

*Bhairon Singh Shekhawat*

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The intrinsic strength of the Institute lies in its expertise gained over 52 years of its existence and, above all, its wide national network with more than 63 Regional and Local Branches all over the country. I have no doubt that IIPA will continue with its endeavours with even greater vigour towards improving public governance in our country and help in evolving right policy framework with appropriate strategies for inclusive and sustainable growth and, more importantly, promoting welfare of the common man. Then alone will India become a fully developed nation.

To me a fully developed and empowered India implies overcoming under-development and poverty by becoming a prosperous nation on high growth trajectory with equity, establishing an environment conducive to pursuit of knowledge and learning at institutions of excellence and inspiring confidence and hope among the youth to build a nation of their dreams and vision.

It is a matter of pride and satisfaction that India can boast of having achieved high growth rate during the Tenth Plan period. While this performance reflects the strength of the economy in many areas, it is also true that large parts of our population are still to experience a decisive improvement in their standard of living.

The major challenge before the nation is uplifting 260 million people, who are living below the poverty line, and also to ensure better quality of life for many millions, who are perilously close to the poverty line. They need decent habitat, they need work with reasonable income, they need food, they need healthcare, and they also require good education and a respectable life. I believe such comprehensive empowerment of the poor is the prime responsibility of the State, so that the poor are enabled to enjoy their fundamental right to live with dignity. Otherwise, their neglect is fraught with grave risk of taking disparities or inequalities beyond the limits of tolerance. Let us not forget that deprivation without hope causes despair and discontent in the individual and leads eventually to unrest and upheaval in society. In a significant sense, these divides are the bases of politics of divisiveness. These are also prone to cause not only discontent in individual, but also alienation among people and between groups.

The challenge, therefore, before all of us is to help the country attain the critical Millennium Development Goals of eradicating hunger and poverty. My IIPA friends, committed to this vision, the Institute should set for itself twin goals. First, to be a catalyst for change in the country's effort to reduce vulnerability and eliminate poverty. Secondly, to leverage policy and resources to demonstrate models that provide immediate and long-term strategies for an inclusive growth and sustainable human development, including effectively addressing the special gender and social concerns.

For achieving the above goals, we have to think about plans and strategies, which will improve the quality of life of the villagers by ensuring sustainable livelihood security and by providing basic services like health, education and safe drinking water to all. For this, more public investment in the rural sector is essential, which can also make employment expansion possible. A comprehensive

agenda of integrated and coordinated action should be planned and developed to be implemented in time bound mission mode.

It has been my firm conviction that eliminating the scourge of poverty and deprivation is the sacred duty of the Government. I have believed in the *Antyodaya* philosophy of development, i.e. the focus of action being on the poorest amongst the poor. The successful experience of the pioneering initiatives taken in Rajasthan for alleviation of poverty under the *Antyodaya* scheme launched in 1977 can serve as a useful guide for poor-centric plans of development.

The key issue, however, is ensuring the quality of governance, which should be transparent, corruption-free, focused on the people and characterized by commitment, accountability, responsiveness and inclusiveness. It includes the ways in which institutions, rules and system of governance operate and interact at state and local levels. It also includes the means by which the State relates to its citizens, civil society and the private sector. The test of good governance, in ultimate terms, would lie in the confidence and credibility it inspires in the people.

A key component of good governance has to be to make the delivery system of public programmes and schemes totally free of corruption. For this it is necessary to establish transparency and accountability. We have implemented the Right to Information Act. We should effectively use the provisions of this law to disseminate and share information in respect of coverage of beneficiaries, as also details of expenditure incurred under each of these schemes, along with publication of audit reports on such expenditure.

Friends, the task of improving governance will not be accomplished without imbibing a new work ethos and re-defining governance in all its nuances. We cannot have a regime of good governance in isolation. Let all of us endeavour and make sincere efforts to build an environment, which is conducive to good governance. In achieving this task, this Institute will need to play a prominent and purposeful role.