

# On Good Governance

N Bhaskara Rao

In the ultimate analysis what distinguishes one Government from another? From an *aam admi* perspective more particularly what should differentiate a Government? When would a Government qualify to be described as a good Government? In my analysis a common denominator is when ordinary people get basic public services delivered promptly without having to pay any extra charges or and without requiring the use of extraneous influence of a contact. There would be anywhere between ten to twenty basic public services that a citizen seeks from Government departments or agencies with some frequency. Good governance is the one which enables timely delivery of these



*The Minister of State for Food, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Shri V. Sreenivas Prasad at the launching of the AAY at village Intkheri in Bhopal March 6, 2001*

services transparently and Government, it should also be the concern of civil society to ensure

responsively. While the responsibility for that citizens avail those basic service delivery is that of the services. To facilitate this process,

## **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)**

After a national Sample Survey Exercise found that about 5% of the total population in the country slept without two square meals a day, The Government of India launched the scheme called "Antyodaya Anna Yojana" under its Targeted Public Distribution System (TDPS) for foodgrains with effect from 25.12.2000 to help this section of the population. The collectors were made over all in charge for implementation of the scheme in the Districts. Originally, each beneficiary family was given 25 kg foodgrain per month at the rate of Rs.3/- per kg. This was changed to 35 kg of rice per family per month at the rate of Rs.3/- per kg or wheat at Rs 2/- per kg through fair price shops from November 2006 onwards. Under AAY, The states are required to bear the distribution cost, including margin to dealers and retailers as well as the transportation cost. Thus the entire food subsidy is being passed on to the consumers under the scheme.

The AAY Scheme was expanded in 2003-2004 by adding another 50 lakh Below Poverty Line ( BPL) households . The detailed guidelines for identification of such households covered those headed by widows/ terminally ill persons/disabled persons/persons aged 60 years or more with no assured means of subsistence or societal support. The other household classes covered were those of landless agriculture labourers, marginal

farmers, rural artisans/craftsmen, such as potters, tanners, weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters, slum dwellers and persons earning their livelihood on daily basis in the informal sector like porters, coolies, rickshaw pullers, hand cart pullers, fruit and flower sellers, snake charmers, rag pickers, cobblers, destitute and other similar categories in both rural and urban areas.

The identification of the Antyodaya families and issue of distinctive Ration Cards to these families is the responsibility of the concerned State Governments. Allocation of food grains under the scheme is being released to the State/UTs on the basis of issue of distinctive AAY Ration Cards to the identified Antyodaya families. With this increase, 1.5 crore (i.e.23% of BPL families) got covered by the AAY.

In 2004-5, the govt estimated that 27.5 % of all Indian households were BPL and the Union Budget 2004-05 saw the AAY further expanded by 50 lakh BPL families by including, inter alia, all households at the risk of hunger. Orders to this effect were issued on 3rd august 2004. With this, the number of AAY families increased to 2 crore (i.e. 30.66% of BPL families).

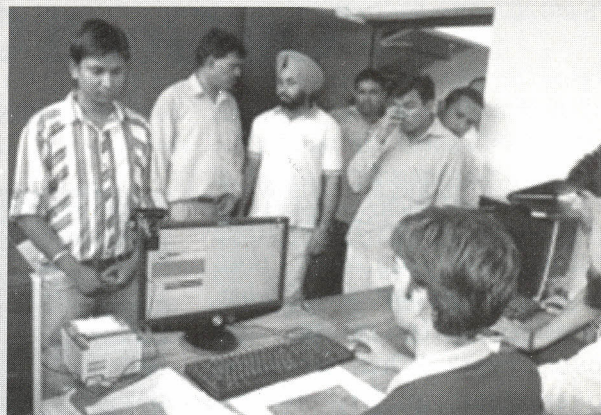
The Union Budget 2005-06 saw the AAY further expanded by 50 lakh BPL households thus increasing its coverage to 2.5 crore households.(i.e.38% of BPL families).



## Computerising TPDS to tackle corruption & improve outcomes

The computerised Public Distribution System (PDS) in two BJP-ruled states-Gujarat and Chhattisgarh-came in for praise from the Supreme Court in Sept 2011, which asked the Central Govt why these be not taken as a model for the entire country.

It divided the computerisation into two components : First to arrest and correct diversions, leakages, delays in allocation and transportation, distribution of food grains to fair price shops; and the second: electronic authentication of delivery and payments at the fair price shop. It observed that Chhattisgarh's system could serve as a model for the first component, while the one in Gujarat could be the model for the second component.



*Smart Card enrolment camp for APL/BPL/AAV in Chandigarh*

Governments have recently created certain administrative mechanisms. These work better and more reliably with intervention and initiatives of civil society. A series of India Corruption Surveys of CMS in the last decade have indicated that between five to twelve percent of those citizens seeking one or other of these basic public services, did not avail the service as they could not pay the extra amount demanded, nor had any influential contact speak for them. This is the challenge. No governance can be good if the per cent of such deprived people is more than one percent at any one point, in any one public service and place.

It is time to deepen the "Rights Regime" in the country - allow and ensure full play of rights already provided for. Unless political parties and news media too are brought under this regime, it cannot be a fair play and become doable. Without concerns of civil society and political parties, doability remains Government centric. Citizens Charter, Social Audit, Service Delivery Guarantee, etc. are instruments to ensure doability. Have we given a fair chance to these instruments to prove themselves? If we cannot even implement "Right to Education", with honesty, what else can we take seriously? An idea of "Right to Skill"

is good if the modus operandi is envisioned. Without political parties getting back to basics, plug into grass roots truly and pursue basic needs of citizens, chances of fair play and implementation of citizen enablers are bleak. Also programmes like Antyodaya (Rajasthan), prajala vadaku palana (AP), need to be repositioned. ICT is a new hope. Expecting the Government to do everything is of course a root cause for doubts on doability, and the previous Governments went all out to make citizens dependent on the Government for everything.

Citizen centric Good Governance formula in my opinion is: Good Governance = RTI + (CC+SG+GR) + (SA+ICT)

(Where SA is social Audit; CC is Citizen Charter; SG is Service Delivery Guarantee; GR is Grievance Redressal; ICT is Information Communication Technologies)

A better way for ensuring good governance is not more and more reforms but ensuring existing instruments or mechanisms are taken seriously and implemented both by the Government agencies and vigilantly pursued by civil society groups. In my opinion this approach works faster and more reliably. This is what I call citizen

centric approach. In this approach, these enabling instruments work better in combination rather than expecting any one approach to yield desired outcomes. RTI activists should also take to citizen charter and right to delivery of basic public services act (which more than ten states had already adopted) together to make their interventions far more effective, notwithstanding provisions in the Whistleblower legislation. I have put this proposition in a formula form to reiterate an integrated approach to get better results out of these different mechanisms. I have explained the modalities in my book "Good Governance: Delivering Corruption-free Public Services" (SAGE, 2013) with specific reference to ten basic public services.

With digitalization gaining momentum, Spreading of network technologies and mobile communication tools becoming part of everyday life, ICT could be a differentiator. Social audit is yet another instrument as it could be adopted specific to issue, people and region for addressing service delivery gaps.

*Dr. Bhaskara Rao is Founder Chairman of Centre for Media Studies.*