

A Conceptual Study of Ethical Values of Transparency and Accountability in Administration

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Abstract--Corruption has long been seen as a hindrance to socio-economic development especially in developing, resource rich countries, where the political elite controls the resources and has a control over the distribution of these resources. We argue that Transparency can serve to limit or prevent ways and means of corrupt behavior. And to clarify the lines of argument we focus on the ethical values of transparency and accountability to explore how closely they are linked and how transparency is helpful to bring in accountability in administration.

Keywords: Transparency, Accountability and Administration

I. INTRODUCTION

Administration of a country plays a vital role in the development and prosperity of its citizens. What remains to be the main objective of the administration is to act responsibly, provide all the information to the people that is to be transparent, to be answerable whenever required that is accountability and to be citizen-friendly. These factors are said to be the pillars of any administrative set up. In the days of Globalization or the increase in the flow of goods, services, ideas, people, information and capital, a transparent and accountable public sector is critically important. We explore in the following sections in detail the ethical values of Transparency and Accountability, their relationship and their importance in administration.

II. TRANSPERANCY

The word transparency has been derived from the Medieval Latin word, “transparere” which means to see through[3]. In other words, the word transparency implies the condition of being transparent, something that is devoid of pretense and deceit. Transparency is an ethical value that can be applied in various contexts like business, social systems, government, etc. In the context of functioning of the administration, transparency means provision of

unfettered, easy and speedy access to reliable information with regard to the decisions made and actions taken by the public sector.

Transparency in Public Administration serves various purposes. It ensures that the administrative actions are undertaken within the legal framework and thus become more predictable. It provides a means to control and keep an eye on the functioning of the administration as transparency helps the citizens to get information regarding the administrative services, processes and organizations, which in turn makes the administration answerable to the public/citizens for its actions. It increases and strengthens the faith and the trust of the people in the organization. For transparency it is imperative that all the information should be easily accessible that is, in the form of documents, etc; something that is not exempted from publication; it must be ensured that it should be easily understandable by one and all; it must be provided in time; and most importantly there should be awareness among the people so that they access information in time. Transparency makes sure that people know exactly what is going on and the rationale behind all the decisions and administrative actions of the government or its functionaries at different levels.

Transparency can be ensured through openness in public dealings, implementation of the Right to Information act for easy access to the details of the expenditure/contracts, the cost of the projects, information regarding the different procedures for any application, information about the bio-data of the contestants for elections, etc. A link between the administration and transparency is to be set up because of the fact that every single thread of information should be evident between the general public and the governmental authority so as to give the word representative democracy a true meaning. But transparency in the administrative system alone cannot help in achieving the dream of a truly democratic state as a

responsive and impartial government. We argue that accountability in the scenario turns out to be an imperative dimension of administrative structure.

III. ACCOUNTABILITY

The word accountable seems to have come in to usage in the English language for the first time in late sixteenth century and the context was financial. Even today financial accountability is a very important aspect of the administrative structure. It connotes someone who is liable to be called to account implying that government has to be liable for each and every decision, which stands to be scrutinized in public domain. Accountability means that every public functionary should be accountable for his/ her acts and deeds. It refers to the obligation on the part of the government functionaries to give an account of the usage of the public funds and resources. They are answerable for the failure in proper implementation of the plans and programs and in meeting the performance objectives.

Accountability in Government implies the subjection of the discretionary powers and authority vested in civil servants to outside scrutiny through various organs of the society. It is indisputable that every public functionary has to be accountable for his acts and deeds, more so a Government employee who exercises sovereign powers vested in him. It is often said that Government servants are accountable to no one. In theory, this proposition is totally unsustainable but in practice, it is largely true [4]. The administration should be accountable for deciding the targets for various plans, policies, programs, schemes and services for the benefit of all within the stipulated time period; formation of policies for the benefit and welfare of the nation at large and the society in general; setting up the standards for performance and providing quality work; provision of an open system or transparent system where every person may have the access to the information and details of any kind of official papers and decisions.

Accountability is wrapped in a sense of administrative responsibility. It is the most essential thing for any organization. There are various principles for an organization on which it works, like principle of hierarchy, span of control, unity of command, supervision, division of labor, delegation of work and power, etc. and all these principles promote accountability. To achieve the objectives and goals of the organization with the optimum utilization of the available resources is what the administrative accountability seeks. In the broader sense, accountability has to be evaluated on the basis of democratic values and public interest. Bernard Rosen contends, “economic and social forces impact on administrators in a variety of ways, causing them to consider in a political context information that reflects the

diverse conditions, attitudes and groups exercise the right of access to the decision makers with resulting adjustments and compromises, that the accountability of public administrator in a democracy is put to the most sophisticated tests; because it is then that the definition of the ‘public interest’ is honed”[5].

IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In the modern state when liberalization, privatization and globalization are bringing a social change, the environment in which the government is operating is also altering rapidly. There is an explosion of new technology and information, as a result of which public demands higher standards of ethics in transparency and accountability for the sake of moral justification of ideas and practices. These values of transparency and accountability are a prerequisite for the sustainable development and progress of the nation. It makes the administrative representatives more responsible and helps in the deliverance of services and plays an important role in curtailing the administrative corruption.

Transparency and Accountability are interrelated. Transparency provides timely and an unfettered access to the reliable information on decisions and actions taken, keeps a major check on the performance of administrative officers. Accountability that is being accountable for the usage of available resources helps to keep a check on the performance objective. Thus accountability without transparency will be of little value. The existence of both is essential for an efficient, effective and unbiased management of functions in the administration and therefore both transparency and accountability are essential for the sake of sustainable human development. The value of integrity in transparency and accountability in Administration are important for a sound Public Administration which comes into being by winning the trust of the people. People expect the government functionaries to perform their duties with utmost fairness and impartiality, so that the resources available are utilized in the most efficient way possible. Deliverance of reliable services and transparent decision making, instill a new level of trust among the people towards the administration. Ethical values of transparency and accountability are preconditions for winning the public trust.

Transparency and accountability are conceived of in tandem as they enable citizens to have a voice about issues that matter to them and a chance to influence decision-making of the administrators and hold those making decisions accountable. Transparency and accountability are the pillars in the structure of administration. A combination of transparent and accountable institutions is essential for good governance, as it brings along with it the strong skills

and competence and a fundamental willingness in an individual to do the right thing. Vivien Collingwood of Nuffield College, Oxford in the paper, *Good Governance and the World Bank states*: “There are many competing views on what the term “good governance” should mean, but most donors agree that it should include some (if not all) of these: Increased public accountability and transparency; respect for and strengthening of the rule of law and anti-corruption measures; democratization, decentralization and local government reform; increased civil society participation in development; and respect for human rights and the environment” [2].

The real trial of good governance lies in the goals to be achieved by the administration, by the effective and efficient implementation of various policies and programs. The manner in which objectives are achieved, the attitude of the people towards the government agencies with regard to the quality of services delivered, honesty and dedication for duty also turn to be the yardsticks for good governance. It demands accountability on the part of administrators towards the citizens and the involvement of the public in decision making and implementation of policies and programs and thus accountability and transparency become the priceless constituents of good governance and good administration as well. Transparency makes sure that everything is crystal clear to the citizens that what is going on and the reason behind every action taken and decision made. And Accountability makes sure that the administrators of the government are responsible and also answerable to for every action taken in the wake of public good.

The Administration is supposed to serve a particular clientele for whom they are responsible. They can be the citizens of a nation or a particular segment of people. The government functionaries are required to be accountable to the public and also provide them with a transparent system for provision of any kind of information. The citizens can turn out to be more on guard and vigilant if the information is fully disseminated. For this it is important that the informative communication should take place within a stipulated time period that is the response time should be fixed and the people should be provided with the answers and information within that time period and if the services are not provided in time or are not satisfactory a proper channel for grievance redress should be provided.

However, the menace of corruption has plagued the very roots of administration. And to overcome this menace, the citizens need to become more vigilant; a transparent system is needed to be set up where one gets to know about various enactments which can eradicate corruption; details about the cases of corruption and the steps being taken to correct them; the administrators who are held accountable for the implementation of plans and enactments and are

made answerable for the expenditure of each and every single penny belonging to the public fund; and the right way of punishment for abuse of power.

Additionally, the power of media is self evident because of the fact that there has been a large coverage of each and every case of corruption or misdeed by those holding the power in administrative offices. The Government Functionaries have become answerable to the media as the media is the one organ of a democratic state through which the administrators answer to the wider audience. However, despite all the factors including the people, the media and the vigilance on the part of every individual, corruption can assume new forms and levels. The only factor then important for putting an end to this menace is one’s own sense of responsibility. If the administrators abide by the values of transparency and accountability in their individual conduct, for example, then the menace of corruption will vanish.

Accountability is the natural concomitant of transparency. Indeed the purpose of transparency is essentially the facilitation of accountability. The subjection of discretionary powers and authority for fulfilling the duties and the assignments assigned to the administrators for the completion of various projects and for achieving over all development there is a need for an open and accountable system. It turns out to be an important tool for the government employees to make the right use of the sovereign powers vested in them for the development and betterment both of the Administration and society as whole. Accountability is antithetical to monologist power. It establishes a dialogical relationship between accountable and accounting actors [6]. Simply stated, accountability is being answerable for one’s action or behavior [1]. We discuss some of the major factors which are considered to be quintessential for the transparent and accountable administrative systems:

A. *Participation of the citizens*

Direct participation of the people in the administrative process makes administrative accountability and transparency viable. People can take part in the decision making boards, can use their right to information and hold the government accountable for its work. However, till the time people do not understand the importance of this kind of intrusion in the working of the government and administrative departments and gets to know about the socio-economic aspect of it, public participation can be of no use. Therefore awareness must be created among the citizens with regard to the value behind the need for public participation.

B. *Information Dissemination*

For accountability it is essential that a proper forum must be created from where one can get all the relevant information required, so that he/she gets a chance to know that how the government operates and to know the reason behind the decisions which affects their day to day lives.

C. *Innovative Practices*

The various practices and steps taken by the government like Right to Information Act, Zero-Base budgeting, Sun-set legislation, etc. should be adopted with full effect to guarantee accountability. The outdated laws should be done away with. There are many things and procedures in our present system which hold no importance and of no use at all but are still followed. Such obsolete laws and procedures should be abolished and in place of them new rules and practices should be introduced.

D. *Reforms*

In the developing countries, there are a lot of administrative delays due to the long list of government rules and procedures which need to be simplified. Decentralization and delegation of power should be the norm rather than exception.

E. *Carrot and Stick Rule*

It is required that a proper system of reward and punishment should be introduced. If one has to be punished as he/she is accountable for the incompleteness of a task, he/she must also be rewarded when the program or project is completed in time and that too effectively and efficiently.

V. CONCLUSION

Freedom of information and participation in decision making and public policies are vital for the establishment of a civil society and thus accountability and transparency are crucial for it. Development and empowerment in a democracy are obstructed, the argument goes, by a series of accountability failures. The traditional ways of delivering political and bureaucratic accountability, such as intra-government controls or elections, are increasingly found to be limited in scope.

Administrative bottlenecks, weak incentives or corruption in state-centered political and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms restrict their effectiveness, particularly from the perspective of poor and marginalized people, who need them the most but who lack the means to work round such obstacles [8]. Therefore accountability and transparency in public administration cannot be reduced to technical questions of designing control procedures and institutions. These are two essential values to sustain any democracy in the world [7].

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