

trations. The efforts of the editors and those of the authors of the review deserve appreciation. This volume will be an asset as a reference book for libraries and for those who want to know more about biomedical engineering.

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Administrative Reforms: Towards Sustainable Practices. Amita Singh (ed.). Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, B-42, Panchsheel Enclave, New Delhi 110 017. 2003. 319 pp. Price: Rs 380.

Achieving the multi-faceted goals of sustainable development through more efficient utilization of resources poses formidable challenges while providing great opportunities in India. Major economic reforms gained momentum in India in early nineties, but it failed to deliver effectively due to the lack of appropriate implementation measures that were required to ensure sustainability. Highlighting the tenets of sustainable development, Reddy (*Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **87**, 889–898) has emphasized the need for strategies with ‘equity, economic efficiency, environmental soundness, long-term viability, self-reliance and peace’ for regional and nation’s sustainable development.

In a rapidly urbanizing economy with fast technological changes, there is a need for governments to quickly and continuously ‘adapt’ to these changes ensuring a that smooth and sustained workflow through interactions with the government and the people. Thus, the governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It consists of the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Poor governance generates and reinforces poverty and subverts efforts to reduce it. Good governance would ensure that developmental schemes reach all sections of the society and aid in enhancing the quality of life.

Strengthening governance is an essential ingredient for eradicating poverty while promoting sustainable development.

Democracy empowers citizens through decentralization of power, effective people’s participation through state and non-state mechanisms, greater synergy and consolidation among various agencies and programmes of government, civil service reforms, transparency, rationalization of governmental schemes and mode of financial assistance to states, improved access to formal justice system to enforce rights, reforms and strengthening of land administration and harnessing the power of technology for governance. In contrary, policy-making takes place at the centre (macro-level), and the actual implementations at the end-user (micro-level), by the bureaucrats/administrators are mostly different than what was originally conceptualized or intended for, as implementation practices are embedded with colonial structures, bureaucratic autonomy and opaque systems leading to economic inefficiency, ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of some of these set-ups.

With the onset of economic reforms, emergence of technology-driven society (socio-technical systems) and markets, it is imperative for the governments to reinvent, realign and adapt to remain or sustain the external pressures from different stakeholders, especially with pressures of globalization and calls for decentralization for overall development of India’s 700 million plus strong rural population. The necessity to achieve ‘sustainability’ by the administration with local governance or in public sector organisations or any reforms has become a cornerstone. A key issue on achieving sustainability and sustainable development is through administrative reforms. The book under review, a compilation of ‘good practices’, comes in at a time when the helm of affairs on governance and administrative practices is up for a thorough introspection. This book is a collection of papers presented at the ‘International Conference on Administrative Reforms, Good Practices and their Sustainability’ on 24–25th April 2003 at New Delhi.

The introductory chapter by Amita Singh dwells on the ‘best practices’ and ‘innovations’ in the administrative sectors that has taken place at grass-root levels of administrative hierarchy based on exhaustive literature review. This chapter starts with a general overview of administrative reforms, its role and experiments

worldwide. Subsequently, the chapter addresses the early attempts to reform administration in India from post-independence to recent reforms driven by globalization and influence of information and communication technologies (ICT) in administration (e-governance). It is noted that the emergence of New Public Management (NPM) and the need for economic efficiency in governance (through privatisation) although has spearheaded administrative reforms, it is the innovations and best practices either initiated by the local administration (decentralization) or the civic society that has made these successful. Identifying the successful innovations and best practices while addressing the issues of sustainability and replicating these in different instances are difficult since most of these practices and innovations are context specific. However, in the wake of decentralization and greater autonomy at the local/grass-root levels complimented by public participation can be a successful one as evinced from the different case studies.

The first chapter by Mohit Bhattacharya presents the decentralizing experiment in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation through borough and ward committees. The decentralized system headed by a Mayor of the council has come in place of a central command, paving the way to a more participatory approach. In spite of these, the exercises have not been fully successful due to lesser autonomous and executive powers at the ward or borough levels, and limited financial independence. However, it is noted that this experiment can become a role model for many other large municipal corporations by providing greater autonomy at the ward level with scope for revenue mobilization and thereby reducing the dependency on funds from the central agency.

The second chapter by Jennifer Jalal presents the comparison of good practices in public sector reforms that have taken place in Bangalore and Kolkata due to administrative reforms through participation of private sector, non-governmental organizations and public. In the case of Bangalore, the state had mooted the Bangalore Agenda Task Force, which acted as an interface for synergizing the efforts undertaken by different stakeholders involving the different state-run service organizations, the public and the private enterprises. Contrary to this, Kolkata continued the centralized administration without significant reforms while adopting

the ICT and rightsizing to increase efficiency and bring transparency, productivity and accountability in the system. Further, this chapter explains the good practices for reforms initiated by the civil society and the public-private collaborations. Although the creation of BATF was a welcome measure in the administrative reforms, its current existence and the sustainability of 'good practices' is in question due to the changed political scenario in the state. The next chapter on urban-local governance reforms in the American cities by Vidu Soni discusses the need for empowerment of frontline employees and lists the likely obstacles while implementing in developing countries that requires an appropriate combination of bottom-up and top-down reform initiatives in best practices.

The fourth chapter by Daljit Singh addresses the lessons learnt in the regulation of Indian power sector through Electricity Regulatory Commissions (ERC) while providing an account of the performance evaluation of these regulatory commissions based on the operational independence, functional independence, accountability and the consumer participation. The chapter notes the need for interactions between regulators and the government and government-owned utilities. The subsequent chapter by Sudha Mahalingam discusses the regulatory experiments in the power sector with an overview of the power sector reforms and the creation of the ERCs. The regulatory experiment is presented with two case studies from Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The limitations of the regulatory process are linked to the good administrative practices, which highlights the need for improving efficiency, accountability, appropriate tariff fixation, etc. The last chapter on power and transport sector reforms by Kuldeep Mathur, brings out the failure of the state in addressing environmental quality issues and the effective intervention of the judiciary to address the pollution problem caused by the industrial and vehicular emissions in New Delhi.

The subsequent chapter is by James Warner Björkman on the practices and imperfections in the health sector reforms. In the light of NPM, Björkman addresses the health sector reforms, with an overview of the types of reforms and suggests strategies for reforming the health sector. A key aspect is the grassroots-centred approach with the control on decisions shifted to beneficiaries acknowl-

edging feedbacks among users, and at the central level, the health sector policy to have an equity-oriented measure. The last chapter discusses e-governance, as a responsive and transparent service delivery mechanism to address the effectiveness of governments. Suresh Mishra addresses performance measures and standards, although still nascent, through the quantitative benchmarking methods, can serve as good performance standards.

A significant realization and common ground in all the 'best practices' presented here is that different stakeholders are able to acknowledge the feedback of other entities and respond, realign and refocus to benefit for the greater common good. Another key aspect noted here though not explicitly identified by the authors is that most of these socio-technical systems exhibit self-organization and have emerged out of the need to improve either initiated by the administrator at the local level or by the civic participation or through a public-private partnership or even by the judiciary. It is these local interactions that have resulted in global changes that result in self-organization, micro-innovations leading to macro-changes.

This book presents some innovations and best practices in the public sector reforms in one collection and could be a good reference for budding bureaucrats and is relevant for all administrators – the real practitioners, academicians and all the training institutes dealing with administrative practices.

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NASEEMA – The Incredible Story. Translated from Marathi by Aasha Deodhar. Viveka Foundation, New Delhi. 2005. pp. 244. Rs 250.

A poor young lad was completely disappointed and was contemplating suicide. One night, he was flustered when GOD appeared before him. GOD blessed the young lad and told him that all his mis-

ery was over and he was going to start a great life. But ... there was ONE condition. The young lad readily agreed. GOD asked him for his TWO legs and the young lad shrieked promptly and said NO. GOD smiled and asked why not? The young lad said his legs were worth TWO crores. This went on with all his body parts and finally GOD told the young lad, 'you see my child, you are worth several crores and you think you have nothing. If you simply put your body and mind to good use, you will never want to die and live your life to the fullest'.

This book is one solid personal narrative of a woman who lives her life to the fullest. Not just any woman but a wheelchair-bound woman who walks taller than most of us. Naseema, a truly incredible paraplegic woman has not only fought her own disability but has put able-bodied like us to shame by her true grit and determination to support an entire community of disabled people.

Originally written in Marathi and thereafter translated in English by Aasha Deodhar, the book does not contain any chapters, sections, divisions, etc. but gives the reader a continuous account of an intimate glimpse into the life of a disabled person. With tiny illustrations, placed on several pages, the reader enjoys renewed freshness in content time and again.

Naseema was born a normal child to a superintendent in the Central Excise Department with several brothers and sisters. At the age of sixteen, Naseema turned into a paraplegic after suffering various infections but never knowing the real reason for her condition. A very lively person, who enjoyed academics, arts, science, commerce, drama, dancing ... just about everything, had to face bewilderment at first and then suicidal depression. She came across 'a few good men and women' who helped her to rise from the ashes and thereafter fought not only her own disability but took on the pain of an entire community. Naseema's compassion shines in what we today know as 'Helpers of the Handicapped (HOH)'.

HOH is a hostel-cum-rehabilitation centre in Kolhapur, which caters to poor disabled children from rural areas. HOH provides for surgeries, aids/appliances, exposure to sports and cultural activities, vocational training and employment opportunities. HOH has completely rehabilitated 35 children and has been successfully producing wheelchairs, tricycles, calipers, crutches, etc. To top it all, the centre is