Societal Expectations of Good Governance: Case Study on Mauritius

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ABSTRACT

At a time when governance plays an important function in determining how society must operate in the most effective way, it is important to consider societal expectations from such a concept. Society broadly expects good governance so that institutions are respected, law is abided by rightfully and people get the deserved services from the government. Poor governance leads to frustration and resentment from social members as well creating the path to prejudicial attitudes and perceptions. This research paper analyses such expectations based on the following variables namely: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus oriented, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and, lastly, accountability. These parameters are duly analysed in light of social expectations both from a positive and negative perspective. The differences clearly posit the relevance of good governance in Mauritius provided that the eight factors are rightfully applied and practiced in such a democratic society.

Keywords: Society, expectations, good governance, factors, Mauritius.

1. INTRODUCTION

First of all, three interlinked terms; society, government and governance need to be defined to better frame the research perspective. Each concept is individually defined and links are developed. A society is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction or a large social group sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. According to Williams (1976), societies are characterised by patterns of relationships social relations between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent of members.

A government is the system to govern a state or community. The word *government* derives from the Greek verb *kubernáo* meaning *to steer* rudder. The Columbia Encyclopaedia (2015) defines government as "a system of social control under which the right to make laws, and the right to enforce them, is vested in a particular group in society".

Every country in the world is ruled by a system of governance that combines at least three or more political or economic attributes. Governance comprises all of the processes of governing —whether undertaken by the government of a state, by a market or by a network over a social system and whether through the laws, norms, power or language of an organised society (Mark, 2012). It relates to "the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement, or reproduction of social norms and institutions".

In other terms, it could be described as the political processes that exist in and between formal institutions.

1.1 Concept of good governance

Good governance is an indeterminate term used in the international development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources. Good Governance is an approach to government that is committed to creating a system founded in justice and peace that protects individual's human rights and civil liberties. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission (2010), Good governance is

measured by the eight factors of Participation, Rule of Law, Transparency, Responsiveness, Consensus Oriented, Equity and Inclusiveness, Effectiveness and Efficiency, and Accountability.

2. THE FACTORS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Each of the eight factors of good governance is now developed in the paragraphs below with reference to the United Nations definition.

2.1 Participation

Participation requires that all groups, particularly those most vulnerable, have direct or representative access to the systems of government. This manifests as a strong civil society and citizens with the freedom of association and expression. To participate means to engage members of society in the main activities undertaken. People must be given ample chance to participate in societal activities: work, debate, actions, situations.

2.2 Rule of law

Rule of Law is exemplified by impartial legal systems that protect the human rights and civil liberties of all citizens, particularly minorities. This is indicated by an independent judicial branch and a police force free from corruption. All members are subject to the rule of law. Nobody should get any favour or unnecessary protection from law. Law ensures equal treatment and protection of each one. Vulnerable groups need to be fully protected under the rule of law.

2.3 Transparency

Transparency means that citizens understand and have access to the means and manner in which decisions are made, especially if they are directly affected by such decisions. It guides an organisation's decisions and policies on the disclosure of information to its employees and the public, or simply the intended recipient of the information (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson ,2014). This information must be provided in an understandable and accessible format, typically translated through the media. All activities undertaken by institutions must be clear and understandable. Financial accountability is essential with regards to transparency. Managerial transparency is equally sought in activities concerning society.

2.4 Responsiveness

Responsiveness simply involves that institutions respond to their stakeholders within a reasonable time frame. Institutions cannot be involved in time wasting or postponing judgments and decisions. Society must perceive that decisions are quickly channelled to its members. Queries and problems must be dealt with in a timely and effective manner. There must be a degree of satisfaction regarding the way, timeliness and quality of responses are provided to society.

2.5 Consensus-oriented

Consensus oriented is demonstrated by an agenda that seeks to mediate between the many different needs, perspectives, and expectations of a diverse citizens. Decisions needs to be made in a manner that reflects a deep understanding of the historical, cultural, and social context of the community. There must be decisions that meet the

needs of society. There must be a clear cut difference between rational and subjective decisions. Sometimes popular decisions might bring consensus. e.g. Brexit, populist forces in Europe.

2.6 Equity and Inclusiveness

Equity and inclusiveness depends on ensuring that all the members of a community feel included and empowered to improve or maintain their well-being, especially those individuals and groups that are the most vulnerable. According to Schleicher (2014), Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to success. Equity provides a sense of equal treatment to all members of society. Inclusiveness ensures that the vulnerable groups and minorities are also included. By combining both, equity and inclusiveness ensure that members of society do benefit from adequate consideration from government and that their voices are being heard.

2.7 Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effectiveness and efficiency are developed through the sustainable use of resources to meet the needs of a society. Sustainability refers to both ensuring social investments carry through and natural resources are maintained for future generations. Effective governance sees that outputs are attained within the expected parameters like time and objectives. Efficiency ensures that resources are optimised and wastage is limited in most cases. It is also essential to think of sustainability to see that benefits stretch over the long-term.

2.8 Accountability

Accountability refers to institutions being ultimately accountable to the people and one another (Mulgan, 2000). This includes government agencies, civil society, and the private sector all being accountable to one another as well. Government is accountable for the strategy and programme that it has developed. The private sector is accountable for programmes and infrastructure that it promotes to society. Civil society is accountable on its own for responsiveness and feedback to the different institutions.

3. THE EIGHT FACTORS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE VIEWED FROM A MAURITIAN PERSPECTIVE

Once the eight factors of good governance have been briefly explained, they are now seen from a Mauritian society perspective. This model highlights how governance is viewed in the Mauritian context from each factor described below.

3.1 Participation of society in Mauritius

People are concerned with good governance. They are generally aware of what "la bonne gouvernance" is. In the Mauritian public service, good governance revolves around the optimal use of resources, the improvement of management and the quality of service and the accountability of managers, among others (Le Mauricien, 2015). Institutions like ICAC are created to engage people in fighting corruption. Government engages people to participate in its debates. The public has the right to voice its opinion wherever applicable.

3.2 Rule of law in Mauritius

Mauritian citizens are law abiding and hence show respect to the rule of law. Matters pertaining to legislation are highly followed by the community. Breach of law is punishable and society is concerned with it; e.g. traffic rules. People want to see better application and enforcement of law to avoid anarchy or chaos in society. Law is generally seen as a protector of civil rights.

3.3 Transparency in Mauritius

Transparency and good governance are related in the Mauritian society. All government actions must be undertaken in full transparency. Tenders and bids should be undertaken with transparency. Bypassing law and regulations are condemned by society. Procedures are expected to be strictly followed by society members. There might be whistle blowing if transparency is not achieved in the Mauritian society.

3.4 Responsiveness in Mauritius

Government must respond in a timely manner to community problems in Mauritius. Problems linked with water supply must be quickly managed. The creation of a Citizens Customer Unit to answer queries and problems of Mauritians is a success nowadays. Local institutions like the Police Force, educational authorities and utilities must respond in a timely way to society. A lack of responsiveness can lead to sanctions imposed by the community.

3.5 Consensus Oriented in the Mauritian society

A burning issue like the "Best Loser System" needs full consensus from the Mauritian society (Banwell Commission, 1966). Mauritians are keen to find out consensus on the Electoral Reform. Debate on death penalty needs consensus although the legislative assembly has a major role to play. Consensus is sought on salary adjustments namely from the people. There are also a range of issues like the legalisation of cannabis, acceptance of LGBT in a cross-sectional way.

3.6 Equity and Inclusiveness in Mauritius

Mauritians want to see equity when decisions are taken by government. This comes from equal treatment of people regarding recruitment in the public service. Discrimination is scorned off by the Mauritian community. Inclusiveness is seriously considered by Mauritians. The "Best Loser System" has mixed feelings but a positive outlook from minorities in Mauritius.

3.7 Effectiveness and Efficiency in Mauritius

Mauritian people want an effective government. Being a democracy, governments are changed every 5 years' subject to elections. The government is judged on the effectiveness of its programme. Inefficiency is decried by society members when it comes to issues like wastage of resources, bureaucracy and poor governance. Efficiency is applauded by Mauritians when activities are undertaken within budgetary and human resource requirements.

3.8 Accountability in Mauritius

Mauritian people want an accountable government.

Government must be accountable for:

- *Timely* decisions—Implementing a project like a link road named Verdun.
- *Right* decisions—The replacement of old Rs 2000 notes.
- *Sound* policies—Improvement of living conditions of old people.
- *Transparency*—Procedures like fitness and driving.
- *Fairness and equity*—Addressing the needs of vulnerable people.

4. EXPECTATIONS FROM SOCIETY FROM BAD GOVERNANCE

If bad governance is assumed to be practiced in society, there will be negative expectations which will be highly felt by its members. There will be a low perception of institutions withholding good governance, an increase in nepotism and favouritism, a certain degree of disengagement of society members from the democratic principles implemented in the country, a possibility of social upheaval along with a general "feel bad factor". It is also worth mentioning the higher risk of connivance, complacency and malpractice from social members. Each factor is discussed below.

4.1 Low perception of institutions

Institutions that encourage good governance will suffer from a negative image. Public institutions like the judiciary or any other organisation dealing with governance might suffer from a bad perception. People will have little or no respect from such institutions believing that they are acting as an "eyewash" to the public and are protecting the interests of just a happy few.

4.2 Nepotism and favouritism encouraged

It is clear that an absence of good governance comes from the stemming of nepotism and favouritism in society. There will be influence from politicians and people in power. There will not be the promotion of meritocracy and equality. This is where people who are in the good shoes of the authorities have better chances of seeking employment than the others.

4.3 Disengagement in democracy

Democracy is a model that provides the right of freedom of speech and association of individuals. However, when bad governance creeps in society, it becomes more difficult to see social engagement in democracy. People lose confidence from the State and its institutions and are unwilling to contribute to anything meaningful that strengthens or consolidates democracy. Since individual rights are baffled, democratic engagement is minimized or repressed.

4.4 Risk of social upheaval

Poor management of governance is likely to lead to social upheavals. Recent cases include the "yellow jacket" movement in France in 2018 whereby the French population showed a high level of disgust in its government and this created a major social unrest that was difficult to control. Crémieux (2018) states that such a movement was n

built entirely from social networks, around rejection of a further increase in the carbon tax on fuels. It also reflected the weakness of effective governance in the current economic climate in France.

4.5 Feel bad factor

A "feel bad factor" is also felt when ineffective governance exists in society. People feel disinterested in the institution while they have a bad image of them. Low levels of participation in elections followed by a certain disinterest in activities proposed by the State and its institutions can also reflect the "feel bad factor". This is also supported by sluggishness in economic development and a general "laissez faire" attitude.

4.6 Connivance, complacency and malpractice increase

In line with the above-mentioned factors, it is possible to say that connivance—a tacit encouragement or of assent to another's wrongdoing (Stewart, 2006), complacency—a feeling that things should be accepted as such whether good or bad, and malpractice—behaviour that is wrongful, tend to increase. Such practices are close to corruption and create wrongful behaviour. It is feared that such attitudes should not be socially embedded in the long-run.

5. EXPECTATIONS FROM SOCIETY FROM GOOD GOVERNANCE

On the contrary, good governance may provide certain positive effects and contributions on behalf of social members. These are: better perception of institutions, positive attitudes developed from social members, higher level of engagement and participation in democracy, improved ranking of a nation in its governance, better transparency and accountability including more efficiency through good governance practice. These concepts are developed below.

5.1 Better perception of institutions

With a good governance mechanism, it is quite possible to find out a good perception of institutions implementing governance. People feel that the institutions are yardsticks for good governance and there must be compliance with the standards set by such organisations. This perception in itself engages the community to build higher levels of trust and acceptance of the institutions concerned.

5.2 Positive attitudes

A general feeling of positivity is felt when good governance exists. Levels of frustration and disengagement are generally low. With positive attitudes, society members find it worthwhile to believe in the institutions that govern them and contribute positively to them.

5.3 Better engagement in democracy

Democratic engagement and participation are enhanced as good governance is implemented in society. Members feel part of society and show higher engagement on issues like good practice, excellent service, ethics and law abidance. At the same time, they can show more participation like acting as whistle blowers against illegal practice, sharing values among members and encouraging positive attitudes from members (Vandekerckhove, 2006).

5.4 Improved ranking of institutions

Local institutions are rated on behalf of the practice of governance and so does the country. With the practice and application of good governance, local institutions like those engaged in fighting corruption, financial institutions and even the government benefit from better ranking like the actual Baa1 from international institutions like Moody's. This are likely to impact not only on society but investors willing to bring capital and development opportunities to a nation.

5.5 Better transparency and accountability

Transparency and accountability are reinforced through good governance. Individuals and institutions work hard to see that their governance policies and strategies are working out effectively and that members are making the most of them. Through transparency, all activities are clearly laid out and procedures are diligently followed. In terms of accountability, transactions and activities of any nature are clearly displayed and left to scrutiny and observance to public members.

5.6 Improved efficiency through good governance

At the State level, there will be improved efficiency. Better performance will be accounted as there will be higher conformity with democratic principles. Since procedures will be strictly adhered to and followed, there will be improved performance. Expectations are great and people engaged in the various activities will undertake the right effort to work under sound ethical principles to ensure higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

6. EVALUATION OF MAURITIUS UNDER GOVERNANCE

It is important after the analysis of the two extremes of governance to assess how Mauritius could be portrayed under governance. The analysis is based on selected press articles and statements made on governance by the Mauritian community. The key points are analysed below.

6.1 Mauritian people is known as "lepep admirab"

A general statement that has become classical in society is that Mauritius is known as "lepep admirab" meaning an admirable society. This comes from the fact that the population looks to be complacent and generally reserved whenever decisions or policies are implemented on society. Prayag (2018) states that Mauritians are happy to sit and passively watch those they elected to protect their interests treat us with spite. Most decisions are accepted with minimal disruption from social members. While this might look good from leaders implementing policies, opinion leaders and community members find this attitude generally bad and not so effective. Price increases, electoral decisions, budgetary practices and most legislations are passed without much intervention and feedback from social members.

6.2 Generally passive and complacent

There might be an assumed passivity and complacency from the Mauritian community. This attitude might be partly in line with the mechanisms of governance set in society. Since the possibility for contesting a policy or decision is usually weak, there is an increase in passivity. This is reflected in the low level of participation of

Mauritians in debates, in low social involvement with institutions and a general acceptance of a "top down" approach of managing activities in the country.

6.3 A low perception of institutions

The perception of Mauritians of local institutions empowering governance is low. The Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) is perceived as a bulldog without teeth. The Public Service Commission (PSC) is subject to criticism from people. Institutions like the Financial Services Commission (FSC) are now seriously viewed by the community. This has resulted from criticisms in the press and social media that have tarnished their image and have made Mauritians more sceptical of this governance-based organisations.

6.4 Understands the relevance of good governance

Although the perception of good governance is fairly low in Mauritius, the average citizen understands the relevance of good governance. The prevalence of corruption in Mauritius is low by regional standards, but graft and nepotism nevertheless remain concerns and are a source of public frustration (Export.gov, 2017). Campaigns on sensitisation on road safety is known to all Mauritians or any other campaign undertaken by ICAC and similar institutions. People are made aware of the need to develop positive attitudes and are apparently concerned with them in the country although the need to comply by the practices remain to be discussed.

6.5 Wants to be empowered to participate in good governance

The Mauritian community wants to be empowered with good governance practices. The general concept is a "top down" approach and a "rule of the thumb", a heuristic model put to practice (Investopedia, 2018). Mauritians want to find themselves are advocates of good governance provided that they are given the opportunity to do so. Possibly, there is low empowerment at the individual level and this is where the need arises to give more power and influence to individuals to put to practice good governance.

6.6 Might be limited in terms of participation

Participation in good governance is limited although there is an appeal from the authorities to hear from community members. Such participation can be something socially rooted where passivity is high. However, there could be other parameters like the job actually undertaken, the limits to authority and responsibility and the fear of being denounced in case if the public's participation was not right. Such limitations put a brake on the contribution of the average Mauritian to embrace good governance practices fully through social participation.

6.7 Seeks more social media to fight back injustices

Else, social media plays a major role in combatting social injustices. In the Mauritian community, such a practice is more common today than ever before. Most cases of injustice and poor governance are openly debated on social media representing some third-party involvement in the democratic process. However, recent temptations to curb abuses on the Internet namely though social media might have, to some extent, intimidated Mauritians to be engaged in good governance practice.

7. CONCLUSION

Societal expectations of good governance are high when social members are informed of its importance in maintaining high levels of ethical behaviour, equity and efficiency. The notion of good governance has been developed since a few decades in Mauritius while it was not well known and inculcated initially. The creation of institutions linked with good governance like the Public Service Commission, The Independent Commission against Corruption, the Financial Services Commission coupled with jurisdiction for good governance, have in turn developed a nationally-accepted notion of governance. The Mauritian society now understands the principles of good governance and is keen to react in case of wrongful manoeuvres to counter it. The positive element today is that social media has become a useful tool to counter negative actions and Mauritius performs quite well in the eight factors identified by the United Nations regarding good governance. One of the major concerns might be that the common citizen in Mauritius needs to be empowered to ensure that he participates effectively in the implementation and application of good governance principles. He must be encouraged and offered opportunities to participate in the promotion of good governance and understand how it ensures the effective and efficient management of society and collectively develop and maintain yardsticks of excellence.

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