty among bureaucrats to family and kin (Jamil, 2007: p.195).

Patron-client relationship: Bangladesh is characterized as a hierarchical society in which interpersonal relationships are based on positions, status, seniority, and gender (Jansen, 1990: p.26). This social system is also reflected on the administrative system of the country. As a consequence, it has been the custom to use "yes sir" while addressing senior officers. As a result, most employees are submissive to their bosses and the subordinates are always anxious about how to please the boss. So they

always tell him what he wants to hear, and not necessarily what the reality is. On the other hand, most superiors want to dictate decisions to their subordinates, contributing slackness and inertia among them. On the other hand, it is easy to follow the orders given by superiors. So in Bangladesh, the relationship between senior and junior is often referred to as "patron-client" relationship (Jahangir, 1981: p.26). "Winning the heart" of the superior is a common strategy employed by junior officers to gain access to favor and nepotism. Official duties and responsibilities are often ignored and also are less valued in the process of obtaining close relationship to the superior (Jamil, 2007: p.222).

Bureaucracy-Citizen interface: In Bangladesh, bureaucrats have a "patron-client" attitude towards citizens. Citizens are always considered as object of administration and they are expected by government agencies to follow what is told. Mass people are always expected to accept the decision made in their name by the government. At the same time, bureaucrats are also often criticized for their elitist attitude and partiality in dealing with citizens. In other word, the bureaucracy-citizen interface in Bangladesh is also characterized by elitism. As hierarchy dominates interpersonal relationships in our country and governance is not based on responding to citizen's demands but deciding for citizens, bureaucratic actions often favor the elites with whom bureaucrats share economic, social and academic backgrounds (Zafarullah, 1995: p.1). Unless one has personal relations, it is very difficult for general people to get the service from the administration. Neither a sense of responsiveness or accountability is observed in the behavior of the civil servants; nor is any professional norm and standard developed for the delivery of public service. Such type of patron-client relationship and their elitist attitude is, more or less, accepted by political decision-makers and also by the citizens.

Tadbir and bribing: Two common characteristics of administrative culture in Bangladesh are tadbir and bribing. Literally, tadbir, an Arabic word, refers to "an act of looking after or taking care of a particular or business interest". In this sense, tadbir refers to persuasion or lobbying. But the practice of tadbir is so widespread in the civil service in Bangladesh that the term has attained a negative parlance (Jamil, 2007: p. 217). In a seminar organized by the Bangladesh Economic Association, speakers identified tadbir and bribing as the two most common bureaucratic pathologies of the country (The Daily Jugantor and The Daily Star. 21th September 2002). They viewed tadbir as "a process that leads to

corruption because it breaks away the standard bureaucratic norms, values, and impersonal rules". According to the analysis of Jamil, tadbir is an act of lobbying that influence decision making in the civil service in an unlawful manner and it has both positive and negative sides. The positive side of tadbir has a humanitarian motive and is employed by an individual either for himself or to help or assist someone... The negative side of tadbir is associated when it is used to break, bypass or manipulate rules in order to acquire unlawful gains for one-self or others. In this regard, corruption is usually associated with tadbir (Jamil, 2007: p. 218).

Corruption: One of the known administrative bad practices of our country is using official position for personal gain and thus nurtures corruption. It is a known fact that certain positions did provide the civil servants to make the money and officials also did make use of their position. Corruption becomes an inescapable fact of life in Bangladesh because the society is a highly complex network involving reciprocal favors and obligations; as a result, payoff is the lifeblood of the country (Maloney, 1986: p.173). In the past, corrupted government officials did not command respect from the people. Over the time, there has been a change in social attitude and now people have started imitating those officials, who have successfully made the gains out of the government positions. As a result, corruption has been nurtured and official positions are now being used more for profit-making purposes rather than for the purpose of service to the society. The main reason for such widespread corruption is lack of accountability in government services and the other important factor for corruption is the tolerance of the society; that means to some extent corruption practices has been accepted by the society. Now-a-days, the earning culture is being respected regardless of whatever means is employed. So, personal gains at the cost of violating societal interest are not being discouraged in Bangladesh. Corrupted officials very often get support and patronization from political actors specially who are in power.

There are various mechanisms of accountability but no mechanism is exercised in this field. In Bangladesh, bureaucrats are now more corrupted and politicized than before and bureaucratic corruption remains undiscovered and unpunished (Kabir, 2010: p.134). Administrative corruption has become, by and large, the administrative culture in Bangladesh (Khan, Rahman and Siddique, 1995: p.334).

Politicization of bureaucracy: Politicization of bureaucracy has become one of the significant administrative cultures of Bangladesh. The politicization of bureaucracy is not a new phenomenon in the history of the public administration in Bangladesh, which is inherited from the British period. In Bangladesh, the present bureaucracy is extremely politicized. In the policy paper, "The Political Economy of the State and Market in Bangladesh," Sobhan (2002) highly criticized the bureaucracy in the country for its political involvement. As a result, now bureaucrats can hold prestigious posts as long as their political masters are happy with their (bureaucrats) pro-party performance (Kabir, 2010: p.134). In the recent years, contractual appointment has been popular among the retired bureaucrats. With a view to serving the ruling party interest and also to carry out the orders of politicians, pro-ruling party retired bureaucrats are appointed on "contractual basis". In recent years, the bureaucrats are promoted on the basis of political consideration, not on the basis of merit and seniority. As a result, many meritorious and experienced officers become frustrated in bureaucracy. In Bangladesh, "prized posting" is another style of politicization of the bureaucracy. The pro-ruling party-minded bureaucrats are capturing those opportunities. Because of political consideration, less qualified and less experienced civil servants hold very important administrative positions. Another recent administrative punishment phenomenon is deputing disliking officers as the "officer on special duty" (OSD) which is used punishing bureaucrats whom seem to have relations with the opposition party. Over the years, in Bangladesh fresh recruitments in civil service have been characterized by irregularities, inconsistencies and political interventions. These have had grave consequences for bureaucratic autonomy, performance, inter-service coordination, loyalty, commitment and integrity (Jamil, 2007: p.199). All these consequences ultimately become strong obstacles for achieving good governance in our country.

Another negative impact of politicization of bureaucracy is the wide spread corruption in every level of administration. In other word, the political- bureaucratic nexus in the corruption has also been observed in Bangladesh. Zafarullah and Siddiquee (2001) state:

...the nexus between corrupt officials and politicians is still pervasive in the administrative hierarchy. Politicians in Bangladesh are believed to have a direct hand in sustaining corruption in administration. They have lucrative shares in all state deals, they receive commissions from terrorists and smugglers and they patronize corrupt officials for personal

gains. Sometimes, it is extremely difficult for someone to honestly discharge his or her responsibilities because of the pressure from above. Most often pressures from political elites to carry out their illegal orders force bureaucrats to ignore professional ethics and public interests.

Lack of accountability and transparency: In Bangladesh, the bureaucracy is also suffering from lack of accountability and transparency. The chain of accountability stretching from the parliament to class iv employees is weak and fuzzy; many in the links have been ruptured, resulting in an inability to enforce financial contracts, stop theft in public enterprises or hold officials accountable for improper or delayed judgment (World Bank, 1996: P.8). Traditional internal mechanisms like hierarchy and supervision have mostly failed (Khan, 1998: p.166). In a parliamentary democracy the legislature plays an important oversight role to keep the executive in check. But this has not happened in Bangladesh (Khan, 2009: p.180). Thus public sector lacks accountability in Bangladesh. At the same time, it is mostly non-transparent. As for example, decision making in this sector as a whole is non-transparent (Khan, 1998: p. 167). Decisions taken by the cabinet, the deliberations involved in reaching them, are not open to public viewing. Both in the political and administrative spheres secrecy is jealously guarded (Khan, 2009: p. 181). Certain acts such as the Official Secret Act, 1923 and Government Service Conduct Rules, 1979 have restricted general people to access in relevant file and documents. There is a general tendency among civil servants to keep everything, including those, which need to be communicated to and stakeholders, secret. This over-emphasis on secrecy in the civil service has been a major factor for corruption. At the same time, it discourages transparency in administration, which is one of the core characteristics of good governance.

2.4 Administrative Cultures and Good Governance in Bangladesh

In the above section, the prime administrative cultures of Bangladesh are discussed. These existing cultures are creating obstacles for achieving good governance in this country. With a view to achieving good governance the civil servants should be loyal towards the organization, not to the cadre. They should be service oriented. They should follow the rule of law and should remember that they are public servants. But they have a "patron-client" attitude towards citizens. Bangladeshi bureaucrats are also often criticized for their elitist attitude. They have partiality in dealing with citizens. All these cultures are making obstacles to achieve

rule of law and equity-two core characteristics of good governance. Tadbir and bribing increase nepotism and corruption in administration. Besides politicization of bureaucracy is creating the wide spread corruption in every level of administration of this country. Thus Tadbir and bribing, politicization of bureaucracy and corruption are also observed as significant obstacles for achieving good governance in this country. Lack of accountability and non-transparency became so dominant administrative culture of this country that state apparatuses have been used for individual, family, group and party benefits at the cost of citizens and the state (Khan, 2009: p.185). Thus Bangladesh has become an extremely corrupt country. All the organs of government have been tainted by corruption. All kinds of corruption, from petty to grand theft, can be observed in Bangladesh. All these administrative cultures are the major bars for achieving good governance in this country. At the same time, lack of accountability and transparency in administration is considered to be a major impediment to achieve good governance. The governance system in Bangladesh is premised on a lack of accountability and secrecy. These two factors combined together have made governance in this country inefficient, ineffective and expensive (Khan, 2009: p.180). In a parliamentary democratic country, the legislature plays an important role to keep the executive in check. But this has not happened in Bangladesh (Khan, 2009: p.180). In this regard, Ahmed rightly identified the negative attitude of the bureaucracy as an important impediment to making the parliamentary control effective on the civil servants. According to him, although the bureaucracy does not always openly defy the authority of parliament and its committees neither can it be seen as much hospitable to the suggestions or demands for more transparency and accountability. One of the important reasons is the over-dependence of the successive ruling parties over the bureaucracy for regime maintenance (Ahmed, 2006: p. 140). Thus in Bangladesh lack of accountability is strongly found in public sector. The failure of administrative accountability mechanisms has contributed to the indifferent and arrogant attitudes that most bureaucrats hold towards citizens in general (Khan, 1983: p.688). Thus most of the existing administrative cultures of this country have created significant obstacles for achieving good governance.

3.0 Recommendations to overcome the barriers

Like many other developing countries, achieving good governance is an important challenge for Bangladesh. But there are so many existing

administrative cultures which are found as serious constraints to achieve it. Therefore, there is a strong need to bring about the change in the administrative cultures by taking various measures. There are some general recommendations that would be helpful to overcome the barriers.

- *Participation and interface among different actors:* With a view to achieving good governance, participation of all men and women in the decision making process either directly or through their representatives should be ensured. Those who working at the different levels within the organization or at the field level, should give opportunity to participate in the decision making process. Decentralization in the form of devolution, delegation or de-concentration provides the opportunity to the people working within the organization or at the field level and at the same time it also provide opportunity towards concerned actors to participate in the decision making process.
- *Rule of law and justice:* The administrative system should be based on the principle of rule of law. The notion of rule of law needs to go beyond formalism. So rule of law and justice should be the basic principle of governance so that all citizens can enjoy their basic human rights and get justice.
- *Change the notion of official secrecy:* The notion of official secrecy should be redefined. The government should open all information for citizens except those that have to do with national security. Free flows of information can make the public official responsible and transparent. Bangladesh government already passed "Right to Information Act, 2009" which encourages free flows of information for the citizens. Government should take proper steps to implement it and it would be helpful to ensure transparency, responsiveness and accountability of public services.
- *Rearrange Civil Service Act/ Rules of business:* With a view to making the civil servants responsible and accountable a clear-cut delineation of their roles, responsibilities and authorities is required. The scope of civil service act/rules of business should be expanded where their responsibilities towards the political decision-makers, the parliament, especially parliamentary committees, constitutional bodies, political parties- both the party in position and the opposition, civil society organizations and

finally towards the people should clearly stated. The people should let it know and make the civil servants follow this act during their service period.

- *Simplification of work procedures:* So long as work procedures remain cumbersome and non-transparent, the administration would not be accountable and responsive towards the public. Fulfillment of self-interest or safeguarding the interest of a few people-decision makers and others- become dominating factors in our administration. Due to lack of transparency in work procedures, the administration is considered not only as unaccountable but also as non-responsive to the public. This is also contributing to the increasing corruption and inefficiency in the administration. So there is a strong need for an integrity management system with simplification of work procedures within the government for ensuring transparency in all activities and decisions of public offices. In this regard the application of information technology (IT) in all levels of administration is the best example of simplification of work procedures. E-governance should be encouraged in public sector which will make the civil servants accountable, responsive, and transparent and at the same time efficient.
- *Performance Indicators:* With a view to increasing efficiency and effectiveness of public officials, performance indicators need to be developed for measuring the achievement of a particular official objectively. At the same time an element of competition should be introduced in the civil service. That means, inter-cadre and inter-organizational competition will be opened for external agencies, including the private sector and NGOs. A competitive bureaucracy would mean that rewards and punishments for its members are associated with the degree of success or failure to compete with others. In this regard personal accountability for decisions should be established in place of organizational accountability.
- *Training on behavioral aspects:* With a view to changing the attitudes of civil servants towards general people, training would be fruitful device. Civil service training should focus on behavioral aspects rather than on knowledge aspects. They should give the training of appropriate ethics and values.

Through proper training they can have the right attitude towards mass people. Civil servants should remember that they are the public servants and from this point of view they should be impartial in dealing with citizens.

- *Non-partisan bureaucracy:* One of the most harmful administrative cultures of our country is politicization of bureaucracy which is one of the significant impediments for achieving good governance. The impact of politicization of bureaucracy is very critical and it has become a threat to effective, efficient and neutral public administration of our country. So political decision makers of both party in position and the opposition should realized the fact and they should be careful not to use the bureaucracy for their party interest. The bureaucracy should remain neutral and non-partisan. The fresh recruitments in civil service and promotion should be on the basis of merit. OSD system should be abolished. Meritorious and experienced officers should give opportunity to hold important administrative positions and thus serve the country. With a view to achieve good governance, bureaucracy should be free from political influence and intervention.
- *Role of Civil Society organizations:* With a view to ensuring good governance in our country, civil society organizations can play a significant role. They may raise their voices and concerns on behalf of the people over a number of public issues. They can check whether the issues are the outcomes of government decisions or otherwise motivated. It has been the case even in relation to administration. Regarding public administration, civil society organizations can appreciate the works done, assess their performance, put pressure to adopt the transparency in the performance of departmental functions and make advocacy for changing in the belief systems or attitudes or behavioral patterns in a positive way. Indeed they have been working as pressure groups and the success of these efforts ultimately depends on the political will to change their beliefs, attitudes and behavioral pattern.

4.0 Conclusion

The socio-political and economic perspectives of a country and its history play the most important role in creating the administrative culture of a country. Bangladesh is not an exception. There are some administrative cultures which become major constraints towards achieving good governance. It is the proper time to change the work style and behavior of bureaucrats in relation to the mass people. They should be effective, efficient, responsive, accountable, neutral and transparent in running the public administration of this country. In this regard, international development partners also can play an important role by providing with consultations and technical supports to the government for ensuring good governance in Bangladesh. The adoption of sustainable development and good governance as the guiding principles for extending support by the UNDP and advocacy for transparency and accountability by the World Bank may be cited as examples in this regard. There are a number of options available for the administration, which can be adopted in the light of good governance. With a view to bringing about changes in the administrative culture of the country, further measures need to be taken for the sake of achieving good governance in public administration. Some of them are indicated above. At the same time, the institutional mechanisms to monitor the process of change are also required. It should be mention worthy that the success of any reform initiatives depends on the seriousness and sincerity of two principal actors of administration - political decision makers and civil servants. At the same time, it is equally important that how far these two principal actors are able to win the trust and confidence of people - the significant third actor. So the suggestions provided above are simultaneously true for all the actors - political decision makers, civil servants and the citizens -how far they are committed towards achieving good governance in Bangladesh.

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