

## **World Governance Survey**

### **Preliminary Analysis of the India Country Study**

#### **I. *The Data Collection Exercise:***

The experience of data collection in India was fairly uneven. Over 85 copies of the questionnaire were circulated, on the basis of an initial list - later expanded - which was designed to be representative of every sector of professional activity identified. In most cases, the mailing of the questionnaire was preceded by a prior telephone conversation or a personal visit to confirm that the respondent was willing to do it. Nevertheless, the follow-up effort was enormously taxing with, in many cases, respondents having to be reminded anywhere between five to ten times each. There were many who promised to complete the questionnaire but have failed to do so in four months! But there were also a few others who responded simply on the basis of the cover letter.

On the whole, most individuals in every category needed persuasion and reminders, yet experts from the government, academia, the media and even the non-governmental sector were more responsive than those from politics, the law and business, many of whom simply claimed being too busy. This was surprising, considering that in several recent conferences and symposia politicians and business leaders have come together to voice concerns about governance issues. Even representatives of an organisation such as the Confederation of Indian Industry, which has hosted many of these initiatives, did not bother to respond. Evidently, the ostensible concern for governance in these critical groups is rather superficial.

In the Indian context, the professional categories identified also caused some confusion. For instance, a media person listed himself as NGO representative, presumably because there is no “media” category. Also, government and civil service are often overlapping categories in India. Some very experienced, though retired, civil servants put themselves

down as “Other”, simply because they are not technically employed in the government/civil service today. Similarly, some individuals who are, or have been, very closely involved in policy-making at very high levels of government called themselves academics because that is their primary professional identity. It may be a good idea, in any future exercise of this kind, to include a category of policy-advisers who are neither civil servants nor government representatives.

## II. *The Six Dimensions of Governance:*

Although the data processing exercise in India has followed the example of the study on Argentina in presenting the results - namely, by calculating question averages and dimension averages - the following analysis is based on frequency distributions rather than on the mean, which tends to flatten out differences and variations by inevitably clustering them around the middle.

- The Socialising Dimension : Participation in the Political Process.

The experts give this dimension a fairly high rating, which is not surprising given that the constitutional and legal framework is, and is perceived to be, on the whole, fair. The civil and political liberties and rights of citizens are generally respected (though, of course, there are stark violations of these in areas where, for instance, there is “terrorism” or insurgency of some kind). On this dimension, then, the combined ratings of high and very high account for 46% of the respondents. The Indian experience, in fact, suggests that the different elements of the socialising dimension need to be differentiated, and that a question-specific rather than dimension-specific response yields a very different picture. This is so because while citizens could broadly be said to enjoy the *civil* freedoms of expression, assembly and association, and enjoy constitutional guarantees of *formal equality*, this does not prevent *social* discrimination on caste, class, religion, or gender from being significant in actual political practice. Also, while (Q.5) citizens are zealous in the exercise of their political *right* to vote, they may be equally fiercely resistant of their *duty* to pay taxes! This would explain why the mean scores for Q.4 and Q.5 are

much lower than those for Q.1 and Q.2, *a significant variation internal to the socialising dimension.*

- The Aggregative Dimension: Interest Aggregation in the Political Process.

On this dimension, the number of respondents who gave a rating of high or very high is relatively equal to those who rated the performance as moderate. This provides us with an indication of how Indian democracy is actually enforced. In other words, while the institutions may provide equal opportunities of participation, there is no guarantee that this will in fact translate into equal voice. Also, while the legislature has become more representative of society in the sense that more members of the historically disadvantaged castes are represented (a result of the politicisation of these caste identities, and the emergence of caste-based political parties in the last decade or so), it is less representative of religious minorities or women.

If we disaggregate the different elements of this dimension, we observe that while Q.7 received a high rating in favour of high/very high, there is not much change in this rating for Q.8. This means that, though the legislature is more representative of previously excluded sections of society, and there are many more political parties in the fray today, the policy-making process does not fairly reflect public preferences. The number of political parties has proliferated in recent years, but the articulation of sectional interests represented by each of these brings about stalemate, instead of new policies acceptable to everyone. Indeed, more than half of the respondents give a rating of low to moderate for Q.8. This is partially explained by the rather ambivalent response to Q.9, on the extent to which the legislature actually affects policy content. Here we find the bulk of our respondents divided between moderate and high. Clearly, legislative approval is critical, but the initiation and draft formulation of bills are done by the political *and* executive, the finer details are debated in parliamentary committees, and - as long as the bill is not terribly controversial and the government enjoys a majority in the legislature - approval is smooth. Controversial bills can be repeatedly stalled and even prevented from being discussed, as showed by the case with the Women's Reservation Bill.

- The Executive Dimension: Government Stewardship.

The combined frequency distribution of the questions in this dimension is almost evenly distributed from low to very high. This again suggests the importance of disaggregating the individual questions in the section. Most respondents seem to suggest that while government is broadly committed (moderate to high rating) to ensuring the personal security of citizens, it performs poorly on the welfare dimension of ensuring an adequate standard of living for its citizens. There can, of course, be disagreement about whether - as some experts have suggested in the comments - the problem is one of faulty implementation/scarcely resources or lack of genuine commitment.

There is an overwhelming unanimity on the fact that the military in India has a deeply rooted tradition of complete subordination to the civilian government. The responses to Q.13 and Q.15 complement each other, as the first suggests that the government frequently hesitates in making tough decisions in the national interest, and the second that it prefers peaceful resolution of conflicts. While peaceful resolution of conflicts can be widely endorsed as an appropriate strategy, there are sections of society who would argue that this reflects weakness and the inability of the political leadership to stand by its beliefs. Others would argue that the government seeks to resolve conflicts through co-optation and accommodation until they become virtually intractable, and require suppression by force.

- The Managerial Dimension : Policy Implementation, Especially the Bureaucracy.

On this dimension, we find that more than half of the respondents are clustered around the moderate to high rating. This is echoed in the high ratings for Q.16 (that civil servants play a central role in the policy process) and Q.17 (that recruitment to the civil service is based on merit). The question of accountability of civil servants (Q.18), however, is seen to be low to moderate. This is not surprising because civil servants are not expected to be accountable to the public. However – at the local, more than at the central government level - ministers are known to punish independent-minded or non-pliable civil servants by transferring them or assigning them to difficult posts. Conversely, there are also cases where politicians and bureaucrats together collude with commercial interests

(occasionally even belonging to the underworld) who need protection. In the Indian context, the question of bureaucratic accountability should be focused on the issue of transparency. The citizen-state interface in India continues to remain at the same level as in the colonial period, one of supplication on the part of the citizen and arbitrary harassment by rent-seeking public officials. Despite the existence of a framework of rules, distortions can be and are practiced by a bureaucracy skilled in using the vocabulary of rules to exploit lacunae and contradictions for self-interest.

Thus, the responses to Q.19 are ambivalent, spanning from low to high. This may be because some respondents have interpreted it as substantially a reference to the existence of rules (of which India has arguably too many rather than too few, including many archaic colonial ones), while others have interpreted it in terms of the lack of real transparency in the decision-making procedures. Similarly, Q.20 may have been answered without reference to the explanatory part of the question, leading to some confusion between the existence and formally equal availability of public services, on the one hand, and real equality of access to these, on the other. The comments of many experts point out that such services are available in urban centres, but they are generally missing from the rural areas.

- The Regulatory Dimension : Relationship between the State and the Market.

The combined frequency distribution for Q.21 to Q.25 shows a concentration of moderate to high for the regulatory dimension. However, there are significant variations within this dimension, which deserve to be noted. Many respondents indicated their inability to understand Q.21 because it refers to all types of property rights; there are important differences in the respect and sanctity given to property rights in, say, the commons, private property or public property. The property rights of the rich seem to be respected more than the property rights of the poor. Thus, the acquisition of land for “public purposes” - to construct big dams or for development projects, for instance - displaces and dispossesses large numbers of people whose living conditions invariably become worse. The failure to give recognition to customary rights of usufruct, such as those enjoyed by tribal communities, is a colonial legacy eagerly sustained. The question could

not adequately capture such differences, hence the clustering around the “moderate” score.

The equal application of economic regulations to firms in the economy is moderate to high, and if this suggests a lack of transparency, it is underlined by the “moderate” rating on Q.24. Corruption in many types of government-business interface remains a reality. The attentiveness of the government to the new rules of global trade, finance and technology flows is high, possibly because the government has little choice in the matter.

- The Adjudicatory Dimension : Dispute Resolution, Particularly the Judiciary.

On the adjudicatory dimension, too, we find over 60% of our respondents clustered around a moderate to high rating, which is also reflected in some of the answers to the individual questions. There are no significant internal variations in this section of the questionnaire, covering Q.26-Q.30. The experts’ comments for this section need to be paid equal attention as they provide relevant explanations of why the ratings are moderate to high.

On the whole, India has had an exemplary judicial system, and this is particularly true of the higher courts. However, despite the high quality of judicial expertise and talent, there is a huge backlog of cases. Since justice at the higher levels is both delayed and expensive, the poor have little real recourse to it. They are therefore largely dependent upon lower courts, where corruption and stalling by lawyers and middle-men is increasingly rampant. Public Interest Litigation has proved to be a useful innovation, but it has limitations. Lok Adalats (People’s Courts) and other dispute-resolution mechanisms become increasingly necessary, and efforts are being made to develop them.

### **III. *Changes over the last five years:***

The answers to most questions suggest no significant change over the past five years. A comparison of the individual question averages indicates either marginal improvements

or an identical status for more than half of the questions. These are particularly noticeable in the questions relating to the regulatory dimension. Thus, whether it is the application of economic regulations to firms, or greater consultation between private and public sector actors, and most of all, the greater role of the rules of global trade and finance, all these register a marked upswing. This can be easily explained, because it is perceived to be associated with the processes of globalisation and economic liberalisation in India, rather than with any determined intent to provide better governance.

The questions with no change in the average scores are Q.13 (leaders encouraged to make tough decisions in the national interest) and 18 (civil service accountability).

There is no dramatic negative change in any of the indicators over time. Marginal downslides - e.g., in the responses to Q.7 - report a *factual* phenomenon (in this case that today there are more political parties, regional and caste-based, competing for power than there were five years ago). The last five years have seen the inauguration of an era of coalition politics in India, in which no single party has enjoyed a majority that could enable it to run the government without entering into political alliances.

Many experts have indicated their discomfort with the five-year comparison, which they feel is too short a period given the specific historical and political circumstances in India. Some have suggested at least a ten-year to assess differences. Further, given the size and complexity of India, it has been suggested that the questionnaire does not allow room for recording regional variations.

#### **IV. *An Overview of the Collective Ratings for Governance in India:***

Relating the obtained results to the analytical framework of the World Governance Survey requires an examination of possible determinants – historical, social, political, economic and international – that could explain them; possible interconnections between

the realms of governance and development will also be briefly analysed (using Amartya Sen's definition of development).

Despite a promising institutional context, India's structures of governance seem to have remained ineffectual in fulfilling the basic needs of the citizens. This is at least partly due to the historical and economic context of colonialism. During independence, the social and economic problems facing India were formidable. Little or no industry, and a stagnant agriculture incapable of generating a surplus determined India to choose the path of heavy industrialization led by the public sector and based on import-substitution. This path of development was pursued in tandem with political democratisation, in the form of institutions of parliamentary democracy, and in the context of an enormously diverse society comprised of people professing different faiths, speaking many different languages, and practising a variety of customs and ways of life. All these objectives were intended to be pursued under the supervision of a law and bureaucracy that had been trained to run a colonial state, and was now sought to be reinvented – with, as it turned out, little success – as a developmental bureaucracy.

The strategy of development that was adopted proved to be largely ineffectual. The slow growth rate of the Indian economy (memorably called “the Hindu rate of growth” by the economist Raj Krishna), a constantly growing population, poor implementation of development policies and the diversion of resources (such as water and electricity) to pockets of prosperity, created islands of affluence in a sea of poverty and under-development. The industrialists, big farmers, and the political class along with the bureaucracy and urban middle-classes prospered. The inability to provide welfare for the ordinary citizen, including food security, potable drinking water, basic sanitation, primary education, and health-care have been among the major failures of the Indian state. These are, by any standards, obvious failures of governance. A variety of programmes for development, employment generation and poverty reduction have not made a dent in the acute poverty and endemic malnutrition that afflicts so many.



Nevertheless, India's experience of democratic governance since independence in 1947 has often been hailed as highly successful. Unlike many other countries that underwent decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century, India has managed to sustain a reasonably vibrant democracy and civil society. Elections are frequent and, for the most part, free and fair. The press is extremely vigilant, sometimes even more than the Opposition. Apart from a brief period of 19 months (between 1975-77), when Indira Gandhi declared a national emergency and suspended all civil rights, Indian citizens have been fairly secure in the enjoyment of their civil liberties and political rights. However, though approximately 30% of India's population still subsists below a rather sparsely defined "poverty line", it has largely failed to use these rights to make demands upon the political system for what Sen has called economic entitlements or social opportunities.

Conversely, the groups which have managed to make their voices heard are frequently those who mobilize around issues of identity (such as region and caste). While procedural aspects of democratic governance have been largely sustained, the substantive aspects remain elusive. As such, public institutions are inaccessible to large numbers of people – notably the poor and the illiterate – and their agendas remain captives of dominant social groups. The recent emergence of movements demanding transparency and accountability of the local administration appear to have a revolutionary impact in terms of transforming popular consciousness, but these are still few and confined to certain areas only.

Without access to information and the elementary education necessary to use it to good purpose, democratic processes alone are unlikely to provide people with effective means for demanding their entitlements. It renders them vulnerable to manipulation by political leaders, so that even when a disadvantaged caste mobilises successfully, the benefits tend to be cornered by elites within these groups. It also renders the poor vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and the violation of their basic rights, whether by state personnel (such as the police) or by dominant or upper caste social groups.

The managerial, regulatory and adjudicatory aspects of governance face a variety of formidable obstacles, not excluding domination and control by powerful social groups.

Hence, populism is often the favoured political answer to demands for social security. Unless the institutions in these spheres are deliberately and consciously informed by an ethos of welfare and social security rather than that of control or rent seeking; and until they are rendered more accessible and more transparent, they are unlikely to produce positive developmental outcomes. As of now, the state is seen to be far more vulnerable to external - mostly economic - pressures, than it is to internal ones, unless these threaten or jeopardise its security. The transition from a planned economy to a liberalised, market-friendly regime is occurring slowly but surely. But its impact on poverty remains indeterminate, leading to some concern about the inability or disinclination of the state to continue to provide for public expenditure in the social sector.

#### V. *India-specific Issues: Implications for the Questionnaire and the Survey Process*

There seem to be some India-specific factors that the questionnaire, as presently designed, could not adequately address. These include:

- ◆ **The size, complexity and diversity of India:** The pluralism of Indian society and its policy consequences are hinted at in the diverse strategies devised by the makers of the Indian Constitution who addressed this in three distinct ways: (a) to secure and guarantee the rights of religious minorities, the freedom to practice and propagate religion, as well as personal laws for members of minority communities to co-exist with the universally applicable criminal law; (b) to compensate for the historical disadvantages of certain categories of social groups, provisions for affirmative action for the scheduled castes and tribes were made, both in public employment as well as in representative bodies; (c) at the macro-institutional level, federal structures and “consociational” practices were adopted. Each of these- the rights of religious minorities, programmes of affirmative action for historically disadvantaged social groups, and the federal structures of governance - has been politically contested in the last two decades. A slightly different example of the complex diversity of India is

suggested by the mixed results of the recent experience of decentralized governance across the country. If some of these are heartening stories of success while others are not, this is not surprising given the different types and levels of social complexity, e.g. in terms of the resilience of locally dominant power structures, and the continued ability of dominant social groups to capture these institutions. Any survey of India has to be sensitive to regional differences, as examples of successful democratic governance subsist alongside examples of near-failure and even administrative collapse.

- ◆ **Welfare and Development:** In the context of a country like India, the welfare dimension could be highlighted more sharply because this is arguably an important independent test of the adequacy of governance. This would also cohere with the attempt - suggested in the working proposal of this project - to relate the realms of governance with developmental outcomes.
  
  - ◆ **Time-period:** The comparison between the present and five years ago has expectedly not yielded much in the findings. This is because, unlike many other countries, India has mercifully not undergone any dramatic upheavals. There have undoubtedly been important political and economic changes during this period, but the basic structures are fundamentally unchanged. Of course, the many political assertions of the last decade - most notably, that of the backward castes - has arguably led to the deepening of democracy, but this is a slow on-going process whose long-term consequences will only become apparent in the future. Perhaps a ten or fifteen year comparison may be more appropriate for the Indian context.
-