

Indian Chief Ministers' Governance Forum

Background and Rationale

If India has to grow, then the parts of the sum, i.e. States will have to grow. Many policy issues decided by the Union Government have to be implemented by the States. States also *suo moto* implement certain policies to tackle similar problems. Such implementation is carried out by States in varying manner, and there is much scope of learning from each other. Such exchanges can be facilitated by a States-led platform, which does not exist.

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28 States can be laboratories for policy making, as they provide 28 settings as opposed to just one, allowing a greater diversity of ideas to be tried out with least risks.

Admittedly, there is great diversity among

states' political leadership and thus the outcomes will vary from state to state. Most importantly, the locus of political accountability is shifting to States, which provides a competitive spirit to states to innovate and emulate good ideas.

Countries, such as US¹ and Nigeria² have adopted similar structures with the objective of promoting better understanding, good governance, and cooperation among the States and ensure a healthy and beneficial relationship between the States and other tiers of the government. It has paid rich dividend³ for these countries in terms of achieving social welfare goals.

There are cases where some of the States have taken very progressive steps to address various issues in their region. The Right to Information Act is one such milestone which helped India to increase transparency and efficiency in public governance, and a State, such as Rajasthan has played the role of catalyst in implementing this idea.

States like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have also come up with some very positive reforms, such as

assured and on time delivery of public services to the common man. Gujarat has done very well to create favourable condition for industrialisation in the states. Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act can also be taken as example where different states came together to provide for procompetitive regulation of agricultural produce markets.

Other states have also shown their keenness to initiate or replicate these moves to achieve social welfare goals. This is not an impossible task given the fact that all the States are an integral part of the federal structure of our country, but lack avenues for developing understanding and cooperation between and among States.

In the past, steps have been taken by the Central Government in this direction but it has been more focused upon the Centre-State relations, undermining the importance of relationship *among* the States. The Inter State Council, which was established in the year 1990 based on the recommendation of the Sarkaria Commission, is one such step, to develop a bond between the Union and State Governments.

The structure of the Council has been designed in a manner that somehow ignores the participation of States in overall functioning of the Council. It has a top down approach. Also, it certainly does not provide a common platform to the States where they can discuss and exchange knowledge, skills and ideas related to development of States. As a result, the Council has met only 10 times since its inception in 1990 with the last meeting taking place five years back in 2006. Its poor functioning is another story that has to be taken under consideration.

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Why Indian Chief Ministers' Governance Forum?

Taking into consideration all these facts and the dynamic situation within the country, it is very much desirable for the States to have a common platform which they can utilise to engage on issues of common interest. Thus, the creation of the Indian Chief Ministers' Governance Forum would lead to better coordination among States which can ultimately result in sharing, replication and up-scaling of innovative governance and developmental practices and also help in developing innovative solutions to address today's

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most pressing public policy challenges.

This will be a completely apolitical forum comprising of Chief Ministers of States with selective representation from the Business, Civil Society, Academia, Media, and Central Government in accordance with the selected theme.

This kind of platform can surely be of great importance for relatively less developed States in our country as they can have regular interaction with other States through this platform. It can help States to develop common understanding between them and form a cohesive unit to meet the present as well as future challenges.

What will it do?

1. The Forum would be an initiative of State Governments only, with the participation of the Union Government as observers. It could be established by them through a registered society or even as an informal network

2. The Forum will periodically elect the office bearers from among the Chief Ministers with a permanent Secretariat in New Delhi and organise periodic meetings in a plenary or on specific subjects

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3. The Forum would be an exchange platform among States to acquire knowledge, transfer skills and know how on good practices on initiatives being undertaken, be a particular State or a group of States

4. The Forum could form different committees within the forum, i.e. on topics and on redressal of inter-state disputes etc.

What will it achieve?

The formation of Forum would lead to following outcomes:

- Increased interaction between the States
- Improved cooperation and coordination between the States
- Sharing of idea, knowledge, skills between the States
- Better and effective solutions to common issues impeding social and economic growth of the States
- Avoidance and timely redressal of disputes arising between the States
- Replication of good practices adopted/ initiated by one State in other States without having to reinvent the wheel
- Strengthening of federal structure of the country (number of States coming together would be better equipped to defend their interests in front of the Central Government)

Endnotes

- 1 The National Governors Association (NGA) in the USA is the collective voice of the Governors of the 50 states, 3 Territories and 2 Commonwealths.
- 2 The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) is a coalition of all 36 democratically elected Governors of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- 3 The focus of NGF's annual meeting held in July 2011 was on higher education for catalysing economic growth and advancing competitiveness. In October 2011, the Forum initiated a programme in association with the Gates Foundation to improve Polio and Routine Immunisation.