

Social Accountability in Urban Governance: Indian Case Studies

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Foreword

The social contract between governments and citizens in a country requires that, in return for the support of the citizenry through the payment of taxes, government is obligated to provide responsible and responsive governance especially in the provision of public services. Within a context of development and the Millennium Development Goals, this responsibility cannot be overstressed. The UN Millennium Project¹ identified poor governance among one of the four overarching reasons why the MDG target could possibly not be met in many countries of Asia. Governance encompasses many aspects, and among the most important is social accountability.

To a large extent, governance failure is a result of the inadequacy of the knowledge of civil servants in both the “know how” and the “do how” about social accountability. And there is consequently, an urgent need to fill this capacity gap in the civil service.

A convergence of existing efforts, common aims and goals, interests and opportunities brings the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) and the WBI together in this effort.

This effort has been supported by the Norwegian Government through the Norwegian Governance Trust Fund for Improving Procurement and Service Delivery, administered through the World Bank SASSD and WBI.

Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) is a pioneer in post-experience capacity building institution in India. Established as a joint effort of the Indian industry and the government in 1956, ASCI is a noted think tank on business, industry and economy. It advises various national and international agencies through research, management training and consultancy. ASCI is already engaged in delivering social accountability as part of the regular content in its ongoing programmes; whether these be called “corporate social responsibility” for industry, “accountability” or e-procurement in programmes on urban governance and management. In fact, the programmes on e procurement are among ASCI’s most well attended and in-demand programmes

The World Bank Institute (WBI) has taken a major initiative to develop capacity building programmes in the topic of Social Accountability (Sac). It seeks to assist a select number of training institutions in South Asia to establish training programs on the theme with the aim to increase the number of social accountability specialists who can apply their skills for improved policies, budget and procurement oversight, and better governance and service delivery. Toward that end, an emerging need had been identified at a March 2007 regional workshop in Hyderabad. Following that, the World Bank

¹www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/index.htm (retrieved on 21st February 2008)

Institute held a two day regional workshop in New Delhi on November 19-20th 2007 with the objectives to: (i) develop core curriculum on social accountability targeting different stakeholders; and (ii) broaden a South Asia Network on Sac.

ASCI's ongoing work, its participation in the South Asia regional workshop on developing core curriculum in Sac in November 2007; and its desire to upscale and widen the scope of content input in its ongoing capacity building efforts form the background for this effort to develop a compendium of case studies on Social Accountability for a target cohort of national and state level **urban governance** government officials at the policy making and implementation levels. Such case studies are designed to be integrated into ongoing programmes as individual modules, and will form the bases for full fledged short term programmes and a Certification Programme in Social Accountability, similar to the Certification Programme in Urban Management.

An effort that began with an exploration of meaningful, appropriate and relevant content for municipal government developed into a compendium of critically analyzed case studies which will be used to assist officials to apply citizen engagement and social accountability tools and environments in their own settings. The compendium is anchored by an introductory essay which lays out the scenarios in which the case studies are embedded.

Each case study is based on an extensive analysis of secondary public domain information, and substantiated by in depth interviews and field visits to locations where the initiatives took place.

A large team of internal faculty and external expertise assisted the core team in developing the case studies. While the limitations of space inhibit each individual participant from being listed and acknowledged, some merit special mention.

At the outset, Administrative Staff College of India places on record our appreciation for the support provided by the Norwegian government for providing support through the Norwegian Governance Trust Fund for Improving Procurement and Service Delivery, administered through the World Bank SASSD and WBI. In turn, colleagues at the World Bank Institute were unfailing in their continuous encouragement and support throughout the duration of the project, going beyond the call of duty to read, review and comment on materials presented.

CUTS Centre for Consumer Action Research and Training (CART), Rajasthan, a key player in the social accountability arena must be acknowledged for its very valuable contribution in terms of case studies. More important, their team brought insights to the whole effort which no amount of theoretical understanding could replace. CUTS Centre for Consumer Action Research and Training (CART) must be recognized as a major contributor to this effort.

Colleagues who have written, read and reviewed the various drafts and who have given their precious time out of their busy schedules reflect the commitment that this effort has received from many quarters. We place on record our appreciation to them.

Young faculty and research scholars such as Harish, Vandana, and Sumanth, and Harish, played a key role in background research, interviews and field work. In essence, recognizing their work is to assure ourselves that the future of social accountability initiatives and efforts is well nurtured in the upcoming generation of practitioners.

The materials and case studies presented in this compendium will be first tested and later used in the various capacity building programmes at the Administrative Staff College of India, commencing with the Certificate Programme in Urban Management at the Administrative Staff College of India in June 2009. The intention is to make the social accountability theme a major component of the content of executive leadership programmes. The intention, in the future, is to use these materials as a foundation for creating online environments so that they could be used in both offline and online modes for delivery to a larger cohort of government officials.

This is a work in progress, and ASCI recognizes, with all humility, that there is much to do and many promises to keep. On this journey, we are fellow travelers who look to others to tell us if we are on the right path. And we hope that our participants in the many programmes where this material will be used will find out effort worthy and relevant of them.

The views expressed in this compendium of case studies do not necessarily reflect those of the organization to which the author belongs. While credit is given wherever due, all errors of fact or comment, remain the author's own.

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Social Accountability in Urban Governance: Indian Cases

Preface

Governance, in the best of times, is difficult. And in developing societies, the problem is aggravated by poverty, illiteracy, poor economic development combined with racial, ethnic, and linguistic divisions, and the acceptance of the importance of democratic processes and human rights.

Developing country governments now recognize that stable, democratic government and well-managed public institutions are essential for the improvement of the living conditions of the poor and to combat poverty. There is ample cross country evidence which demonstrates a strong association between good governance and improved investment, growth rates, better economic performance, improved adult literacy, a reduction in state corruption, and improved service delivery. There is also a growing recognition that a well functioning and capable state alone is insufficient to ensure quality public service delivery to citizens that meets citizens' needs and aspirations and that the state also needs to be accountable and responsive to its citizens.

The most familiar and daily contact between governments and citizens is through those services that have the most direct link between the two—education, health, water, sanitation, and electricity.

Governments use a variety of ways and methods to deliver these services—direct government provision, contracting out to the private sector and to non governmental organizations; through devolution and decentralization to local governments, community participation and through direct transfers to households. There have been some widely acclaimed successes, e.g. e-Seva², of cases where government has done well.

There are many instances where there have been failures in the effective delivery of quality services. Both successes and failures point to the link between the key relationships between the various stakeholders—the government, the service provider and the citizen. It is in this relationship that there is a need to innovate and strengthen accountability of government to citizens, because when there is a failure, civic engagement, whether through existing legal mechanisms or through extra legal methods such as rallies, strikes, riots, can take place.

This increasing assertiveness or civic engagement takes many forms—but essentially calls for a demand for a more responsive and effective government. Constructive civic engagement, with clear-cut enabling environments, tools and mechanisms, or the philosophy and practices, comes under the current rubric of “social accountability”.

² <http://esevaonline.com/> (retrieved on February 21, 2009)

In the recent years, increasingly, there is evidence of citizen groups who are working closely with the government or their representatives to ensure that service delivery is effective and accountable. The convergence of a pro active government and citizenry has lead to an increased space for public officials and institutions to engage directly with their beneficiaries, indentify issues and stakeholders and discuss the way forward. The process due to which the space is created where citizens play a vital role in exacting accountability and where public officials are engaging with the citizens is referred to as social accountability.

However, the process of engaging citizens and making public officials pro active in ensuring transparency is challenging. The spectrum of cases documented in this compilation to reflect social accountability initiatives is diverse and complex. While case studies are instances where government has taken proactive action, other case studies are those which have been initiated by citizens. Thus, it is important to understand the political, social, cultural, managerial, technological, methodological, and historical issues that might make or break an initiative given its geographic location and people involved.

1.0 From Accountability to Social Accountability.

All governments have methods and mechanisms to ensure accountability of public servants and services. Those that are internal to the state are referred to as “horizontal” mechanisms of accountability.³ These include:

- (i) Political mechanisms (e.g., constitutional constraints, separation of powers, the legislature and legislative investigative commissions);
- (ii) Fiscal mechanisms (e.g., formal systems of auditing and financial accounting);
- (iii) Administrative mechanisms (e.g., hierarchical reporting, norms of public sector probity, public service codes of conduct, rules and procedures regarding transparency and public oversight), and;
- (iv) Legal mechanisms (e.g., corruption control agencies, ombudsmen and the judiciary).⁴

This is the conventional and established approach to accountability which one can identify as the “supply side”. So, if public officials are held accountable, what is it that they are held accountable for? If one argues that public officials are to be honest and rule abiding, they should be rewarded to the extent to which they remain immune to corrupt practices. Or are they to be rewarded for good performance and punished for poor results. If one takes this view, the question that then comes up is when are they accountable--- throughout the process or only after results have or not have been achieved?

This brings the debate to the dimension of the “demand side” of accountability, and consequently to the question of accountability to and responsibility towards the people they serve. Demand-side governance, in which citizens and communities engage in holding their governments accountable is a crucial factor in improving governance and public administration, but one that is difficult to support and strengthen through traditional “supply-side” means and methods. The inclusion of the demand side of accountability leads to a definition of accountability that includes proactive behaviors like seeking information and justification, the evaluation of performance in addition to rule-following, the calling to account before, during, and after decisions are made, and, of course, the application of sanctions. We can therefore define accountability as a “*proactive process by which public officials inform about and justify their*”

³ Schedler, A., L. Diamond and M. Plattner (eds.) (1999). *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner

⁴ Goetz, Anne Marie and John Gaventa (2001). *Bringing Citizen Voice and Client Focus into Service Delivery*. IDS Working Paper No. 138. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

plans of action, their behavior, and results and are sanctioned accordingly.”⁵

2.0 A Definition of Social Accountability

Governments can do a great deal on their own, in proactive processes, to improve accountability. Evidence however shows that pro-accountability reform is more effective when society plays a central role. Therefore, when looking at the demand side of accountability so as to improve public performance, service delivery and governance, one looks at **social accountability**, which can be defined as

an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability⁶

A key component of social accountability is that it involves independent evaluation of the performance of an organization as it relates to the attainment of social goals.

With a set of tools and mechanisms, social accountability goes beyond mechanisms such as elections to ways and means through which citizens can use to hold public officials and organizations accountable. Traditionally, these have included a variety of civil society-led actions such as public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, investigative journalism and public interest lawsuits. In more recent years, the expanded use of participatory data collection and analysis tools combined with enhanced space and opportunity for citizen/civil society engagement with the state, have led to a new generation of social accountability practices.

Social accountability mechanisms are intended both to complement and enhance conventional mechanisms of accountability. They are not intended to be necessarily in an adversarial relationship with government. When institutionalized, they are powerful tools in the hands of both government and social groups.

3.0 Governance Reform and Accountability under the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)

According to the 2001 census, India has a population of 1027 million with approximately 28 per cent or 285 million people living in urban areas. As a result of the liberalization policies adopted by the Government of India, the

⁵ *Social Accountability in the Public Sector. A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module.* Washington: The World Bank. 2005 p. 15

⁶ The term social accountability is, in a sense, a misnomer since it is not meant to refer to a specific type of accountability, but rather to a particular approach (or set of mechanisms) for exacting accountability.

urban population may increase to about 40 per cent of total population by the year 2021. It is also estimated that 65 per cent of the GDP of the country will then come from urban areas.

These figures are just indicative of the strains and pressures that urban infrastructure and services will be under without substantive reform in the urban sector as urban economic activities are dependent on infrastructure, such as power, telecom, roads, water supply and mass transportation, coupled with civic infrastructure, such as sanitation and solid waste management.

Alongside this reality is the global and also India's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 7 which specifically identifies the improvement of living conditions in urban settlements. This commitment to take up a comprehensive programme of urban renewal and expansion of social housing in towns and cities, paying attention to the needs of slum dwellers is central to the Common Minimum Programme of the Government. Further, as a part of its commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of India proposes to: (i) facilitate investments in the urban sector; and (ii) strengthen the existing policies in order to achieve these goals.

A flagship programme of the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) has as its mission

The aim is to encourage reforms and fast track planned development of identified cities. Focus is to be on efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, community participation, and accountability of ULBs/ Parastatal agencies towards citizens.⁷

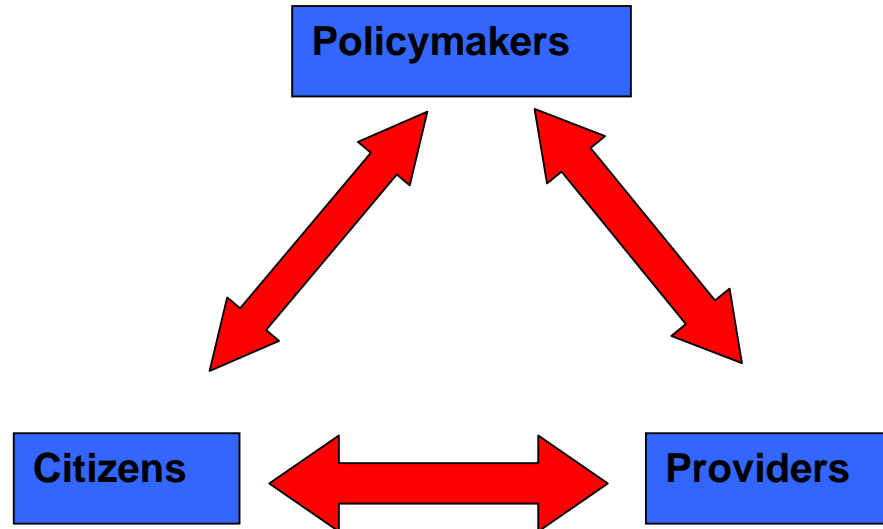
The JNNURM has two major sub missions: Sub-Mission for Urban Infrastructure and Governance, and the Sub-Mission for Basic Services to the Urban Poor. With a time frame of seven years from 2005-2006 to 2011-2012, the outcomes of the mission include, most importantly, that modern and transparent budgeting, accounting and financial management be systems, designed and adopted for all urban service and governance functions and that local services and governance will be conducted in a manner that is transparent and accountable to citizens.

While not getting into the details of the mission and implementation plan, two important aspects need to be stressed here—the stress on **community participation** stated in the mission and the importance of service delivery and governance in a manner that is **“transparent and accountable to citizens”**. These two concepts built into the JNNURM bring this flagship programme within the ambit of the debates and

⁷ <http://www.jnnurm.nic.in/nurmudweb/toolkit/Overview.pdf> p. 5 (retrieved March 23rd, 2009)

discussions on good governance and social accountability, with special reference to improving urban governance and basic urban services to the poor in urban settlements.

4.0 A Conceptual Framework for Social Accountability



Source: Repurposed from WDR 2004: Making Services work for the Poor. p.6

To help understand the various dimensions and components of social accountability, it is necessary first, to unpack the different sets of actors at play in the relationship and second, to identify the different entry points for social accountability initiatives for the different sets of actors. To do this, it is necessary to focus on key services provided by the government in health, education, water, electricity, and sanitation for the citizens (clients of the services). In the World Development Report 2004⁸, the framework of relationships between the various actors, i.e. the clients of services, the service providers and policy makers is shown as

Citizens, as patients in a hospital, students in schools; consumers of water and electricity are the **clients** as they pay for these services, either through taxes and through user charges levied by the state.

The **service providers** are the agencies or offices (public or private) where there is a direct interface between the citizen and the government. The electricity, water and sanitation supply boards; schools and the schools systems, hospitals (public or private but to whom an ordinary citizen goes to for service).

Policy makers can be easily identified as elected officials, government officials in positions to set policy and determine course of action, and have

⁸http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?entityID=000090341_20031007150121&theSitePK=477688&contentMDK=20283204&menuPK=477696&pagePK=64167689&piPK=64167673 (retrieved on February 21, 2009)

supervisory and monitoring, and disciplining authority over service providers and who reward or penalize based on performance.

Consider the first of the sets of relationships that citizens have with policy makers or elected officials—called “the long route”⁹ of accountability. In principle, citizens influence policy makers and politicians through existing political processes such as elections. In practice, this is a slow process, does not always work (especially for the poor who have less clout with politicians) and the distance between the citizen and the policy makers and elected officials grows because of weaknesses in the electoral system or the slowness of the process itself; i.e. once every four or five years.

Even if poor people can reach the policy makers, services will not improve unless the policy maker can ensure that the service provider will deliver the service to them. Given the weaknesses in this long route of accountability, it is easier to influence service outcomes by strengthening the shorter route, i.e. the link between the citizens and the service providers. Citizens can play different roles in strengthening service delivery and in making it more responsive to their needs. First, they can influence inputs and help the provider to tailor the service to their needs. Second, they can be effective monitors of service providers since they are at the point of service delivery.

The link between all three major players is through the processes of information, communication and advocacy, and monitoring that are facilitated through the tools of civic engagement and social accountability.

How can service providers be more efficient, effective, and responsive to citizen needs? By developing proactive mechanisms provided by enabling legal environments and by using the same tools of using of information, communication, advocacy and monitoring.

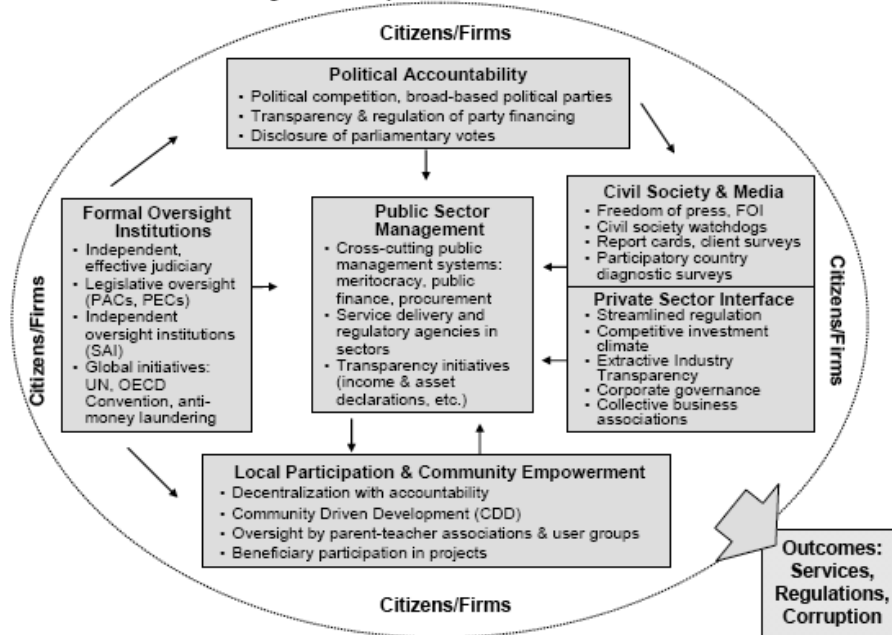
5.0 The Entry Points of Social Accountability

In the dynamic and continuously changing relationship between citizens, policy makers, elected officials and service providers, it is difficult to sometimes define an entry point for action. Cross cutting governance reforms are sometimes necessary to establish the broad relationships on a firmer footing and to ensure better service delivery to citizens—who in turn participate both in the process of improving service delivery through input mechanisms and by monitoring the process during and after implementation.

There could be several entry points for different players and there are different components of the system that need to be taken into consideration.

⁹ Source: WDR 2004: Making Services Work for the Poor. p. 6

Figure A2: Entry Points for Governance Reform



Source: Strengthening World Bank Group Engagement on Governance and Anticorruption. World Bank Group 2007

In a broad governance reform environment necessary for better service delivery, citizens and service providers--whose link forms the shorter route to social accountability--are the constant background against which government can be evaluated in terms of reform. Some of the reforms which are system-wide, consist of the development of political accountability and formal oversight mechanisms. Other interventions in the system include public sector management through a wide variety of reforms. A third possibility is citizen engagement with and in relation to service providers in public services through a variety of existing mechanisms such as media, performance monitoring systems such as citizen report cards, community score cards, client surveys, enable the social accountability of government.

It is possible to link these entry points to common concerns that citizens have when they articulate their demands for better governments to gaps in government services and mechanisms and tools through which these gaps can be addressed.

This is the framework within which the current stocktaking of Indian cases is embedded.

6.0 A Conceptual Framework for the Case Studies

Extensive discussions preceded the framework for a discussion of social accountability within the urban sector. Some of the key issues in the discussions centered around the characteristics of urban officials; their specific needs; their awareness of social accountability concepts, tools, mechanisms and processes; and what value addition the selected cases might provide for ‘overburdened officials often in a hurry’. Specifically, a realization emerged that readers of these cases are

- Senior and middle level officials who make the decisions or who have a say in the decision making processes within urban governments,
- Decisions made by such officials often impact upon large numbers of people and therefore, the decisions need to satisfy demands of a large population base,
- Often the decisions are about subjects they are not fully familiar with but which would have an impact on both efficiency and effectiveness of the services delivered,
- The strength of these officials are that they were experienced in sifting information to get to the basics to enable decision making,
- And generally speaking, they would have very little time or patience to go through long treatises and documents on social accountability—they needed quick and ready examples and analyses of what worked, what did not work and why.

Another factor determined the choice of case studies presented in this compilation. There is a community of practitioners of social accountability, consisting of civil society organizations who are familiar with the work taking place in this emerging field. There is also a community of academics and researchers and experts working in and with international donor agencies who are keen on good governance and who, in turn, are familiar with current practices. These are not the audiences addressed. Instead, it is senior and middle level officials, in critical need of timely knowledge and actionable evidence, who form the focus of audiences addressed.

The assumptions made here in the selection of cases and the groups to be addressed focused both on tried and tested practices, as it did on “what’s new for the users of the cases’ rather than on what’s new in the field. In other words, what is “new”? Livingstone (1999)¹⁰, in an extensive exploration of the idea of newness, has argued that the notion of “new” can either be seen with reference to the “newness of technology or idea” or in the context of “what’s new for society” about these technologies or

¹⁰ Livingstone, Sonia (1999) New media, new audiences? *New media and society*, 1 (1). pp. 59-66. ISSN 1461-7315; <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000391/>

ideas. Arguing within the framework of new technologies, Livingstone further postulated that what is new for the western world is not necessarily so for the rest of the world. Within a social context, the introduction of radio or television may be as “new” as the introduction of Internet. The same is applicable with social accountability initiatives. Newness has been defined here as new to the context, rather than new to the limited community of practice in the field of social accountability.

A third factor that contributed to the selection of case studies included that they have to demonstrate an initiative in terms of an approach—was it the case of a government official or department initiating the effort in order to improve governance (supply side accountability) or did the case demonstrate a demand driven movement (demand side accountability). Reader will find cases such as Lokvani or Versatile Online Information for Citizen Empowerment which were essentially initiated by government officials operating within conventional government bureaucracies and officialdom and still made a difference when it came to transparency and accountability. E procurement in Andhra Pradesh is another example of such a case as is the example of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Andhra Pradesh.

Case studies selected also include some that are tried and tested such as the Citizen’s Report Card first used in Bangalore and then replicated elsewhere; the grassroots movement leading up to the Right to Information Act 2005 in India; the use of Right To Information as a tool to improve accountability; participatory expenditure tracking in the mid-day meal scheme in Rajasthan; the example of e procurement from Andhra Pradesh; and the widely acclaimed Bhagidhari scheme of Delhi. These are established examples of good practice. On the other side, little known cases such as the experience of the Sarva Shiksha Abhyan in Kohlapur; the Lokvani in Uttar Pradesh demonstrate that there are local initiatives that do not normally get publicized, but are rich in the way they can contribute to new learning in the field.

The cases of Public Record Of Operations and Finance (PROOF), Bangalore and the participatory budgeting in Pune Municipal Corporation show how both urban governments and civil society organizations come together. In the first instance, the effort did not sustain while in Pune, officials learned from the Bangalore experience and put in institutional mechanisms for sustainability.

As the authors endeavored to put together an in-depth analysis of the cases, all efforts were made toward enhancing public domain knowledge with critical insights based on extensive interviews with the players and verification based on field visits made to the initiative sites and field evidence collected there. The attempt is to capture the Indian experience, both for consumption in India and abroad since nothing resonates as a real example unless it is set in contexts. At the same time, the case studies, some of them little known outside such contexts, could

contribute to the growing global and practice in social accountability as a critical component of good governance.

The compilation of cases in the following chapters broadly falls within the continuum of an **enabling environment, tools and institutionalization**. In each case, readers can identify one or more of the following: the enabling environment that has facilitated the initiative, the tools used to make the initiative successful, and if the initiative or practice has been institutionalized for sustainability. Similarly, within the same continuum participants can identify the factors that did not contribute or limited the potential of the initiative.

Each case also looks at how the initiative was **formulated, implemented and monitored**, and what was the **impact**. Furthermore, each case examines the key issues and challenges of governance, strategies adopted by the leadership, stakeholders who contributed or challenged the initiative, and the impact the initiative has had---did it move beyond a pilot project, was it institutionalized, and what factors enable or disable sustainability of social accountability initiatives.

The following cases document various social accountability initiatives across India. The cases reflect empowered citizen groups and proactive public officials, both committed to creating public value. Even as governments in developing countries continue to be difficult to access, the cases highlight the attempts of the Government of India to create public spaces to engage with its citizens.

The cases highlight the environment and context in which the initiative was formulated and implemented. In addition, they enable public officials to understand the various issues and challenges that determine the success or constraints of an initiative in terms of scaling up, replicating and sustaining it. This compilation of cases can work as a valuable guide for public officials interested in designing and implementing socially accountable initiatives.

Following the case studies, is a section on 'Trainer's Notes' is also included. The intention here is to align authors' perspectives with those of trainers and to provide trainers with some guidelines on different ways in which the cases can be used. By no means prescriptive, the trainer's notes section seeks to suggest while users are invited to use the cases as flexibly and in the best ways to suit their training groups, conditions and contexts.

The effort is intended to be an introduction to the theme and not an exhaustive explanation. It is designed to help public officials analyze their own individual situations and departments; it also seeks to enable them to think both as service providers and as citizens, who while being public servants, are also, citizens receiving services from different agencies.

The introductory essay and the case studies are best read sequentially; that is, going from the essay to the cases, and by analyzing the case studies and questions presented as part of the case study analysis. However, readers may also like to start at a point where they are most comfortable and move through the module in a dynamic and flexible manner. The case studies are important and so are the exercises presented following the analysis as they help to set the tone for the discussion of both the previous and the following cases.

7.0 Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this introductory chapter has been to provide a conceptual framework for social accountability and to argue a case for its importance in the delivery of public services to and its citizens. The intention has also been to provide a framework or a lens through which the selection of case studies can be used and reviewed.

When social accountability is integrated into government departments, there are several benefits. For instance,

- Policy makers and government officials are quickly alerted to the concerns of citizens. Social accountability tools enable government officials to anticipate public concerns and to attune their programmes accordingly.
- Organizations are assisted in reorienting and refocusing priorities in tune with people's expectations.
- Organizational reputation is enhanced when problem areas are anticipated and addressed. Public confidence in their own institutions grows; in turn, the department is rewarded for its performance by a renewed confidence in its own work.
- Return on investment and effort improves as inefficient and ineffective systems give way to innovative, responsive and reoriented public service infrastructure and services

Readers are invited to go through and comment, to use the material as best suits their situations and conditions. This is a work in progress and the authors look forward to incorporating constructive insights.

Case Studies in Urban Settings

1. CITIZEN REPORT CARD (CRC), BANGALORE AND BEYOND

Launched: 1994

Current Status: Ongoing

Major Partners: Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore

Introduction

The Citizen Report Card is a simple but powerful tool to provide public service agencies (PSA) useful feedback about the quality and adequacy of their services. It is a tool that can be used by citizen groups, service providers and policy makers alike to gauge access to services, their quality, problems and hurdles. Essentially, the Citizen Report Card captures the totality of critical service related parameters.

The Citizen Report Card of Bangalore was the pioneer, one which has been replicated in many cities in the developing world with some success. A reflection on this case will yield insights for public officials to be guided by, when preparing their own citizen friendly initiatives.

The Context

Bangalore was a city with a population of over four million in 1993. It was quickly turning into India's hub of information technology. A quarter of its population was poor, most of them living in slums spread throughout the city. Bangalore's residents depended on several public agencies established by the state government for their essential services such as the city's municipal corporation which provided roads, streetlights and garbage removal. While electricity was supplied by another large agency, water, transport, telecom, health care, and urban land and housing were the responsibility of other large public service providers. A common feature of all these services was that they were monopolistic or dominant supply sources. This mattered even more to the poor, as they could not afford some of the high cost options that richer people could use in the event that public service providers failed. Thus when electricity failed, the rich could turn on their generators. They might use private vehicles when public transport failed. Such options were seldom feasible for the poor. The poor suffered from yet another handicap, namely, their lack of influence and voice to get their problems solved at the agency level. Collective action by citizens to address these problems was also difficult to organize and costly in terms of time and resources.

In 1993, a small citizens' group in Bangalore launched a survey of citizens to gather feedback on the public services in the city. A market research firm, Marketing and Business Associates, carried out the actual survey work. The survey was launched after the group assessed the service related problems being faced by the people through focus group

discussions. Structured questionnaires were designed in light of this knowledge and pre-tested to ensure their relevance and suitability for field level interviews. The survey covered nearly 1200 households selected from among the middle class and low-income households. Separate questionnaires were used for interviewing these two segments, but the objectives remained the same-to find out:

- 1) How satisfactory are the public services from the user's perspective?
- 2) What aspects of the services were satisfactory and what were not?
- 3) What were the direct and indirect costs incurred by the users for these services?

Satisfaction was measured on a rating scale (1 to 7) and aggregated to yield averages for its different dimensions. The results obtained from an analysis of the data were used to rate the different service providers in terms of the quality of the service, corruption and overall user satisfaction. A structured summary of these ratings across the agencies involved was called the "*Citizen Report Card on Public Services*".

The survey covered only those households that had direct experience with the services and had interactions with the agencies so that they could provide answers to questions on these subjects. The representative nature of the sample, the professionalism and neutrality in the conduct of the survey, and the large number of respondents ensured the credibility of the findings.

The first report card on Bangalore in 1994 revealed several interesting patterns about the city's public services. Citizens, rich and poor, were dissatisfied with public services and with the behaviour of the staff in the agencies providing services. The survey showed that the satisfaction levels of the middle-income respondents did not exceed 25 per cent for any of the seven service providers covered by the survey.

Beyond the publication of the report card, the citizen group that started the initiative did not take any other follow up action. Though the report card did not provoke all the service providers into taking immediate steps to improve their services, it is creditable that three out of eight agencies initiated action and sought help from the Public Affairs Centre (PAC), Bangalore, on their own.

A second PAC report card in 1999 provided new evidence on the state of public services in Bangalore after a lapse of five years. The survey methodology was essentially the same but the sample size was increased to 2000 households. The results showed a partial improvement in public satisfaction with most of the agencies, but the satisfaction level was still only below 50 per cent even for the better performers. A disturbing finding was that corruption levels in several agencies had increased. The low-income people continued to visit agencies more often than their middle-

income counterparts to solve their problems. The report cards indicated a clear link between petty corruption and inefficient service provision.

The follow up actions in 1999 differed significantly from those in 1994. Well before the public dissemination of results, PAC presented mini report cards to the major service providers in the city on a one on one basis. This was followed by a seminar for the management teams from selected agencies to exchange their experiences with reforms since the first report card. The objective of this exercise was to learn from each other. The deliberations showed that agencies other than those who sought its help were also engaged in improving their services in different ways. The final event was a public meeting with citizen groups and media where the report card findings were presented to both leaders and staff of all the service providers. Leaders of the agencies addressed the gathering and explained to the public their plans to deal with the problems highlighted in the report card. This event and the report card findings were widely covered in the news media.

Though the report card of 1999 showed only partial improvements in the city's services, it was clear that several of the service providers had initiated action to improve service quality and respond to the specific issues raised in the first report card. One example is the improvements in some agencies billing procedures. Another is the increasing use of joint forums with users to improve the responsiveness of staff. But within a few months of the second report card, the new Chief Minister of the state (Karnataka) - of which Bangalore is the capital - announced the creation of a Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) in 1999 as a public-private partnership with several non-official and eminent citizens as members along with the heads of all service providers to improve the services and infrastructure of the city with greater public participation. In contrast to the more limited agency responses, this move by the Chief Minister raised the level to systemic responses across agencies. It created a forum where all the stakeholders could be brought together both to solve the city's problems and to tap ideas and funds from the private sector. It was the first time that a Chief Minister had launched an initiative to improve services in response to citizen feedback.

A Third Citizen Report Card was undertaken in 2003. A comparison of these findings from the third survey with the earlier report cards showed improvements in the city's public services. User satisfaction among general households ranged between 96% for Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTTC) and 73% for Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Municipal Corporation (BMP) and Government Hospitals. Agencies did vary, however, in respect of the proportions of people who have given a rating of "completely satisfied". While BMTTC had the largest proportion of satisfied users, it was Bangalore Electricity Company (BESCOM) which had the largest segment of users expressing "full satisfaction". The fact that a number of agencies have significant segments of users who are partially satisfied suggests

that much could be done to improve upon what has been achieved till now.

A comparison of the performance of these agencies over the last ten years revealed a significant improvement in the satisfaction of users of services. Of the nine agencies on which citizens of Bangalore provided feedback, all received satisfaction ratings above 70% this time in contrast to less than 40% in 1999 and much lower ratings in 1994. The improvement was the greatest in the case of Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) where citizen satisfaction moved up from 16% to 85%. In the cases of BWSSB and BMP, the improvement in citizen satisfaction has been less impressive.

Drivers of change

Demand for better services tends to operate from outside the government system. Citizen demands and media pressure are some examples. In a real sense, all demand side factors act as external catalysts. They have no direct role in the design or delivery of services. These external pressures can be sustained, however, only in open, democratic societies that tolerate dissent and debate.

From the demand side, the glare effect of citizen report cards showed to the service providers that their services were under public scrutiny; that comparisons were being made between the better and the worse; public meetings and seminars that kept issues of improved services on the public agenda for discussion and debate; media attention to negative findings caused embarrassment for service providers. In a city becoming increasingly international, donor agency support also played a role.

The supply of services, on the other hand, is the business of government itself. The factors that cause supply responses to happen therefore tend to be linked to government and are largely within its control. They could take action on their own, or they may act in response to demand side drivers of change. The interaction between the demand side and supply side factors that caused positive service outcomes has been a special feature of the past decade in Bangalore. In terms of sequence, demand side forces were the first to appear on the city scene. The supply responses came later. State initiatives such as the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) catalyzed a number of reforms in a range of agencies, increased resource mobilization by agencies for service delivery improvement; and proactive role by the Lok Ayukta (ombudsman) of Bangalore.

The common thread that runs through the different supply side interventions discussed above is the political commitment and support of the Chief Minister of the state. This was a weak factor during the period 1994-1999. The 1999 change in the chief minister and the decisive political support that he provided for reform made a decisive difference.

The improvement in services reported above did not happen overnight. Starting with the first Report Card in 1994, the spotlight on public services had set in motion a series of actions by different stakeholders, which converged and cumulated to produce these results. Some agencies had taken remedial steps to improve their services as is evident from the report card of 1999. How these and other factors interacted and cumulated to achieve this turnaround in Bangalore is not easy to measure and explain. Nor is it possible to attribute the precise contribution of each of these factors to the turnaround. Needless to add, the same constellation and sequence of factors may not be required in other settings. It may also not perhaps be easy to replicate the drivers of change that worked in one context in another. Nevertheless, the contributions made by the different interventions in Bangalore may have some lessons to offer reformers in other settings.

The foregoing discussion highlights the contributions made by a variety of interventions that reinforced one another in the Bangalore context. It is their joint influence that is reflected in the report card of 2003, although the precise influence of each of the factors is difficult to quantify. An agency head, for example, could take credit for the turnaround in his/her services. But the fact remains that without the support or pressure from the other factors mentioned above, the agency head may not have taken the necessary actions. The political commitment of the Chief Minister would have worked as an enabling condition. The assistance provided by BATF may have brought better ideas and more citizen friendly practices to the agency (e.g., improved solid waste management, simpler tax system, improved billing procedure, etc.). Report cards and media publicity would have acted as external catalysts and speeded up the change. The service improvement for which the agency takes credit may not have happened in the absence of the joint influence of all these drivers of change.

Some pre-conditions need to be in place to ensure the acceptability of report cards. The credibility of those who use the tool and engage in advocacy is extremely important. The exercise should be seen as impartial and independent. The conduct of the survey and the interpretation of its findings should be done with utmost integrity. In general, competent and professionally managed organizations need to act as intermediaries for this to happen. These conditions apply irrespective of whether the initiative comes from civil society or the government.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The findings of the two Report Cards generally presented a highly negative view of the performance of the city's public services. The satisfaction levels of ordinary citizens were low and only partial improvement was revealed by the second Report Card conducted five years later. The concerns expressed by some of the interviewees about the Report Card methodology need to be addressed.

As a quick and ready index of the quality of public services, the Bangalore Citizen Report Cards are pioneering works. However, surveys as general assessment tools, tend to provide broad brush strokes rather than detailing causes and consequences. By their very nature, they may leave out important segments of the city's population, as for instance including households but not industry. They may also leave out, as in the Bangalore case, the service providers themselves who do not get a chance to express their concerns. Citizen Report Cards are subject to the vagaries of ambiguity; can be challenged differently by different service providers and may not necessarily provide critical inputs and options and areas for improvement,

The Citizen Report Card works best when there is explicit recognition within an organization of the need to conduct a citizen survey. Conducting the survey itself will require some in house social research and analytical skills and capacity, particularly in designing and carrying out large scale field surveys

Replication of Citizen Report Cards

The Report Card on Bangalore was the first of its kind in the world, and it has been replicated in other Indian cities such as Ahmedabad, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune. Public Affairs Centre has supported this work in some of these cities with partner organizations which in turn have initiated a public dialogue and have advocated reform. The Public Affairs Centre has also undertaken similar report card assessment through a Millennial Survey of select states across India. The Industries Department in Karnataka has adopted the Report Card approach to get feedback from industrialists to improve governance in the industry sector. In Mumbai, a civic group called PRAJA used the report card findings to jointly design a citizen charter on services with the City Municipal Corporation and made it operational. In addition, two cities in Ukraine and a Social Development project in the Philippines have prepared with World Bank support report cards based on this model.

A public monitoring system, which would need to be developed gradually, has the potential to strengthen processes of citizen feedback. Report Cards can instead focus on a specific service such as water supply, public transport, or health. Public Affairs Centre's Report Card on hospital services and its subsequent interaction with the Bangalore Corporation's maternity homes has had an observable impact

Impact

How influential were the Citizen Report Cards in Bangalore? The answer varies from agency to agency: provision of report card information, however significant, is only one part of the story; how the information is used depends on factors such as leadership, resources, and the institutional environment facing each public agency.

- In the case of Bangalore Municipal Corporation, the information that lack of transparency in the determination of property taxes was responsible for corruption and loss of revenue proved critical in stimulating the agency to undertake property tax reform; this has yielded positive results.
- In the Karnataka Electricity Board and Bangalore Water Supply and Sanitation Board, the Citizen Report Card highlighted the problem of over-billing of consumers; in response both agencies took remedial action.
- With respect to the Bangalore Development Authority, the high levels of dissatisfaction expressed by ordinary citizens with its services came as a shock to senior officials, who responded by initiating reforms.
- The Citizen Report Card findings have provided further impetus to ongoing efforts to improve service delivery. The finding that 20% of citizens had no dustbins near their houses pushed the Bangalore Municipal Corporation to focus attention to this aspect of solid waste management. The Report Card stimulated Karnataka Electricity Board to undertake a survey on its own to obtain public feedback about its services.

One significant issue that emerges from the Citizen Report Card work, and from the interviews conducted as part of this review, is that lack of information is a serious barrier that limits citizen access to public services. The emphasis on this aspect in the Citizen Report Card work has catalyzed the agencies to introduce greater transparency and customer orientation in their operations. It also led to greater interaction between the Public Service Agencies and citizen groups.

A progression in the influence of the Report Cards can be seen, from limited impact (with dissemination of feedback) to more impact (with dialogue and public pressure for change) to greater impact (with advice on reform), corresponding to the reactive, proactive and reformist roles of the Public Affairs Centre over a period of time. The skills, resources and organization required to play all three roles will not always be available to civil society organizations, however. The Public Affairs Centre has shown that independent civil society groups can play a useful role to provide such feedback which, in turn, can act as a stimulus to reforms.

Some of the limitations of the report cards pointed out that better use of local media would have helped to reach a large number of citizens not conversant with English. The report card focuses on user feedback as governments and monopoly service providers ignore such information. It is presented as “voice” of the people to which many public agencies are not exposed.

Issues to Reflect

Clearly, the success of the Bangalore Citizen Report Card is a result of the coming together of both service providers and citizens. Current global literature does not have many cases of success similar to that of Bangalore. Readers are invited to reflect on why Bangalore succeeded and other cities seem to have not.

Exercise Questions

If you were to design a Citizen Report Card for your city/municipality, what are the key parameters of service you would like to evaluate, and why. What are the key questions you would like answered in a Citizen Report Card? What steps would you take to plan, design and implement a CRC—would you do it in house; outsource it to a marketing firm; outsource it to a citizen group? Why?

2. Bhagidhari: 'citizen -government partnership'

Launch Date: 2000

Current Status: ongoing

Major Partners: Government of Delhi, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Merchants and Traders Associations (MTAs), Delhi

Introduction

Participatory governance, from identification of problems to participatory performance monitoring and implementation of solutions moves away from traditional models of urban governance. It moves away from a total dependence on government officials for service delivery to a more equitable and shared responsibility for urban services and is one of the foundations of citizen engagement with government.

Facilitated by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments to the Indian Constitution, Bhagidhari literally means "collaborative partnership," it envisages collaboration between citizens and the city administration for improvement of civic services and facilitates citywide changes. The case study allows for a critical analysis of a live experience in participatory governance.

The Context

The city and state of Delhi suffers from the problems of dual identity, especially after the creation of the National Capital Territory. As the capital of the country and the seat of the Indian government, many governance functions are carried out by the Central government, but there are many functions which affect the average citizen's life, that are the responsibility of the state government. Frequent power outages, problems with the water supply, overburdened sanitation system; increasing problems with the transportation system—all problems that the Delhi citizen lived with every day in the last two decades as the city experienced uncontrolled and unplanned growth.

The citizen-government partnership began in 2000 with the intention of facilitating city wide changes through a principle of decentralization and citizen participation. Initially, the Bhagidhari Cell at the Chief Minister's office conducted interactions with citizens' groups and supervised resource mobilization. The focus then shifted to engaging Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Merchant and Traders Associations (MTAs) in sharing responsibility in identification of problems and for working together with the respective public utilities to resolve such problems.

The issues taken up in Bhagidhari are wide ranging. They are as small as collection of water and electricity bills to something big like rainwater-

harvesting scheme, which calls for expertise. For the Merchant and Traders Associations. As the issues range from removal of slums/ Jhuggi Jhopdi (huts and hutments) clusters, encroachments on approach roads to sale of beverages, ice creams, on roads and pavements, etc. The issues generally are same for all the RWAs/MTAs. In Bhagidhari workshops only issues which are relevant for the community are discussed. Individual issues are taken up for discussion only at the District Commissioner meeting with the RWAs and the nodal officers of various participating agencies.

The Process

Government departments and autonomous bodies participating in Bhagidari scheme include the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB); Municipal Corporation of Delhi; Department of Environment and Forests (E&F); Delhi Police (DP); New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC); Sales Tax Department; Weights and Measures Department; and the Industries Department

The 'Bhagidari Cell' has been coordinating the activities covered under this scheme. Since 2003-04, the budget for conducting workshops has been around Rs 10 lakhs per district. It was proposed that each district would hold at least two workshops in a financial year so that around 20 workshops could be organised with citizens' groups. In addition, a provision of Rs 40 lakhs has been kept for paying the fee of consultants engaged for conducting workshops.

The Bhagidari fund is used for disseminating news about the progress of various schemes undertaken under the Bhagidari initiative. It is done through printing newsletters both by the Delhi Government and the citizens' groups through the Directorate of Information and Publicity. With a view to providing impetus to the good work done by government agencies and Resident Welfare Associations/ MTAs, award schemes have been initiated for the best maintained market area and Resident Welfare Associations. The total cash award component in this scheme is Rs 5 lakhs.

Bhagidhari works through a three stage process. The first stage, which involves workshops with citizen groups consists of discussion of problems and arriving at consensus and solutions. Each workshop is for a two and half day duration in a round table discussion with the participants. Each table has four citizens (Two each from two citizen groups, viz. Residents Welfare Association or Market Traders Association) and five to six officials of public utility departments. There are around thirty to thirty five such round table discussions during a workshop. Each table group works on issues selected by the Design Team. The group discusses and builds consensus on solution of issue-based problems. Each stakeholder's (including the citizen's) role and responsibilities are identified and committed.

At the second stage, the solutions arrived at by the Resident Welfare Association/Merchant and Traders Associations are sent to concerned departments and Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) offices. In turn, the officials hold regular meetings to implement and monitor solutions. The Area Officers ensure a fortnightly meeting with the Resident Welfare Associations of their areas. The District Officers of the public utilities monitor and co-ordinate the working of these Area Officers

The third stage consists of monthly and quarterly reviews taken by the Heads of Departments and the Deputy Commissioners. The Chief Minister and Chief Secretary also take quarterly reviews.

All details of the Bhagidhari scheme are made publicly available through the website created for the purpose.¹¹ Bhagidhari faced various challenges during initial years of its implementation. To bring together a large number of citizen groups and government officials on a common platform was difficult. It faced strong resistance from field-level government officers, who were not willing to step out of their bureaucratic shell and embrace the direct interaction with citizens' groups. Change in attitude was brought through an ongoing change management process where, through the continued interactions with the RWA/Merchant and Traders Associations, attitude change came about.

Impact

Bhagidhari has been in operation for more than eight years. It has firmed up and more than 2000 citizen groups have participated in various Bhagidhari workshops. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence of the improvement of services in Delhi. However, a mid term survey by an independent agency ACORD brought out interesting comparisons and differences between North, South, East, West and Central Delhi, with regard to impact of Bhagidhari.

Garbage Removal: North and East Delhi Resident Welfare Associations are less satisfied than other areas. Roads and parks were reportedly better maintained in East and North Delhi with scores of 62% and 50% respectively, against the citywide average of 48%.

Drains and Sewers: only 21% in the South and 19% in the East reported that maintenance had improved compared to the citywide average of 34%. Averaging all the six items, the "quality of life" index has improved the most in Central Delhi and least in East Delhi. This indicates the consequence of not including squatter settlements and the urban poor (mostly in East Delhi) in the Bhagidhari initiatives.

Other studies have also shown mixed impact. At places, awareness of the

¹¹ <http://delhigovt.nic.in/bhagi.asp>)

scheme is minimal indicating that there is a strong need for effective communication and advocacy.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Just as Bhagidhari is applauded for the freshness of ideas, it has also been criticized. There have been uneven results and as the mid term assessment showed, there is variation in how different districts and localities of Delhi benefited. Where middle and upper class citizens lived, there has been the greatest benefit; but squatter colonies continue to be plagued by problems, possibly because that there is a lack of awareness of the concept of the scheme in many locales.

Yet another criticism is that as interactions have been limited to registered associations, the impact of Bhagidhari is not visible in slum clusters, resettlement colonies and no effort has been made to reach to the peri-urban areas of Delhi and the absence of punitive action can be seen as both a challenge and a weakness.

Bringing together a large number of citizen groups and government officials on a common platform was not an easy task. Interest levels in the well to do parts of the city were low. Poorer neighbourhoods were keen to take advantage of the new scheme. It required detailed planning and coordinated action holding preliminary meetings, interactions and a whole gamut of logistical arrangements. As the concept emphasized the voluntary nature of all activities, advocacy of the scheme was essential.

Finally, Bhagidhari required managing a change process – a change in perceptions of both the citizens and government officials. The first reaction of citizens was to view this programme as another avenue for redressal of public grievances. It took some time to convince citizens that they had to own the programme – and that they are stakeholders in the development of this city.

The success of Bhagidhari can be measured only to the extent that it has flowered and flourished under a very supportive leadership. The question remains: will it continue to flourish under new leadership—therein lies the key to the sustainability of an initiative such as this.

Key Learning Points

Internal change management is critical. One of the learning points from this effort is while participatory governance is important, the lack of support of internal officials cannot be substituted by transferring some of the responsibilities to Resident Welfare Associations. Thus, one of the key lessons to be learned here is that it is necessary to engage in large

scale internal capacity building and attitude change among middle and junior government officials who because of their critical positions, can make a difference between failure and success. The second lesson that emerges is that of institutionalization and the steps that are needed to institutionalize the role of citizen groups in the governance process needs to be planned out.

Issues to Reflect

One of the key problems in any governance programme is that it works in specific situations to address location and population specific problems. Can these be up scaled without losing the very key elements that make them a success? Will making them big result in a loss of the drive, and the very factors that make it a success?

Schemes like Bhagidhari, driven by a supportive and committed leadership, need to be studied more carefully to identify the key practices that can be adapted, adopted, up-scaled, and replicated in other urban locations. Is it possible to identify what, of this scheme, can be replicated in other urban locations.

Exercise Questions

Readers are invited to compare the Bhagidhari scheme of Delhi with the experience of Bangalore and Pune Corporations (later in this compendium) as they have tried to introduce participatory governance. What are the commonalities and what are the differences. What principles of good practice emerge from each experience that can be taken forward to other municipalities?

Can the Bhagidhari system or a variant of it be introduced or experimented in your city or town

- What are the preparatory steps needed?
- What process changes need to be incorporated?
- What cut backs required?
- What opposition/hurdles to be addressed?
- What would be the likely success/failure

3. Public Record Of Operations and Finance in Bangalore

Launch Date: July 2002

Current status: Completed after first year.

Major Partners: Four independent not-for-profit organisations in Bangalore: Janaagraha, VOICES, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Public Affairs Centre

Introduction

The Public Record Of Operations and Finance (PROOF) campaign was aimed at improving the system of local governance through building citizen confidence in local city government. The campaign undertook public discussions on four quarterly budgets of the Bangalore City Corporation in the 2002-2003 financial year. The process contributed to the public expenditure management and oversight typically lacking in a local government context. The PROOF campaign continued for a year and has important lessons to offer on sustainability and institutionalization in social accountability projects.

The Context

Bangalore's rapid growth since the late 80s, had by the turn of the century, put immense pressure on its infrastructure. At the same time expenditure on social infrastructure has not been having the desired impact. Bangalore city government had been plagued by corruption, inability to manage resources and weak oversight. In such a situation four Civil Society Organizations with wide ranging competencies in public expenditure management, citizen participation, community media and e-governance came together to start this campaign.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts pave the way for decentralizing of power by establishing local government bodies in rural and urban areas. With devolution of powers, as mandated by the constitution following the amendments, the local bodies are now in charge of their budgets for area development. The Karnataka Right to Information Act, 2000 created the enabling environment for civil society to demand information. The role of this Act in facilitating the public disclosure and debate on Bangalore city's budget has been critical.

The Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) was set up by the Karnataka Chief Minister and with members like Nandan Nilekani (Chairman, Infosys) to improve city governance. BATF supported the creation of a fund based accrual accounting system in Bangalore City Corporation. The City Corporation agreed to it making it easier to assess its performance. Four independent not-for-profit Civil Society Organisations in Bangalore--Janaagraha, VOICES, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies and Public Affairs Centre started the PROOF campaign to increase accountability and citizen participation in public expenditure management.

Having a high profile person like Ramesh Ramanathan from Janaagraha who was also a member of Bangalore Agenda Task Force helped in enabling the PROOF campaign. Ramesh Ramanathan came up with the idea of the civil society organisations demanding budget data since the

system could provide it. Along with him, Vinod Vyasulu from Centre for Budget and Policy Studies and Dr Ashish Sen from VOICES were the champions of the PROOF campaign.

Ramesh Ramanathan had worked earlier in London with the Citibank and has a MBA from Yale. He created quite a buzz in Bangalore by getting involved in civic issues as a corporate citizen and then started Janaagraha. Janaagraha has taken as its mandate a wide range of civic issues; VOICES has had a long-time active presence in the Bangalore community service scenario and known for communication and advocacy initiatives; Public Affairs Centre was roped in for its expertise in e-accountability initiatives, it had earlier carried out e-governance projects in Andhra Pradesh and CBPS draws on the strength of Vinod Vyasulu, who is known not only for his work on citizen involvement in budgeting as an economist, but for his series of books on Bangalore

PROOF's primary activity is a quarterly review of Bangalore City Corporation's management of finances. Before the campaign came into the picture, financial data was not readily available to the public. Consultation between the PROOF partners and government officials resulted in the Bangalore City Corporation releasing budget data and standing up to public scrutiny. Bound by obligations under the Karnataka Right to Information Act (2000), the Bangalore City Corporation provided the information. PROOF campaign's efforts to build confidence between the citizens and the service providers succeeded with city government officials agreeing to participate in the public discussions.

The Process

The initiative worked through quarterly public discussions, the campaign partners to help enable a discussion between the officials and citizens simplified budget statements. The revenue and expenditure statements that were earlier discussed within the City Corporation were opened up by the PROOF campaign to public scrutiny. As noted the fund based accrual accounting system that was earlier put in place made the process easier in terms of evaluation. Four such discussions were held in four quarters on August 17, 2002; December 7, 2002; March 15, 2003 and May 17, 2003.

The organizers of proof had to confront the gap between convening discussions as a strategy and the preparedness of citizens to use these for demanding accountability. After the first discussion, it became apparent that participating citizens needed to be trained to focus their questions better. In the first discussion several questions asked did not pertain to the city government's larger mandate as people liked to ask specific questions regarding state of affairs in their wards or immediate neighbourhoods. Training programmes and workshops were soon devised to help citizens understand the nature of city budgeting and functions of Bangalore City Corporation. Following these exercises the quality of

debate improved substantially in the following public debates.

Results

PROOF was a successful campaign carried on for a year and illustrates that enabling environment for external or vertical social accountability practices exists in India but as a one-off campaign that was not institutionalized, PROOF did not survive beyond initiation by its champions.

Sustainability was a key issue with the budget for the campaign drying up. Following the first year most of the partners did not have any funds for the project and PROOF had to look for new sources of funding to sustain. American Chamber of Commerce and Multi National Corporations like Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services had expressed their interest in participating and supporting the initiative. However, partners felt accepting funding from private enterprises was not appropriate given that PROOF was already being identified with big corporations given the support it received from Infosys chairman Nandan Nilekani, according to Vinod Vyasulu, CBPS. For instance, key and vocal organizations with long histories of civic mobilization and struggle on behalf of slum dwellers like Karnataka Kolargerri Nivasigala Samyukta Sanghatane (KKNSS) felt alienated. One of the outputs of the PROOF campaign is that the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies has become involved in training service providers on how to manage city expenditures by imparting them with appropriate skills that were found to be lacking in them during the campaign period.

PROOF campaign was carried forward in a confidence building spirit rather than a confrontational approach. However, Bangalore City Corporation officials continued to perceive PROOF partners as high handed. For instance, PROOF accused Bangalore City Corporation of taking a loan from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) without informing the public. In reality, the City Corporation had released an advertisement was to the public a week earlier. Officials were angry with the partners and had threatened to pull out. Nandan Nilekani intervention and Ramesh Ramanathan's apology on this occasion resolved the conflict. The participants on the other hand perceived PROOF's confidence-building efforts as being too soft on corruption. Despite planning and allotment of money, people were not getting the services, and participants felt that a ward level discussion on actual spending would be more beneficial and help to hold city government accountable for the specific works in their neighbourhoods.

There were also issues of inadequate representation of poorer sections in public discussions since most of the citizen participants were educated, English speaking, retired and middle classes. To address this issue PROOF tied up, with Akshara and Karnataka Kolargerri Nivasigala Samyukta Sanghatane (KKNSS), which are known for their work in

Bangalore's slums to bring about issues concerning budget allocations to poor living in the slums. This notwithstanding, PROOF campaign continued to be perceived or retained its reputation as a educated middle class campaign backed by big corporations.

Public discussions were limited by several factors including under representation of poor and non-inclusion of elected corporators. Only two elected corporators participated.

Communication

The campaign, it must be noted, never really succeeded in capturing the imagination of the public. In part, this could be attributed to the fact that it suffered from the lack of an effective mass media strategy. A programme titled, *Proof Puttanna* was run on Akashwani All India Radio, Bangalore to inform the public about the PROOF campaign which carried interviews with city government officials, PROOF partners and citizens. In addition, 100,000 flyers were distributed in both Kannada and English ahead of each public discussion to inform and invite citizens. Partners agree that even by the end of the first year citizens by and large remained ignorant about the campaign. It was hard for citizens from various walks of life to really understand how the PROOF campaign addressed their problems. Part of this problem lies in the perception that it was a top down campaign, Pune city which also carried out a participatory budgeting process overcame some of these problems by adopting a different structure that was based on ward level discussions.

A class divide is also reflected in the use of English language as the preferred mode of communication and campaigning without corresponding events and materials in Kannada and Tamil, the dominant languages of the state, and in particular, the city's slums. Although the PROOF campaign held training sessions in Kannada, these efforts were by no means wide-ranging or adequate.

Sustainability

The state government, on its part, has been unwilling to let city government take on greater responsibilities. Elections to the Bangalore City Corporation have been withheld for the last three years in direct contravention of the spirit of the Constitution. Greater Bangalore City Corporation that is run by administrators working directly under the State government has replaced Bangalore City Corporation.

There has also been a lack of coordination between different institutions such as Greater Bangalore City Corporation and Bangalore Development Authority, and local area development funds attached to elected representatives. With change in political leadership, the way city development is handled varies. In such a fluid situation, civil society

organizations find it challenging to bring on board diverse stakeholders. There were pressures on the PROOF campaign from within the stakeholders such as KKNSS and Akshara who were critical of the campaign's elite middleclass bias. Most importantly when compared to the Pune participatory budget initiative, the case highlights, the need to keep urban poor as a focal point of its efforts in order to be inclusive of the urban citizenry.

Impact

Seema Dargar, a independent researcher, carried out an in-depth study of the PROOF campaign. Dargar felt that PROOF was a very successful campaign but suffered from not-so-genuine partnership between city government and civil society organizations. The level of confidence that PROOF wanted to achieve was not realized with the Bangalore Agenda Task Force using its influence with Chief Minister's office to bring Bangalore City Corporation officials on board much to their own reluctance.

Strengths and Weaknesses

A key strength for the PROOF campaign was the support it received from the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna. He constituted the BATF to help improve the civic amenities in the city. BATF would intervene at various stages in the PROOF campaign to resolve conflicts and overcome problems. One such example is a spat with Bangalore City Corporation over the issue of taking a Housing and Urban Development Corporation loan, which made it difficult for PROOF to carry on. Direct intervention from the Chief Minister and an apology from Ramesh Ramanathan on behalf of PROOF partners saved the day on this occasion. While it clearly helped in the short run to have such support over a period of time, resentment started building up among the service providers at this 'high handed' approach- this had an impact on the sustainability of the project.

A key weakness was lack of public awareness about the campaign; it was not made evident how the campaign was in the public interest. Despite these efforts, the campaign ended up being limited in participation, representation and reach. According to a former mayor PROOF was not able to bring on board the issues concerning the urban poor. Though PROOF's work with KKNSS was in the right direction, subsequently with increased interest from big corporations and MNC's, KKNSS did not see PROOF as furthering their interest in working with urban poor.

Key Learning Points

PROOF partners envisaged the campaign to be carried forward in a confidence building spirit rather than through a confrontational attitude

towards the government. Prevalence of corruption and a general mismanagement of funds by local governments call for better civic engagement in the budgeting processes. While it is important to make citizens aware of the budgeting process, the campaign found that local government employees lacked the skills to deal with financial accounting on their own. An approach that understands the difficult work environment for those working in local governance has a better chance of succeeding than one that is merely vigilante in approach. It is important to take government officials into confidence and explain that this is a worthwhile exercise.

It has been noted that Chief Minister's support to the campaign helped its success. Since then the political changes have not been conducive for the campaign to be institutionalized in any way. Bangalore City Corporation has been replaced by Greater Bangalore City Corporation, which is being run by officials without elected representatives. The elections to the city government have been on hold since 2006. Following filing of a public interest litigation by the then mayor, court had ordered for the elections to be held on 10th of March, 2009 which was later extended up to 1st August, 2009.

Developmental work in the city is also channelized through various parallel bodies such as the Bangalore Development Authority. It is quite clear that local government bodies haven't been institutionalized as yet. A social accountability campaign in this situation has to work with a lot of different players. While champions are required to make a start, as they go along it is important to take various actors on board to sustain the campaign. Politicians and administrators at various levels must be made to understand the need for civic engagement and social accountability. A campaign has to be connect with the grassroots issues for its sustained significance. Diverse stakeholder groups such as civil society organizations working with urban poor, big private corporations, multi national companies—all on the same platform--invariably creates conflicts of interest. While support from everyone is good, the key issue is to keep the urban poor as the focal point of these efforts. At the same time, it is also important to engage the upper and middle classes who have more “voice” than the urban poor.

Issues to Reflect

Insufficient devolution of powers and a tendency for centralization by the state government makes social accountability practices difficult to carry out. Local government is not close to the people for them to engage with it. In turn, the local government often lacks the independent powers to act effectively.

Exercise Questions

- Examine the feasibility to initiate civic engagement in your city, the actors, processes, and issues.

- What preparatory steps need to be taken to ensure effective citizen engagement for social accountability?
- What are the likely hurdles to initiate and sustain and how does a government agency overcome them?
- Who are the key stakeholders to bring on board, and how does an organization manage their diverse interests to find the common cause?

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4. Case study on sustainability in social accountability: participatory budget of Pune City Corporation

Launched in 2005-06 Continuing

Major Partners: Janwani, Centre for Environment Education, National Society for Clean Cities and Nagrik Chetna Manch

Introduction

The elected councils approve the city budgets for each financial year. Citizens' participation improves efficiency of budget process, expenditure tracking, and encourages transparency in the delivery of urban services. The experience of the Pune Municipal Corporation was inspired by the PROOF's Bangalore experience. Learning from Bangalore's experience, Pune put an institutional model in place right at the beginning of the process. Pune has since been running the participatory budget for the past three years in all its 14 wards. The case highlights the issues of sustainability in social accountability, which is often difficult to achieve.

The Context

Though elected representatives play a role in deciding on how to prioritize and manage city development, a need for oversight has been strongly felt in the context of developing countries. Money spent on roads, water and sanitation, education and health services does not translate into satisfactory improvement in civic infrastructure. City governments are typically plagued by problems such as corruption, mismanagement of public money, inadequately trained officials etc. Involving citizens directly to improve accountability in city governance could help in achieving desirable results. PROOF campaign had proved that if city administration is willing to co-operate, a process for social accountability can be initiated.

In the case of Pune, Dr. Nitin Kareer, Commissioner of Pune Municipal Corporation, who had attended PROOF's public meetings in Bangalore championed the process. Dr. Kareer was later promoted to the position of District Magistrate of Pune. He is currently Junior Secretary and Personal Assistant to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

India's Right to Information Act, 2005, created the enabling environment for the campaign and provided the entry point for citizens to engage with public officials. Janwani in partnership with Centre for Environment Education (CEE), National Society for Clean Cities (NSCC), Nagrik Chetna Manch, neighbourhood groups with active support of the Pune Municipal Corporation, particularly the Commissioner initiated the participatory budgeting in Pune.

The Process

The evolution of the Pune participatory budget was a long drawn out process. Civil Society Organizations such as National Society for Clean Cities, Mohalla (Ward) Committees and Nagrik Chetna Manch first submitted proposals for projects to be undertaken to the Pune Municipal Corporation in 2004-05. Later at a public meeting on participatory budgeting organized by the National Society for Clean Cities (NSCC), Pune on 15 July 2006, the Municipal Commissioner spoke about the structure and functioning of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) budgeting processes. After this meeting, the Municipal Commissioner encouraged further participation from people to identify and prioritize projects on the basis of urgent attention and increased representation of the various segments of society in Pune.

Dr. Nitin Kareer, had attended PROOF's meetings in Bangalore in 2006. He had discussed its results and possible methodologies for Pune with Bangalore based partners such as Janagraha and the Pune based NGO, Janwani. In turn, Janwani held meeting with the Pune Municipal Corporation from August to November 2006 with an aim of institutionalizing the process. Though no signed understanding could be reached between PMC and partnering Civil Society Organizations on one hand and Janwani and its partners such as Centre for Environment Education (CEE) Ahmedabad on the other, it was agreed that if the process continued, roles of each of the partners would evolve over time. This loose alliance worked towards bringing peoples issues to the fore.

The comprehensive process of participatory budgeting for the 2006-07 period was carried out at a ward level. Pune has 14 such administrative wards. At a different level, the process was also facilitated by, the head of the Urban Community Development Department, Mr Ashok Kalamkar. Partners felt that programmes benefitting the poor could be taken up with Mr. Kalamkar as the Department of Urban Community Development operates several schemes through neighbourhood groups for the benefit of slum dwellers. It is important to note here that the process was initiated and first public discussions were carried out when there was no elected Municipal Corporation. Since the elections, the corporators have tried to scrap the process as it seeks to bring them under greater public scrutiny. Partners agree that it is Nitin Kareer's persistence that has resulted in successful institutionalization of the participatory budgeting exercise.

As part of the process, the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) undertook to locate and train postgraduate students to act as neutral facilitators and to help develop tools for the participatory budget process. CEE was already working with United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies Regional Center of Expertise on Sustainable Urban Development. Fourteen economics students of the University of Pune working on this project became the facilitators and were trained to develop tools for participatory budget processes.

Each ward was allocated Rs 20 lakhs for development for provision of basic infrastructure needs such as roads, water and sanitation. Rs 5 lakhs out of the total allocation of Rs 20 lakhs were reserved for the poorest of the poor. Rather than the ward officer deciding on what projects to be taken up and in what order, it was left to the participants to prioritize their projects. Officials initially had to contend with the over enthusiasm of the participants who demanded more allocations than those to which they were entitled. Participants thus had to be first trained to understand the mandate of the ward. Training programmes were carried out to help participants make the decisions.

Ward level discussions were found to be very relevant for addressing peoples' immediate needs. Following a discussion on what should be the priorities for the budget, people were given questionnaires to take home and return within 30 days. These were then treated as ballots for voting to decide the priority of the projects to be undertaken. For instance, one ward received 74 applications with 300 proposals, showing that given an opportunity, citizens will come forward with both problems and proposals.

Pune has about 2400 active self help neighbourhood groups. Typically 50 households constitute a neighbourhood. Neighbourhood groups consist of women who are elected to represent households in their neighbourhood. Neighbourhood groups in urban slums of Pune are well known for being active. This network of neighbourhood groups made the idea of participatory budget possible right from the ward level. The feeling of the neighbourhood as a community is also commendable for providing representation to women and the poor.

Local media proved to be valuable partners. They were instrumental in reaching out to the citizens; and Janwani placed newspaper advertisements inviting the general public for the four zonal budget meetings.

The first year had drawn considerable excitement from citizens about the participatory budget process. However, for it to sustain, it is imperative that the results are meaningful. While there is no independent public assessment available in the public domain, fourteen wards are continuing the participatory budget process into the third year. The sustainability of the process is itself an important achievement, because the previous experience of Bangalore did not succeed.

There are some key elements that might help in understanding Pune's success vis-à-vis PROOF. First, Pune started with a bottom up approach with ward meetings devised to address citizens concerns. Second, the initiative came from the city officials with the Municipal Commissioner directly championing the cause. Third, partners understood their role well within the larger scheme of things and laid emphasis on sustainability. Fourth, poorer sections of the city are usually the ones that are most

interested in being stakeholders. Involving poorer neighbourhood groups and allocating money for the poorest of the poor encouraged their participation.

The participatory budgeting process in all 14 wards of Pune is now into its third year and it can be said that its been successfully institutionalized. According to the partners, participation has leveled after initial enthusiasm from during the first year. While it has been successful in incorporating peoples' proposals into the budgeting process, the same cannot be said about implementation. According to the partners, poorer areas have not benefited. Smaller works intended to benefit the slums are being put aside by the officials in favour of larger projects. Another important grey area remains participation of elected corporators. While there are exceptions a majority of corporators since the beginning have been less interested and see this exercise as a breach of their powers.

Strengths And Weaknesses

Pune's experience is still new, but its strength lies in the approach—i.e. working from the bottom up rather than running the risk of being labeled as an elite initiative.

The culture of civic engagement that is very much of the cultural ethos of the city is an added advantage as is the support of the most popular language newspaper, Sakal. Dissatisfaction of corporators with the entire process is a key weakness that needs to be addressed. Conflicts between corporators and officials have cast a long shadow over the process¹². It is not clear to what extent the Urban Development Ministry's service level benchmarks have been used to establish service quality levels.

Key Learning Points

The poor need to be made active stakeholders in improving standards of living. It has been found that they find it easy to team up and fight for a common cause. For any social accountability tool to be effective, it has to be inclusive of the interests of the poor in terms of being oriented towards providing pro poor budgets and accountability reforms. It helps to have discussions that are focused on the immediate needs. Training and capacity building of ward level participants is crucial for them to understand the mandate and the limitations of the city government and to make reasonable demands.

Janwani could not sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Pune Municipal Corporation as other partners were wary of such a deal. Working processes and loose links between partners tied together by common interest and responsibility was responsible for the process to work, showing that while it might not be possible for a process to resolve

¹² <http://www.sakaaltimes.com/2009/03/08135546/Why-PMC-corporators-hate-Kalam.html>

all issues, it can be sustained if partners decide to work for a common cause.

Issues to Reflect Over

While the Indian Ministry of Urban Development is promoting a Community Participation Law in urban development, there are issues of concurrent responsibilities, of role definitions of partners, and of institutionalization. Readers are invited to explore their own contexts to determine if participatory budgeting will improve their own municipality's performance, and whether social accountability can play an important role,

Exercise Questions

Readers are invited to make a list of five services they provide which can become the starting points for social accountability and governance reform. Alongside each service, participants can list the kind of roadblocks they would face when bringing participatory budgeting as a regular part of their work and list the strategies they would follow to address each roadblock.

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Janwani also provided a process documentation video

Case Studies in Peri-Urban and Rural Settings

5. Social Audit In The Sarva Shiksha Abhayan In Kohlapur District, Maharashtra

Launch Date: 2005

Current Status: Continuing

Partners: Zilla Parishad, Kohlapur District; District Collector, Kohlapur, Sarva Shiksha Abhyan Project; Civil Society Organizations; Universities; Gram Panchayats

Introduction

This initiative is an attempt to use social accountability mechanisms to address the issues of inclusiveness, quality and improved performance of school children with a focus on the holistic (physical, emotional, and educational) development of the child within the ambit of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme of the Government of India.¹³ Officials of the district were aware of a social audit requirement within SSA but were quite unfamiliar with the concepts and processes of social accountability. They simply felt that a positive approach, combined with wide stakeholder and community participation, where the monitoring and audit was rooted in the community itself would yield results.

The Context

Kohlapur district, which had an impressive record of investment in education in the pre-independence era under the enlightened guidance of Chatrapathi Shahu Maharaj and other educational leaders, fell behind in terms of educational outcomes with poor enrollment and retention rates, increased drop out rates, poor pass out rates, as a result of poor infrastructure, low levels of teacher and student motivation, unhealthy and unsafe school environments, etc.

An enabling environment created as a result of Social Audit being embedded as a requirement in the SSA project; the use of transparency mechanisms such as community reports cards in the villages, public discussions on school issues at the Gram Sabha meetings; the

¹³ Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is Government of India's flagship programme designed to universalize primary education enabling India to meet its commitments under the Millennium Development Goal 2. Funded from both government funds and an educational cess of 5 per cent of taxable income from every Indian income tax payer, SSA is a umbrella which looks at the overall primary education system—from improving access to education; school infrastructures, enhancing girls' access to education; quality of education; teaching quality, children's nutrition and health, etc. The Union government issues guidelines, which are then implemented in a mission mode by the State governments who have set up special programme implementation units the state to administer the programme. An important and mandatory element of the SSA is community participation and the use of social audit tools to improve education for children

involvement of mothers as major informal partners in the programme for quality control and monitoring provided the backdrop against which officials could take positive action.

The process was initiated by the then Collector of Kohlapur District, Prabhakar Deshmukh, and by officials of the Education Department charged with the SSA mandate. It was policy makers who initiated the project to benefit the school children in the district.

The issues were clear, a poor record in educational provision, low teacher attendance rates, dilapidated infrastructure in schools. The choices before administration were also clear—should they spend their valuable time punishing errant teachers, making only small inroads into the corruption in the system—or should they use positive and proactive measures to bring stakeholders on board and to increase accountability at the level of the local Panchayats¹⁴ level itself.

Without really being familiar with the current global theories of participatory development processes, officials put into place a system of stakeholder participation and transparency.

For stakeholder participation, the officials ensured that members of the community, i.e. educationists, school principals, retired school principals, presidents and representatives of teachers unions, other community workers, representatives of gram Panchayats were also included and involved at all levels of discussion, planning and implementation. A first “Chintan Shibir”, i.e. a brainstorming session was followed by the establishment of four working groups to study and work out detailed plans for quality improvement in school atmosphere, improvement of teacher academic and teaching quality, academic performance, emotional, nutritional support. Systematically and at given times, the study groups met and provided detailed plans that were worked out and implemented in a participatory approach, following an in-depth discussion of the proposals in two meetings. A plan of action booklet was prepared, teachers trained, communities mobilized and the programme launched. Guidelines and timelines were also prepared so that teachers and communities would be able to follow a process fully. At the same time, local innovation and creativity was encouraged. For instance, the idea of remedial classes for 60 days for children falling below the 50 per cent mark in examinations emerged from local teachers who then implemented the remedial classes to bring children up to mark.

The draft planning documents were put in the General Body of the Zilla Parishad¹⁵ and approved. Approval was also taken from teachers and teachers unions, from Gram Sabhas¹⁶ who would play a key role in the process and active participation from villagers was mobilized.

¹⁴ village local government mechanism

¹⁵ district administration

¹⁶ Village level community meetings.

People's involvement, once they became convinced, is a hallmark of this programme. Villagers have contributed in time, kind and cash for the improvement of infrastructure of the schools.

To ensure transparency in all the work, Village Education Committees formed an important element. In addition, Gram Sabhas were effectively used as a forum of discussion and resolution of educational problems in the villages ranging from school beautification to creating child friendly schools, to student performance, etc. Regular public notification of important information about the school, the committees, the performance of children, investments made, etc are visible on notice boards in the schools. All records are also well maintained and available.

One important innovation to build in transparency in functioning of the school was the creation of a Mata Palak Sangh (Mother Parents Association), which became the nodal group to monitor the nutritional intake and other problems in the school on a regular basis.

Peer evaluation, or cross evaluation as the project implementers chose to call it, formed an important element for transparency and accountability. Teachers from one cluster become evaluators of another school cluster and their findings publicly available and discussed. Performance ratings are gathered in monitoring documents, which are also publicly available.

Success at the scholarship examination by an increasing larger percentage of students from Kolhapur Zilla¹⁷ benefiting from the scheme is one yardstick of the visible performance of the school since the programme started.

As a result of the active stakeholder involvement, the Mata Palak Sanghs, and other ways of village involvement, there is currently a 100 per cent enrollment and no drop out from schools.

Statistics and figures of improved school environments and performance tell only part of the story. While pass out rates have improved from 50 per cent to 90 per cent, the number of scholarship holders from Kohlapur is the currently highest in Maharashtra. There is a visible display of collective leadership, seriousness and accountability among all stakeholders. Political support from the leadership provided the impetus and the pressure for overall improvement in student and teacher morale, motivation, and performance.

Sustainability

The programme no longer belongs to the Zilla Parishad alone. It belongs to each village and villagers who are both participants and beneficiaries in

¹⁷ district

the programme. As a consequence and because a sense of ownership exists among all stakeholders, this programme, having taken off, is intrinsically sustainable, so long as student performance continues to visibly grow, the transparency of the Gram Sabhas ensures accountability, and quality assurance at every stage and level is publicly displayed and acknowledged.

The idea of community participation in the running of education at the primary level is not new. However, what is new is the innovative way in which the programme has been designed and implemented; and that it has shown district wide results within a short time of three four years.

The model is both replicable in other districts in the state and in the country. In fact, the Government of Maharashtra has issued directives that the programme be replicated in all the districts of the state

Impact

The programme has been evaluated by two nationally known organizations, the Indian Institute of Education, (IIE) Pune in 2003 and by the National Council for Educational Research and Training, (NCERT), New Delhi in 2005-2006.

Findings from the IIE study show improved attendance and interest in studies, sharp reduction in the drop out rate; better performance of weaker students, increased overall academic performance; increased interaction between parents and teachers; introduction of mother parent association; increased sense of pride, higher teacher motivation and accountability, an enhanced sense of hygiene and health among students.

The IIE study reported that "coordination and motivation at all levels can really transform the situation".

The findings of the IIE were validated in 2005-2006 by an NCERT study. The NCERT study identified involvement of the entire district educational functionaries and sense of ownership of the programme in the community, which led to a remarkable change in attitude, behaviour, and performance of teachers. The expected outcome of the Rajarshi Shahu Sarvagin Shikshan Karayakarm, i.e. the quality improvement in the learning achievement level along with mental, social, intellectual and physical development of children in A.P. primary schools has been met beyond expectations.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The strength of the project is in its institutionalization through community ownership of the programme with results being visible from year to year.

The fact that the officials have moved on to other assignments, but the quality of educational outcomes of the children continues to improve.

But there are weaknesses. For instance,

- Maintaining the same level of commitment and involvement takes proactive action. There is no room for slack and all stakeholders are well aware of this.
- There is recognition that there is a need for further improvement in the inaccessible and mountainous taluqs¹⁸ of the district. More attention is necessary there.
- There is a shortage of women teachers—this needs to be addressed especially in the context of increased girls' participation in schools.
- There is a critical need for forward planning. This cohort of students in the primary school will soon be coming into high school—consequently, unless the secondary school system grows and is energized the way in which primary education has been—there is likely to be severe problems of supply vs. demand; expectations vs. frustrations; and the progress of education in the district will slacken.

Issues to Reflect Over

This is a case study of social audit in a rural context. However, Kohlapur district has both the district and the municipality of Kohlapur within its jurisdiction. Educational outcomes from the municipality are not similar to what has been achieved in the district. In fact, they are in direct contrast and reflect a very poor state of municipal schools and student performance.

What would be required to achieve the same kind of results in the municipal schools? Can this experience be replicated? Why or why not?

Exercise Questions

A quick exercise from this case study to understand social accountability principles better

- a) Whether this case study fits within the general principles of social accountability
- b) What elements of social accountability does it contain
- c) What ingredients of this effort go beyond mere issues of improved service delivery
- d) Is the mandating of social audit necessary for such initiatives to take place or can it be initiated independently by elected leaders and government officials coming together

¹⁸ A sub district administrative unit

- e) Whether such a programme could be replicated in your jurisdiction
- f) Whether such a programme could be up-scaled successfully
- g) Whether systemic changes are really necessary for efforts like this or does it just require innovative thinking?

6. Case study of the Andhra Pradesh Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (under the NREGA)

Launched in 2006 and continuing

Major Partners: Government of Andhra Pradesh and NGOs.

Introduction

Public interest litigations are one form among many available to Indian citizens to seek accountability from government. A series of such public interest litigations filed in India's Supreme Court between 2000 and 2004 raised issues of the failure of the state to guarantee the fundamental right of citizens to live, and implicitly the right to food and employment. In the context of the evolution of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), it is significant that the petition asked the Supreme Court to intervene by directing the government to provide immediate open-ended employment in drought-affected villages. When the United Progressive Alliance came into power at the Centre in 2004, providing an employment guarantee as also establishing a right to information were part of their Common Minimum Programme.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was passed unanimously by the Indian Parliament in 2005. Social audit was as an integral part of the implementation of the Act, thereby creating the enabling environment in which social accountability initiatives can take place. Since rural development is also a state subject, individual state assemblies passed parallel legislation to implement the national law.

Once the NREGA was passed, operational guidelines were circulated. These guidelines provide the broad operational framework and, in the context of transparency and accountability, detail out the Citizens' Charter and provide a step-by-step guidance on how social audits are to be done along with formats for reporting were circulated.

Much has been written about the experience of Andhra Pradesh in the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, also called Andhra Pradesh Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (APREGS). It has been described as a singular success in a country where rural poverty affects more than half the population and where most other states are encountering serious problems in implementing the Act.

The translation of the Act into actual implementation and institutionalized practice is the story of the Andhra Pradesh Rural Employment Scheme (APREGS) (as the act is called in the state). It is a story of the incorporation of several key elements of social accountability and while it is a success, it merits in depth study as a case in terms of certain implementation gaps which impact on the effectiveness of social audit as

a tool by which to ensure demand driven accountability by the poor.

A case analysis of the APREGS best illustrates the importance of a comprehensive assessment of social accountability including all aspects, from approaches to methodologies and tools, public-public partnerships; capacity building, sustainability and impact assessment. This case analysis also shows how procurement accountability mechanisms can be put in place using innovative approaches.

The Context

Earlier schemes for poverty reduction in rural areas were rife with bureaucratic approaches, inefficiency, and above all, wide spread corruption. Crores¹⁹ of rupees worth of work which had never even been taken up was shown as having been completed; old public works were passed off as new; payments were made for non existent structures and kickbacks in wages paid to village poor was a common practice.

The NREGA, on which the APREGS is based, works in tandem with another pioneering legislation in India, the Right to Information Act of 2005. Both these legislations have emerged out of grassroots dissatisfaction and agitation, a proactive and advocacy oriented judiciary, and general elections which best articulated the rural public's dissatisfaction with successive governments.

Article Section 17 of the NREGA mandates conduct of Social Audit as part of the programme. When the programme was launched in Andhra Pradesh, AP had no social audit experience. With a massive task at hand, the Government of Andhra Pradesh was looking for innovative ways of meeting the mandate set by the legislation and opted for an innovative approach which included political backing, the use of information technology tools and a robust social audit programme,

A government led initiative with support at the highest level, it was the policy makers and government officials who initiated the process of social audit in the NREGA in Andhra Pradesh. At the higher levels of government, Mr. K. Raju, Secretary, Department of Rural Development, a senior officer with a deep commitment to rural poverty reduction headed the effort. The target beneficiaries were the very poor, landless families in the villages of Andhra Pradesh.

In February, 2006, around the time that APREGS was being formulated- a pilot social audit conducted in three villages with help of the Rajasthan based Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). The pilot social audits demonstrated the effectiveness of social audit process and created a realization in administration that even a strong administrative response devoid of community's assertion of rights would fall short of realizing

¹⁹ The highest unit of count in India. One crore equals 10 million.

objectives of act.

A massive campaign of training a pool of state officials sensitized to Social Audit was created within the Department of Rural Development. At the same time, a pool of resource persons was created at the state and district levels. Social Audit tools were developed—training modules, training films, brochures, and step-by-step guides. Partnerships with NGOs and CSOs who implement social audit at the village level have been a key ingredient of the process. These organizations work with about 30,000 trained rural youth are conducting this social audit on regular cycles of 15 days.

State resource persons and district resource persons go to the villages to identify literate youth from labourers' families. These youth are then trained as Village Social Auditors and have been formed into teams.

Training for the Village social auditors involves three days of training and consists of an orientation to the scheme, the RTI and the basics of social audit. The non-negotiables in the social audit process are explained and practical exposure includes a study of the Employment Guarantee Scheme related records.

A very senior administrator was placed in overall charge of the scheme; a Strategic Programme Implementation Unit was created within the department of Rural Development, and external expertise from the Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan was brought in to assist the state government. The implantation of APREGS within a government mandated framework showed that advocacy with internal stakeholders, e.g. elected officials, middle and lower level bureaucrats, and was essential to the success. The very system based on hierarchy could be used to change attitudes—because change was 'ordered'. Therefore, in addition to capacity building of social auditors in villagers, a parallel awareness and capacity building initiative was undertaken within the government.

Social Audit (SA) is done in all the Panchayats over a 10 day period. The process begins with the filing of a request under the Right to Information Act. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has mandated that replies be provided within a span of seven days.

The scheme is managed through an information technology backbone with a tightly integrated end to end web portal and tracking software. The system is alive, status-visible and amenable to tracking.

The system keeps track of the work from the day the work is identified and a code is generated and starts flagging delays in the payment cycle as soon as they occur. The free availability of this information on the website also facilitates public scrutiny, thus enabling greater transparency and better social audit

The social audit process culminates in a public meeting at the mandal²⁰ headquarters attended by the people from every village, their elected representatives, the media, the NREGA functionaries concerned, and senior government officers.

The social audit process is not just a dry audit process. It includes verification of figures on records with fact checking on the ground by going door to door, carrying out focused group discussions, meetings with villagers, physical inspection and verification of works; and the reporting of findings as Gram Sabhas (Village meetings) called for the purpose.

Officials, whose attitudes begin with disbelief when they hear findings of social audit become more receptive and learn to appreciate the increased community participation and engagement with both officials and village authorities.

Results

While NREGA implementation has generally been poor in most of the states with many states reporting high expenditure, and leakages in money reaching the poor, results in Andhra Pradesh have stood out as a counter point to results elsewhere. Money has been returned from erring officials to the poor, and all information is publicly available on a dynamic basis.

The biggest strengths of the social audit have been the use of a technology backbone as a major support to the administration of the programme, commitment from the highest levels of government leadership and bureaucracy; an independent monitoring system that is accepted both by the community and the government; and the fact that the findings of the social audit are such that they would never come to light in a management information system or a conventional monitoring and evaluation report.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has provided employment to more than one million poor households in rural villages. Twenty-six per cent of person days of employment have gone to members of the Scheduled Castes, and 11 per cent to members of Scheduled Tribes between April 2007 and March 2008. Some 487,623 works have been initiated between 2006 and March 2008.

Land development, road connectivity, flood control and protection, water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing, de-silting of ponds, minor irrigation works and provision of irrigation facilities to Scheduled Caste/Tribe families and other beneficiaries of land reform were amongst the types of works taken up.

²⁰ The sub district administrative unit as it is called in Andhra Pradesh

The success of social audit within the APREGS has been so great and so visible that there is a demand for inclusion of social audit in all other sectors of government activity, i.e. health, education, housing, etc. It has become an integral part of the Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan described earlier and the National Rural Health Mission being undertaken in the country at present.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The biggest change that NREGA confers on people is the guaranteeing of a right to employment and in making the government accountable. However, the efforts are to deliver the programme and the technology and tracking softwares enable effective and efficient administration of the programme. What evidence there is of accountability and the reduction of corruption in the system is that of the number of petty officials who have been hauled up before the public hearings and villages and either punished or made to return monies to people from whom it has been illegally withheld. There is also extensive anecdotal evidence of officials who are still resistant, and who do not acknowledge applications for work and of continuing corruption at the lower levels of implementation.

Further, while for the Internet savvy individual, information is available on the portal through a proactive disclosure process, the fact remains that one has to hunt through a cobweb of vast amounts of data to search for and find what one is looking for. In addition, what one finds when going through the portal is that social audit findings, despite being digitized, are not placed on the APREGS website. Village level data are available in the village, but not on the public domain website.

For whatever reasons, the AP track record on the provision of employment under this act is still only about 45 days in a year, less than half the entitlement. That means that there is a long way to go before real meaning is given to the promise held out by the pioneering legislation.

Two years into the scheme, there is also need for independent third party monitoring and evaluation²¹. While a recent World Bank study on the programme has shown that there is now extensive awareness of the scheme among the rural poor, there needs to be in depth analysis linking social audit as an input to decision making; and a greater understanding of the reasons why work is available only for half of the guaranteed time to the poor.

Key Learning Points

Social accountability mechanisms such as social audits need partnerships between government, civil society organizations, and communities need

²¹ This is currently being undertaken, but the results in terms of the social accountability aspects are yet unknown.

change management and are also expensive and even when mandated, need budgetary allocations to give teeth to the process.

Issues to Reflect Over

Why has this worked in Andhra Pradesh but not elsewhere?
What are the key principles of best practice that can be replicated, adopted, adapted, in other government programmes?

A Suggested Exercise

The website of the NREGA Andhra Pradesh is http://nrega.ap.gov.in/Nregs/Home_eng.jsp. Readers are invited to explore this website to try to locate its different elements—and to find if any information they need is NOT available there. If not available, how does one access the information? There are gaps, and readers are invited to find them.

References:

Dreze, Jean (2005) “ Food Security: Beating Around the Bush”,
"http://www.righttofoodindia.org"

“Social Audits: from ignorance to awareness. The AP experience”, World Bank study coordinated by Atul Pokharel with Yamini Aiyar and Salimah Samji in partnership with Intellectap and SPIU (Andhra Pradesh Government), 1 February 2008

7. An Assessment of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme done by , Consumer Unity and Trust Society,(CUTS) Centre for Consumer Action Research and Training (CART) Rajasthan, India,

Launched: 2007-2008

Current Status: Concluded

Major Partners: The World Bank & CUTS CART, Department of Rural Development, Government of Rajasthan

Introduction

Civil Society Organizations in Rajasthan have been in the forefront of many grassroots struggles for transparency in government, especially in rural areas. The work of many of these organizations has led to pioneering legislations in India on the Right to Information Act and the recognition of a right to employment as a fundamental right. Such achievements would be left on paper unless there is continuing proactive action to use social accountability tools to ensure that these rights are implemented. Through the first time implementation of social accountability tools such as the Community Score Card (CSC), the Citizen Report Card (CRC), and Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS), the Centre for Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) assessed the implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in a completely rural context. A study of these tools and how they can be used in a rural setting to generate operational and policy changes is the focus of this case study.

The Context

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has been described in the earlier case study. In its third year of implementation, its varied experiences in India, the identification of strengths and flaws in the design and implementation of the scheme would go a long way in assisting mid course modifications and corrections.

The Process

Over a period of two years, CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART) used the Community Score Card (CSC) and other two social accountability tools- Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) and Citizen Report Card (CRC) to understand the perception of people on quantity and quality of service delivery and status of fund flow in the context of the scheme. This effort follows the changes in the implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme following the use of results from social audits in an earlier experience and also reported in this edition.

The whole study process consisted of a scoping visit followed by stakeholder meetings, developing and testing the social audit tools, field data collection, data analysis and dissemination of findings to the government and public groups.

The Citizen Report Card

To identify the Eight hundred and twenty five NREGS beneficiaries from 165 villages were interviewed.. A range of other stakeholders like *Sarpanch*²², *Panchayat sachiv* and mates (supervisors) were also interviewed as were several higher level government officials and Panchayati Raj Institutions²³ representatives were interviewed and several focused group discussions with beneficiaries were conducted. In addition, discussions with different stakeholders and brainstorming on various aspects helped to understand key processes and findings. Data from field surveys was triangulated with information collected through group discussions and observations at field sites. The recommendations emerging from such field data wa meant to improve the implementation of the programme

Community Score Card (CSC)

Under the process of CSC, Service providers and beneficiaries, comprising of Sarpanchs, Up-sarpanchs²⁴, Ward Members, Zilla Parishad Member, Mates (Supervisors) and the community members, who are working under the NREGS mobilized for participation. Selection of *Gram Panchayats* was done on the basis of rapport built during the whole process of CRC and other activities held under the project. All the activities of CSC like input tracking, community scoring process, Self evaluation of service providers, interface meeting and preparation of action agenda were conducted among the participants with the help of resource persons as facilitators.

People in the villages are not informed about the meetings of the Gram Sabha. Hence, there is only minimal participation of the community in the decision making process, which result in lack of information about the details of new work sanctioned and availability of work as well. This has a severe negative impact and opposite to the provisions of the Act.

The principal authority at the district level, District Collector asked for the findings before its dissemination and when he found that both highlights and gaps are given due recognition. He was also aware about the status

²² Head of the Village Panchayat or local government unit

²³ Local government institutions set up under the Constitutional Amendment 73 of the Indian Constitution

²⁴ Vice Head of Village Panchayat

of implementation in his district, and found the information ready to be disseminated correct. Very negative results of any assessment may change the scenario which, sometimes, at district levels is highly person-dependent.

For the process of developing and using the Community Score Card, bringing the service providers and service recipients at the same platform was a great challenge, not only for a 'buy in' but also to hold their attention for four days in one place.

There was a big confrontation among the Civil Society Organizations involved in Social Audit process on the one hand and the *Sarpanch* in Rajasthan at the time of project implementation on the other. The Sarpanches were not ready to share any information with the people from Civil Society Organizations and in many cases, refused to be interviewed.

Sustainability

Mobilization efforts fail to meet their goals if decision makers do not act upon calls for reform. In contrast to earlier practice, there has been a change in the mindset of service providers and policy makers. Once they get over their initial distrust and reluctance, they participate and welcome assessment through a third party monitoring system.

During state level dissemination meetings the Secretary, Planning Government of Rajasthan appreciated the effectiveness of the Community Score Card as a tool for and instructed the state evaluation cell to work with the NGOs and CSOs to explore the possibility of scaling up the use of the tool in different departments and programmes of government.

Communication

Advocacy through district level meetings before, during and after the process of using the Community Score Card helped to disseminate the plans and the results. Short notes prepared for distribution among relevant stakeholders supported these meetings.

Results

As a result of this experience in the use of the Community Score Card, beneficiaries, some for the first time in the lives, realized their power and their right to evaluate/assess the actions of the service providers. Besides generating such awareness on entitlements, the use of social audit tools revealed both strengths and gaps in the implementation of the scheme

This exercise helped to challenge the claim of the authorities that everybody in the village or the job card-holders are well aware of the rights and entitlements as per the provisions of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Still, there is a big gap between the presumed and the real/actual level of information.

Impact

After three months of District and state level dissemination, a tracer study was done to see the impact of the whole process of Citizen Report Cards, the Community Score Cards and the Participatory Expenditure Tracking Surveys. The tracer study found that a task force has been set up to explore the possibility of converging other schemes with the rural employment guarantee scheme. With respect to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme itself, changes in the way payments of wages are done, i.e. through savings accounts for job card holders, insurance coverage for the poorest of the poor, improved monitoring works in process, greater inclusion of women in the supervisory process and initiatives to incorporate social accountability tools by the government in its development operations were evident.

Strengths and weaknesses

Innovative use of the social accountability tools, advocacy with policy makers and the various advocacy strategies prove to be important strengths in this ongoing work.

Weaknesses include a failure to use the report card results to improve the impact of schemes for the beneficiaries and the financial and constraints which prevented an ongoing deployment of these tools for sustained improvement

Key Learning Points

The use of social accountability mechanisms for assessment of service delivery is known for strengthening the demand side of the service delivery. It is believed that a strong demand side will automatically lead to better service delivery. Here with the implementation of this project, it is clear that better rapport with the service providers and service recipients lead more effective delivery of services. At the same time, it is better to work in a collaborative, rather than a confrontationist way with the government. For this, strong partnerships need to be created.

Exercise Questions

Some questions that readers can reflect over include

- What factors differ in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan?
- What appear to be the strengths of the different tools?
- How would you choose between a citizen report card and a community score card?
- What factors determine the selection of a social accountability tool?

8. An Evaluation of Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in Rajasthan, India

Launched: October 01, 2005

Current Status: Concluded

Major Partners: The World Bank & CUTS CART, Department of Rural Development, Government of Rajasthan

Introduction

The Mid-day Meal Scheme is a key component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Programme, a flagship effort by the Government of India to provide access to education for all. It is based on the premise that the provision of a wholesome meal for the very poor children in urban and rural India will go a long way in improving the children's health, and impacting favourably upon increased retention, reduce drop out rates, and improving educational outcomes. Funding support is provided, and operational guidelines for the way in which the meal is to be provided, its nutritional content. The scheme also has an elaborate social audit mechanism that calls for community participation. In another case study reported in this edition, the impact of community participation in monitoring the mid day meal scheme has on children's education.²⁵

In Rajasthan, the CUTS Center for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CART) undertook a pilot project to evaluate the implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in the state of Rajasthan. This was an independent monitoring of a pilot which was also expected to develop and test a methodology that could provide regular user feedback to service providers which would lead to better implementation of the MDMS in the State.. This case is an illustration of the success of civic engagement in bringing change and accountability in the implementation of MDMS.

The Context

Food insecurity, and the threat it poses to the health and development of children, is of critical concern to governments in developing countries. One strategy of government intervention gaining attention and international support has been the implementation of school meal programmes. By supporting health, nutrition and education goals, school meal programme can have a multi-pronged impact on a nation's overall social and economic development. Moreover, while such programmes address immediate, short-term hunger, they also incorporate a nutritional

²⁵ See the Case Study on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Kohlapur District of Maharashtra.

education component to educate children and families on health, nutrition, and attaining food sufficiency.

Every year a huge budget (For example, it was around 3860 Crores (around 200 million USD approximately) for the year 2007-08) is allocated for the successful implementation of the programme by the central government of India. The outcome of this huge public expenditure, which can have a multi-dimensional effect on its future workforce and the status of the country, needs to be improved.

MidDay Meal Scheme is one of the food based schemes in the country, which is directly monitored by the Supreme Court of India, as result of the land mark verdict of November, 2001 based on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by the People Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Rajasthan unit. Hence in addition to the monitoring reports of various commissioners appointed by the apex court, the court was interested in getting genuine feedback from independent agencies with regard to the implementation of the scheme in the country. Rajasthan was one of the states where local resistance was reported with regard to the implementation of some of the directives, e.g. appointment of cooks from the backward sections) of the apex court.

In addition, there was genuine interest on the part of the state Government, especially the then Chief Minister, Ms. Vasundhara Raje, to improve the delivery of the mid day meal scheme in the state. She herself visited several schools, while the meal was served, tasted it along with the children and had given further orders to improve the quality of the food. She also directed the district collectors and Superintendent of Police (SPs) to visits the schools and to check the quality of the meal in their respective districts. In addition, the state Government also invited several private players such as Naandi Foundation, Akshayapatra to involve themselves in the delivery of the MDMS, though there was local resistance as well as different views on this move. This all created an enabling environment for doing an independent and scientific assessment of the implementation of the scheme in the state and to come out with the key findings with regard to the highlights of the service delivery as well as a set of recommendations to address the gaps, if any in the delivery mechanism.

A combination of two social accountability tools, namely the Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) and the Citizen Report Card (CRC) were used in this study. The fund flow, however, is a common phenomenon in any scheme and the use of PETS became very important tool as in MDMS to track the flow of fund as well as food grains. The tool helped immensely in gathering information regarding allocations, transfers and expenditure of fund as well as food grains. The Citizen Report Card tool was used to generate citizen satisfaction scores on the management and delivery of the mid day meal in schools. School going children and parents of such children were covered for this purpose. This also covered

the other actors like teachers, cooks to cull out issues related to their roles and responsibilities.

A scoping visit was conducted in two nearby villages of Chittorgarh to study the real situation in the primary schools and to form a strategy for the study. This was followed by field research consisting of visits to the selected primary schools to observe meal preparation and distribution and detailed semi-structured interviews with government school teachers, parents, students and cooks of the primary schools. Comprehensive questionnaires were prepared for all the stakeholders covering every aspect of the MDM. Wherever possible, implementation authorities were also taken into confidence. They, as well as government officials and community stakeholders were extensively canvassed in order to draw their support for this effort.

Care was taken to ask questions in a non-suggestive manner, and where possible, the accuracy of interview responses was also triangulated. Other stakeholders like teachers, cooks, and local government information. Separate questionnaires specially designed for the survey covering all aspects of the MDMS were used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data through detailed semi-structured interviews.

If the Citizen Report Card necessitated the collection of large amounts of field data, the Participatory Expenditure could be carried out by collecting secondary data on allocations, utilizations, and flows of fund and food grains at each level of transactions. Secondary data for the pilot such as information on allotment, receipt, and utilization of funds and food grains were gathered at all four levels. - the state, district, block, and school levels. After data collection, the primary and secondary data were cleaned, corroborated, and analyzed. The release of funds and food grains across various tiers was tracked along with the timeliness and quality of such releases. Close liaison with officials and reputation of CUTS helped in obtaining data.

Recommendations that emerged from the analysis and discussions were documented and presented to the *Zilla Parishad*,²⁶ the nodal department of the state government, and other interested parties after incorporating the feedback from the district- and state-level dissemination meetings. In addition the final report was submitted to the Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court to monitor the implementation of the scheme. Media had also given wider coverage for the study.

Results

The process of CRC resulted in a massive amount of data that yielded numerous interesting insights and observations. The PETS also revealed

²⁶ District administration

several incidences of delay in receiving budget and food grain allocations caused by poor budgeting and monitoring. Lack of basic infrastructure in schools, marginal role of GPs, Increased Involvement of Teachers in Mid-day meal preparation was prominently found in the findings.

The recommendations that emerged on how to plug the many loopholes in the scheme were taken to the relevant policy makers and implementation personnel. The arrangements for releasing funds to schools three months in advance, transfer of fund into the account of School Development Management Committee (SDMC), attempts to address the problem of kitchens, storage rooms, utensils, and so forth in schools and several other instant decisions were taken after the dissemination of findings.

In Rajasthan, the Panchayati Raj Department is the nodal department, responsible for the overall implementation of the MDMS. At the state level, the Mid-Day Meal Commissioner monitors and supervises implementation of the scheme. At the district level, the *Zilla Parishad* implements the MDMS. At the district level, the (Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (MME) Committee oversees implementation of the MDMS. A village-level MME committee, formed by the Gram Panchayat, comprising of a male and female ward member, a school headmaster, two representatives from parents, the local auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), and the secretary of the Gram Sabha, is responsible for monitoring and supervising implementation of the MDMS in the village. The meal is supposed to be prepared and served in the presence of at least three members of the committee. In this case, most of the officials of the Panchayati Raj responsible for the implementation of the scheme, except for a few (ex. Additional District Collector, CEO of Zilla Parishad & the District Education Officer (DEO)) were vested stakeholders against and on the other side the students, parents and teachers were for.

Since it was an attempt by a civil society organization to evaluate a Government scheme, there were apprehensions in the minds of Government officials. Non-participation in the dissemination meeting or rejecting the findings by the concerned authorities in the beginning was a major challenge. To address this problem, efforts were made to highlight the positive aspects of the mid day meal scheme before drawing any attention to the gaps in service provision. Initial resentment about findings and absence from the dissemination meetings gradually gave way to support.

Sustainability

Since there has been the support of a proactive judiciary on the one hand and a genuine interest on the side of the state government to improve the quality of service delivery, the chances of project sustainability are very high in this example. Further, because local people send their children to the nearby Government school, they remain concerned about the quality of the meal served in the schools and expressed such concern. This study

had helped in bringing this concern to the forefront. Since there was also a space in the design of the service delivery for the local Gram Panchayat, Parents, teachers, local health worker etc., the chance of sustainability both financially and institutionally become very high in this example.

The *Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey* is a quantitative exercise that traces the flow of resources from the origin to the destination and determines the location and magnitude of any leakages in service delivery. PETS not only highlight the use and misuse of public money, but also give insight into cost efficiency, decentralization, consumer perceptions, and accountability issues. It was selected for the reason of involvement of transactions of both fund and food grains at many levels in the scheme.

The *Citizen Report Card* is a commonly used tool for participatory impact evaluation. The CRC is a survey instrument that taps information on users' awareness, access to, and satisfaction with publicly provided services. It contains information about the key constraints the poor face in assessing public services, their views about the quality of services, and their experiences in interacting with public officials. CRC is a powerful tool to get the feedback of the beneficiaries in case of any service delivery.

Considering the objectives of the study and the sector, this was the best available SAc combination.

Communication

Advocacy tools for communication to various stakeholders included drawing attention to the issues during the exploratory visits, dissemination meetings with government officials on the one side and villagers on the other, the production and wide dissemination of a documentary film and coverage by mass media.

Impact

To understand the longer term impact of government attempts to improve the implementation of the Mid Day Meal Scheme, tracer studies were done at select intervals. Two such studies have been completed to date. Both studies show that there have been changes, whether in increased financial allocation for cooking costs; Awareness of cleanliness and hygiene among children and parents, and improved infrastructure for schools.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Like all other initiatives, there are strengths and weaknesses

Some of the strengths include the potential and effectiveness of using a combination of social accountability tools to achieve multiple objectives. Others relate to the benefits of working in close collaboration with the policy makers and service providers; while still others include the fact that the Government finally owned the study and the recommendations made.

Community participation remains limited and consequently a weakness because social audit has not been included in the Mid Day Meal Scheme component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme. The social accountability tools used also require some knowledge of survey methods and budget analysis and the community needs some capacity building before it can use these tools effectively. So, the civic engagement done by civil society organizations did not touch the community at the core, but rather remained marginal to their lives

Key Learning points

The importance of building rapport with all stakeholders cannot be understressed. Similarly, a thorough knowledge of tools by civil society organizations is not enough; this understanding has to be transferred to all stakeholders in a programme. Externally driven social accountability tools need a great deal of advocacy support both at the grassroots and at the level of officials.

Issues to Reflect Over

An in-depth understanding the local situations, nature and inclination of supply side particularly at local level helps to formulate the strategy for enhancing demand side of accountability. For community engagement in any scheme, people should be given the space to make them feel that they will be heard and are at no risk when their express their views. Space has to be created, whether by legislation, a proactive judiciary, or by committed officials so that social accountability tools can do what they are designed to do best—improve service delivery for schemes for the poor.

Exercise Questions

Every state is providing mid day meals through the Mid-day Meal Programme in India. How is the Mid Day Meal Scheme working in your state or district?

Can you identify what means of social accountability are being used in the scheme?

If not, how would you introduce some accountability tools?

What specific benefit do you think the use of social accountability could bring to improving programmes such as the Mid Day Meal Scheme?

9. Testing the Potential of RTI Act as a Social Accountability tool in Rajasthan, India,

Launched: March 01, 2007

Current Status: Concluded

Major Partners: Partnership Transparency Fund (PTF) & CUTS CART
Government of Rajasthan, State Information Commission, Rajasthan

Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) Act became a reality in India in 2005 after a fifteen civil society and people's movement to eliminate corruption and bring transparency to government functioning. To see how well the RTI Act was working as a social accountability tool, several civil society partners in Rajasthan alongside the State Information Commission, tested the Act as a tool to combat corruption in the Rural Development and *Panchayati Raj Institutions* (PRIs) in two districts of Rajasthan. This case illustrates the engagement of people in getting their grievances redressed with the help of this Act

The Context

Rural development and *Panchayati Raj* departments are two departments responsible for transforming rural India. are essentially linked to this snail's pace of development. A special focus on these departments would help to understand the use of the Act in rural settings.

The enactment of Right To Information Act took place only little more than one year before the beginning of this intervention. The Act is being increasingly used as a tool and its ripple effect is growing wider. Governments of the country and state have been under pressure for properly implementing the provisions of RTI because of involvement of civil society organizations who have used the Act to extract public information from government offices. Government officials themselves use the Act to seek information regarding their career paths. Media use the Act as a routine part of investigative and development reporting.

Despite being the hub of the Right To Information movement in India, Rajasthan is facing a problem of lack of awareness among common citizens as well as government officials about this powerful act. Apathy and lack of awareness even among government officials was common. In many cases, the employee appointed as Public Information Officer/Assistant Public Information Officer (PIO/APIO), was not found aware of his role and responsibilities. It was very difficult to reach up to PIO/APIO in any department and file an RTI application because of many

reasons like absence of any such information on bulletin board, the absence of a format for filing an RTI application, Many a time the Principal Information Officer or his/her assistant refused to take application from common citizens. There was no cash collection window for depositing the fee for filing the application under RTI Act in rural areas and applicants would have to run from pillar to post. Proactive disclosure of information under the Act and attempt to publicize public information was a distant dream.

In addition, a challenge faced was the lack of commitment on the part of the state Government for the effective implementation of the Act in the state in letter and spirit.

A baseline survey at the beginning of the intervention showed awareness of the act to be very low. The formation of Consortiums of Groups for Combating Corruption (CGCC) in Rajasthan with 15-20 members in the focus areas of Rural Development to create awareness, and to help people use the Act The members were properly trained to perform a vigilant and proactive role in their respective areas for generating awareness on RTI, hand-holding support to the people filing RTI, to deal with the corrupt practices in their respective areas. The various concerned stakeholders were taken in the loop from the inception of the intervention. The findings of the baseline survey were disseminated among them and later on the when CGCCs started functioning, other experiences like results of various applications filing under RTI, instances of reduced corruption, other experiences, and recommendations for better implementation of the Act etc were disseminated in various meetings. Resourceful, informative and effective IEC material and Quarterly Newsletters were developed to assist the awareness generation campaign for advocacy at National and sub National level.

As concluding activities under the intervention, focused group discussions especially with the RTI applicants and phone survey were accomplished. Taking the findings of the baseline survey in to consideration, the impact assessment was done.

Results

The results of the effort showed that it is possible to build vibrant civil society groups empowered enough with resources in terms of knowledge and information at local levels. Once the functional network of Civil Society Organizations and Community Based Organizations started working as a watchdog as well as a local resource centre for the filing of RTI applications and their follow up, at least 779 RTI applications have been filed through the consortium members.

The government officials from state information commission readily accepted the substantial increase in number of RTI applications from both

government officials and rural masses. In many cases, the very act of filing the RTI application resulted in improving service delivery or removing a deadlock caused by non payment of a bribe. In addition, other available mechanisms were also used to address public grievances such as regular meetings between officials and villages, Gram Sabhas or Village Adalats (courts)

While victims of corruption, the marginalized and common people, beneficiaries of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department and CSOs against corruption, media were the major stakeholders who supported the intervention while corrupt officials of Rural Development and the Panchayati Raj Department, government officials and other service providers burdened with the extra work of providing information, were often very antagonistic.

Sustainability

By the time the intervention ended, a vibrant informal structure in the form of citizen groups has taken place in Ajmer and Jaipur Divisional Headquarters of the state. These citizen groups are empowered enough with resources in terms of knowledge, information, active support from functional network of 42 civil society organizations and non government.

The Intervention had also created a synergy in various actions/movements combating corruption at national and sub-national level. The production of the quarterly newsletter and final document (FD) had been an effective tool of advocacy for the CGCC and generating awareness in the society at large on corruption issues.

Communication and dissemination of information and knowledge gained was done through consultation meetings at various level, dissemination workshops; publications and distribution of bilingual quarterly newsletters; RTI facilitation stalls at rural fairs; and other information, education and communication materials such as pamphlets.

Impact

The project intervention created a deep and wide impact in various government departments on the one hand and poor common citizenry of rural areas in target area on the other. An enabling environment at grassroots was created and a vibrant informal group of CGCC was formed for supporting the community to make corruption-combating attempts more sustainable and long lasting. An impact of this intervention has been the increase in number of applications filed under the Right to Information Act.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Some of the strengths included the enabling environment in Rajasthan with regard to RTI; the potential of RTI in enhancing transparency and accountability; the role of CGCC as a watch-dog and the hand-holding done; the support from media and other CSOs; and the implementation of NREGA, which is having in-built clause of using RTI.

Weaknesses of this effort included the apathy and opposition from the stakeholders against the interventions; low awareness levels about the provisions of Act among the masses as well as among concerned officials; the fear among the citizens to go against the powerful government authorities; the non-allocation of separate budget for the purpose of executing RTI provisions in the beginning.

Key Learning Points

RTI Act has a great potential of engaging citizen for bringing accountability and transparency as it involves citizens to demand information from the service providers and become informed citizens.

Issues to Reflect Over

If used well, the Right to Information Act is one of the most powerful tools in the hands of the citizen. However, its effective use as an accountability tool rests upon an awareness of when and how to use the tool to demand accountability.

Exercise Questions

Think about your own context as a public official. Consider the extent of knowledge you have about the Right to Information Act, your rights as a citizen under it and your responsibilities as an official under the Act.

Read a summary of its provisions on the RTI website (<http://righttoinformation.gov.in/>) or look through the Frequently Asked Questions on the website to familiarize yourself with its provisions

Reflect and then write a paragraph on your own reaction to the Act and on what you see as your responsibilities under it.

Case Studies involving E-governance tools

10. A Case Study On E Procurement As A Social Accountability Tool

Launched: 2001

Current Status: continuing

Major Partners: Government of Andhra Pradesh, C1 India Private Limited

Introduction

Corruption can be defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Procurement constitutes a substantial percentage of government activities. Consisting of two parts, works (the construction of roads, buildings, dams, and other public works) and services—the use of private firms to provide citizen services); procurement is perhaps the one process which has been accused of large scale corruption at all levels.

By bringing transparency into the procurement processes, governments can reduce corruption, improve service delivery, increase cost efficiencies and savings in public expenditure.

Procurement is one area social accountability principles, tools and mechanisms can be used very well. Social accountability tools for transparency include those laws (such as the Sunshine laws of the U.S) in the 1970s requiring regulatory authorities' meetings, decisions and records to be made available to the public. Transparent procedures include open meetings, financial disclosure statements, the freedom of information legislation, budgetary review, audits, integrity pacts, etc, and the use of information and communication technologies to simplify, systematize, and negate many of the weaknesses of the manual processing of tendering and procurement.

E Procurement is the application of today's information and communication technologies (ICTs) for the procurement work of government. From the use of web portals for public disclosure of information; to the use of end-to-end solutions through tracking softwares, it is possible not just to reduce corruption, but also to increase accountability of governments to citizens.

A well-implemented e-procurement system can enable government departments to connect directly with their suppliers including management of correspondence, bids, previous pricing, etc. The objective of e-procurement was to bring about wider publicity of government procurement opportunities and ensure transparency, not to mention cost saving through higher competition and demand aggregation. Doing away with the physical interface with government

staff itself is a major catalyst in bringing down corruption.

An understanding of e Procurement as an accountability tool through the lens of the most successful e Procurement programme in India, i.e. Andhra Pradesh, becomes essential, if one is to implement accountability mechanisms in government procurement

The Context

Traditionally, procurement in Government departments has always been carried out through a **manual tendering process**. This process involves obtaining internal approvals of the project, publishing a Notice Inviting Tenders (NIT) in several media outlets, bid submissions (voluminous sheaths of paper) by suppliers, bid evaluations by buyers, and finally, the awarding of the procurement order and signing of agreements. The complete process requires a long chain of internal authorizations and scrutiny (at times involving several departments), several visits by suppliers to departments, and the generation of reams of paper-based statements and evaluations- a process that is time consuming and expensive.

Procurement is considered a sensitive function, with all related information tightly controlled and closely guarded by government departments, resulting in a severe lack of transparency in the entire process. This lack of transparency leads to misinformation and a lack of trust in the system by the bidders, media and the citizens. In addition, extensive human interaction in the process, in the past, led to subjectivity and discrimination in the advertisement, delays in preparation of tender documents and issue of tender documents to potential bidders; the formation of cartels and favouritism among different bidders for the same project, lobbying and peddling of influence through political interventions; physical threats to bidders from competitors; tender boxes at multiple locations and the physical transportation of these boxes under security cover; tampering of files, delays in finalization of tenders caused by red tape, lack of transparency and manual movement of files across an administrative hierarchy.

Breeding corruption at all levels, manual tendering and procurement was a system, which needed overhaul if any governance reforms were to take place.

In Andhra Pradesh

Championed by N. Chandrababu Naidu, IT savvy political leader of Andhra Pradesh saw E procurement as a ‘killer application’, and initiated the process of reforming the Andhra Pradesh procurement process. E procurement was identified in 2001 as a core eGovproject with the objectives of leveraging buying power through demand aggregation,

providing better value for government money, creating a level playing field for all suppliers, improving business for both government and industry, and creating an increased transparency, monitoring and control of the procurement process.

Once it was recognized that setting up an e Procurement Exchange is not mere technology but a major reform of government, challenges in implementation were addressed. These included interdepartmental coordination, change management (attitudes and processes); security and authentication issues, and institutionalization

When any new concept is introduced, there are vested interests ranged for and against the innovation. There is always a difficulty in explaining the concept to different stakeholders and in gaining their support. Early champions have to struggle to bring about consensus. The same holds true for e Procurement as well. In this case it was the government employees who had to be convinced about the advantages of the application; the task was Herculean. Change management was the greatest challenge in making e-procurement successful. Taking all stakeholders on board, workshops, discussions, training and third party security audit helped in overcoming resistance, says Suresh Chanda, Secretary, Information Technology, Government of Andhra Pradesh.

With most of the stakeholders being government officials, it was the officer community who had to lead by example, which meant that once the officers demonstrated their willingness to use this application, it was only a matter of time before the rest of the officials accepted the idea.

Complete support of both political leadership and senior levels of bureaucracy made advocacy for e procurement easier. This was done through the identification of internal champions some of whom were senior government bureaucrats such as Mr. Ajay Sahni and Mr. J. Satyanarayana and project officers, Mr. P. Ramaraju and K. Bikshapati, A series of stakeholder consultations with both government and professional bodies and trade associations formed an integral part of the implementation plan. Parallel training of government employees to provide hands on understanding of the software and the processes took place. Private industry and suppliers of goods and services to government were the first to come on board.

The Design Model

Based on a public-private partnership model, e Procurement in Andhra Pradesh envisaged a partnership to provide the implementation of E procurement functionality across all departments, customizing the software, setting up and managing hardware and software, training, help desk services, operation and maintenance.

The e-Procurement system in Andhra Pradesh has been developed on the public-private partnership (PPP) model. The entire capital cost, operations and management cost is the responsibility of the service provider who gets a transaction charge from the bidder for each transaction.

Presently the transaction charge is 0.03% of the estimated cost of a bid with a ceiling of INR 10,000 for tender up to INR 500 million and a maximum of INR 25,000/- for tenders above INR 500 million.

The e-procurement platform used by the AP government is built on centralized tier-3 architecture with web-based interface for the departments as well as for bidders. To ensure business continuity in case of main site failure owing to unforeseen disasters, provision has also been made for a Disaster Recovery site.

The nodal department where e procurement is anchored is the Department of Information Technology and Communications, Government of Andhra Pradesh, which has a project office for the purpose. The project office is staffed with a full time project director and supporting functional, technical, and security teams. The Department maintains an ongoing monitoring and close scrutiny of the entire e procurement process. Since the service is maintained by a private service provider, all departments become user agencies for the service.

The pilot roll out in four departments began in 2003, i.e. Irrigation, Roads & Buildings, Andhra Pradesh Technology Services Ltd and Andhra Pradesh Medical and Health Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd) The pilot roll out preceded the operationalization of the e procurement platform in 28 (90 per cent) of the departments—both internal and in public sector funded institutions-- by 2006 and by 2007, 12 government departments, 19 public sector units, 100 municipalities, 5 universities, 300 locations across the state, 1500 government users, and 22,000 vendors, were using the e procurement platform²⁷ These departments account for about 70 per cent of the procurement spend in Andhra Pradesh²⁸

Lessons from the A.P. Experience

Clearly, support of political leadership and the formation of a high powered steering committee were important factors for the successful implementation of e procurement. Initially chaired by the Special Chief Secretary, Transport and Buildings Department, the high-power committee is currently chaired by the Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh with members including all secretaries, heads of departments, and representatives of the service sector. The steering committee meets every two weeks to review the system and to take any decisions which are then binding on all.

²⁷ <http://www.eprocurement.gov.in/default.asp>

²⁸ Agarwal, Vivek Public Private Partnership in eGP. Presentation made on March 12th, 2005.

A massive change management process which included identification of internal champions and extensive capacity building efforts resulted in the development of core expertise within the user department as the government has created a cadre of committed professionals who are continuously trained on new features and applications of the software.

Critical to the success of the system has been the highest level of political support; the high powered steering committee constantly monitoring the process; clear policies and objectives; standardization of processes; extensive capacity building and the development of internal core expertise; the public-private partnership model, and active help desk support.

The system is not without its challenges. There has to be constant and close scrutiny of the model followed by the state. Extensive and ongoing coordination between the government and the private partner is essential. Acceptance and change has come easier in businesses and supplies than among government employees. Programme management with policy, implementation and monitoring and evaluation are critical to success.

Sustainability

Andhra Pradesh's e procurement process has sustained itself despite changes in political leadership and at senior levels of bureaucracy. The experience has shown that it is possible to institutionalize a reform embedding it deep into the structure of government.

Impact

An external impact assessment carried out by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad in 2007 on various e governance reforms included the e procurement experience of Andhra Pradesh. The assessment showed that respondents who have used both the manual and the computerized systems have overwhelmingly preferred the computerized system as the efficiency of the system has reduced the cost and time of accessing services by half. Quality of service delivery and quality of governance were also perceived to have improved moderately with computerization.

What was the impact? Within the first two years of implementation, transactions crossed Rs.15,000 crores (USD 3 billion), making it one of the largest e-procurement exchange in the world. Thousands of transactions have been completed and a single tender worth Rs. 855 Crores (USD 190) million was processed through eProcurement.

On any given day, the number of tenders closed is around 150; the number of bids received are around 700; more than ten thousand documents are uploaded. To achieve this level of transactions, more

than 1000 officers have been trained on e procurement, and a huge number of small suppliers and contractors from across the country are able to actively participate in a process which was the stranglehold of cartels earlier.

Without any direct costs to itself, the Government of Andhra Pradesh had saved over 10 million USD within two years; the reduction in tender processing time had reduced from six months to 45 days; while the average bids per tender increased by a 100 per cent,

The A.P. e procurement experience is considered a global best practice in government reform as it brings both efficiencies and transparency into the government procurement process. It has won several national and international awards from international agencies. The clearest endorsement of this experience is when the Government of India has mandated that all state follow the A.P. lead and put e procurement into place from April 2007 onwards. Based on the A.P. government's experience, almost all states and centrally governed territories, as well as the Central Government are in various stages of implementation of e procurement platforms.

Although most states in India are now actively adopting e-procurement for tendering and purchase purposes, a few have led from the front. States like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat are a few noteworthy ones, which introduced e-procurement in government departments even before the Union government did. By doing so, they managed to achieve early what no other state could do: doing away with tender mafias to ensure equal participation of contractors and bringing in transparency in tender opening and making information available to all bidders once the tender was opened.

Issues to Reflect Over

The Government of India has mandated E procurement in all states from April 01, 2007. What are the key issues you would prioritize in setting up an e procurement portal in your department? Would you choose to adopt, adapt, this model or create a new one? Why

Exercise Questions

Readers are invited to go to website <https://tender.eprocurement.gov.in> and browse through its many features and to examine the different ways in which they could use this tool in their own contexts.

References

Impact Assessment Study Of E-Government Projects In India Center for e-Governance, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and submitted to the Government of India, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Department of IT, 2007

11. Case Study Of Lokvani: Citizen Empowerment Through E-Accountability

Launch Date: November 2004

Status: Continuing

Partners: Lokvani Society- An Autonomous Registered Body

Introduction

Global evidence has shown that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have a tremendous potential in improving governance, reducing corruption, and cutting costs while providing the same high quality of service for both the rich and the poor.

The Lokvani project was initiated in Sitapur District of Uttar Pradesh in November 2004. It sought to help citizens' access information and redress their grievances in a time-bound, transparent and corruption free manner. Initiated from service provider end, Lokvani used Information and Communication Technologies to create a horizontal system of accountability replacing the need for the citizens from both urban and distant rural areas to physically visit concerned offices. The case is particularly interesting as it is an example of effective use of e-governance with intensive citizen engagement from Uttar Pradesh—a state which otherwise is known to be a laggard with respect to technology adoption.

The Context

Districts typically consist of very large populations spread over a vast area including both rural and urban settlements. Citizens seeking information or grievance redressal might have to travel large distances and visit multiple offices investing in a lot of their time. On the other side, the process of service delivery is marred with inefficiency and corruption. Part of the problem is that from a service provider's point of view, district administration has a very large population to serve, and hampered by rigid constraints in bureaucracy and hierarchies, without technological support, service delivery is extremely difficult and cumbersome.

Lokvani was an e-governance initiative championed by the District Collector of Sitapur Mr. Amod Kumar as a public sector reform enabled by ICT's. The project received firm backing of the Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Initially, the idea was to share information about works and expenses to the public and the flat virtual space of Internet would help overcome some of the hierarchy in the real world. Lokvani provided a practical shape to the Right to Information Act in Uttar Pradesh, information could be sought or a complaint could now be lodged from a local kiosk and a receipt obtained.

The model for Lokvani was the Gyandoot²⁹ project implemented in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh and Jan Mitra³⁰ project implemented in Jhalwar district of Rajasthan. A team of three officials consisting of Sub Divisional Magistrate, Sitapur, the District Information Officer, Block Development Officer were sent to study and prepare a report on these projects. The report was then discussed by the six Sub Divisional Magistrates of the district, Additional District Magistrate, the City Magistrate and the Chief Development Officer. Following these discussions the outline of the programme emerged. India's National informatics Center was approached to design the software and user interface in Hindi as it is both the official as well as the local language. To keep the programme autonomous, a Lokvani Society was registered with Amod Kumar as President.

Typically, in an earlier scenario, an aggrieved citizen would file a complaint through a visit to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's tehsil³¹ office. In a likely scenario he is expected to encounter physical and administrative barriers in doing the same. Following filing of the complaint if complainant is unhappy with the response he can then visit the District Magistrate's office and queue up for an audience. The process could take an entire day or more.

Promoting a digital mode of functioning was not easy as officials were used to an older system requiring lot of paper work and long queues. The older system lacked transparency and its functioning was shrouded in secrecy. Such a system was easily exploited by the corrupt with poorer citizens finding themselves on the receiving end.

Lokvani used public-private partnership model for turning local Internet kiosks into Lokvani Kendras (centres). The privately owned Kendras provide information services relating to grievance redressal and land records. To attract people in big numbers, Lokvani project started as a complaint redressal mechanism. A citizen could visit nearest Lokvani Kendra and register his complaint, the District Magistrate and his committee of six look at the individual grievances and forward them to the

²⁹ Gyandoot is the low cost, self-sustainable and community owned rural Intranet project in the rural and tribal district of Dhar in Madhya Pradesh. Computers in 34 village centres in ten Blocks of the district are connected through an Intranet network. Local rural youth act as entrepreneurs for running cybercafes-cum-cyberoffices on commercial lines without salary or stipend. This Intranet system has been named Gyandoot (Messenger of Information). For more details, see <http://www.gyandoot.nic.in/gyandoot/intranet.html>

³⁰ The main objective of the **Jan Mitra project** is to provide a single-window facility to citizens to access government work, simplify various government functions. The system simplifies various government procedures through computerization. The project has installed 28 computer kiosks throughout the province in rural towns and villages. 34 departmental offices have also been linked with the Jan Mitra server in Jhalawar district. The system offers citizens the ability to file grievances with local governments, obtain land records, and bid for government and development agency grants. In order to further develop the Jan Mitra system, the Government of Rajasthan has recruited scores of young entrepreneurs to open kiosks in villages throughout the province. For more information, see <http://www.gga.org.in/node/103>

³¹ lowest revenue collecting unit in administration, usually located at a sub district level

concerned officer thus reducing the need for the citizen to locate the concerned officer herself. A time frame is also set by the committee for a resolution or reply to the complaint again sent through Lokvani. If the issue was not resolved by the date mentioned the officer concerned was required to report to the District Magistrate. If the issue was not within the jurisdiction of the District administration it is forwarded to the concerned person or body.

Within the first year of the project some 70,000 users had filed their grievances through Lokvani. Following its success, a Government Order was issued on June 16 2005 to replicate Lokvani in the entire state of U.P. In order to sustain the initiative, a State-level apex society called "Lokvani Uttar Pradesh" was created in 2006 to be the nodal agency for coordination and supervision of the functioning of district level Lokvani societies. By July 15 2005 Lokvani had resolved 24,000 of the received 28,000 complaints, 171 complaints were not resolved within the due date. By December 2007, the complaints received were 107, 453 through the 700 Lokvani kiosks across the state, out of which 102, 648 complaints were addressed.

Lokvani tried out a unique public private partnership model for setting up Internet kiosks. Existing internet kiosks and computer training facilities were leveraged and upgraded to Lokvani Kendras in the first place. Lokvani team identified young entrepreneurs to set up Lokvani Kendras; these entrepreneurs would take licenses to operate by paying a nominal fee to Lokvani and generate revenues by charging a user fee from the citizens. Other than this, Lokvani provided no other financial support to the kiosks, Lokvani team believed that this would encourage entrepreneurs promote Lokvani services and lead to intense civic engagement.

Lokvani was conceived as an e-governance initiative to bridge the digital divide--one that could be used by the citizens at large and not just by the educated. In return for charging a user fee, kiosk operators fills in the information on behalf of the citizens, and thus even poor and computer illiterate could avail the facilities of Lokvani.

The services provided by Lokvani included

1. Submission, monitoring and resolution of Public grievances
2. Certificates for birth, death, caste, income and domicile
3. e-tendering
4. Status of arms license applications
5. Local employment opportunities
6. Online land records
7. Information and application form for various government schemes
8. Information about various government works/ schemes/ expenditure/ beneficiaries
9. Financial details of expenditure on development

10. Various lists of beneficiaries for government housing, scholarships, pensions etc
11. Provident fund account status for primary teachers in government schools
12. Allotment of food grains and funds for local bodies
13. Details of work carried out under Local Area Development Scheme for Member of Parliament and Members of State Legislature

Though the government officials and infrastructure were not very encouraging, private entrepreneurs rose to the occasion as per the Lokvani teams' expectations. Kiosk owners advertised the initiative through banner ads, wall paintings and pamphlets. Government or the Lokvani society did not advertise in the newspapers but they did ensure the news about the initiative was widely published in the local newspapers. Media was also effective in monitoring the initiative and helping in ensuring efficient redressal by putting up the pressure on officials.

Sustainability

Once the pilot showed a success, the initiative was upscaled throughout the state. It was, however, noted that the number of users levelled off at around 70,000 per month in the Sitapur district. Also, change in political leadership at the state level led to competing initiatives like the Tehsil Divas. Once a month, on a Tehsil Divas, all district administration officials along with the Tehsil officials have face-to-face meetings with citizens to redress their grievances. The new initiative gives a choice to the citizens to use either of the platforms and to judge for themselves which is better. However, providing such choices does indicate that the government's total support for the Lokvani is no longer there. As in other cases this case shows that sustainability is dependent on effective and growing participation from the poor on one hand and political support on the other.

An independent report by the Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow showed that, according to kiosk operators, the grievance redressal system was efficient but the same could not be said of the quality of the resolution. The study found that the project was heavily subsidized and therefore cost effective. All fixed and direct costs were borne by the National Informatics Centre³². Sustainability remains possible as long as these fixed costs are met from government funding. Whether or not the project can sustain itself in Sitapur or across Uttar Pradesh will be largely dependent upon the question "who foots the bill?"

Key Learning Points

³² As part of India's Information Technology promotion policy, Government of India underwrites the cost of establishing common service centres (IT kiosks) in villages.

The independent study by Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow, termed Lokvani as a 'person-driven initiative'. This is important because champions do play a crucial role in conceptualizing planning and setting up the system. The question of sustainability comes up when champions move on to other positions. Amod Kumar has since been promoted to the position of Special Secretary of Information Technology, Government of Uttar Pradesh. Recent evidence from the Lokvani suggests that the initiative has lost some of its momentum. The reasons are varied, political leadership and changing priorities as also if quality is not consistently maintained. Amod Kumar has been quoted in the study as being concerned about whether the initiative would sustain beyond his tenure. Lokvani has been institutionalised, but with changing political priorities it has suffered from some neglect. More recently political parties in UP are building on the resentment generated by computerization as it cuts into their ability to build political bases.

The project and its champion Amod Kumar have won several international and national awards:

Issues to Reflect Over

Critical to the success of this particular project was the champion and the support he got from Chief Minister. A key issue that needs to be addressed is can a program be scaled up and be successful without the same champions in charge? Can the projects that are dependent on support from political leadership to be successful in the first place be scaled up and continue to be successful when political change brings in a new leader with different priorities?

Exercise Questions

Readers are invited to undertake a web search for similar initiatives in their own municipalities. Further, with the government's Mission 2007 and the plan to place a multipurpose common service centre in every village in India, can a project like Lokvani be scaled up? If so, what are the key principles of good practice in this case that could be replicated or scaled up?

References

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- Interview with Prof. Mohammed A. Abid, Administrative Staff College of India on March 25th, 2009. Prof Abid conducted the field study of Lokvani project in Sitapur as part of the Spot Study team for Prime Minister's

Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2006-07

12. Case Study of Versatile Online Information for Citizen Empowerment--(VOICE)--Citizen Engagement Through Interactive Television

Launch date: 1998 citizen engagement since 2001;

Continued till 2003.

Major Partners: Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, Andhra Pradesh Government, Government of India, World Bank

Introduction

Any form of government-citizen engagement takes place through communication—whether these are big media such as newspapers, radio and television, or small media such as banners, posters, or new media such as Internet and other web based technologies. Both citizens and government can use media effectively for information and advocacy purposes. Media provide visibility, transparency, and help improve services while reducing corruption.

The Versatile Online Information for Citizen Empowerment or VOICE is a project initiated by a City Government- the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC), Andhra Pradesh to improve transparency and reduce corruption in its operations. Initially, when the VOICE project used the Internet to provide services to people, it lacked widespread citizen participation, as Internet penetration levels were quite low. The project then moved on to local interactive television to gain from greater television and telephone penetration in the urban areas. A significant increase was seen in the usage of the service provided by VMC. The case illustrates that a multiple media approach is better suited to enhance citizen engagement in e-governance.

The Context

Operations of the city government lacked transparency. Citizens were required to make visits to multiple points and go through a lot of paper work to pay their bills, get licenses/certificates etc. The more the points of contact with government officers, the more were the opportunity for corruption. The way of working of the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation made it very unpopular; and consequently, it suffered from a bad public image. Senior officials in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation decided to take advantage of computerization to foster transparency and better service delivery for the benefit of the citizens.

When the process started in 1998, it consisted of computerization of city data such as land records. This was intended to make access to records

easier, so that it could reduce the time involved in pulling out records on demand. Once this service stabilized, it led to reform in a number of services which then could be provided online. However, initial enthusiasm was not enough, given feedback of low Internet penetration in the city at that time.

This was a technology driven change. Computerization- shifting from paper-based office to a server-based system offered a chance for public sector reform. The need for citizens to go through several queues and several officers, often paying on the way, to access information or pay bills was now reduced. Following computerization, a single window could help resolve all their issues. Increasing transparency would thus lead to reduction in corruption.

Senior Vijayawada Municipal Corporation officials championed the project. The process of planning and digitization of city records took three years. In all 1.5 million records were digitized. Later under the same programme, the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation took steps to implement effective e-governance through offering several services online such as

- Budgetary details: income and expenditure.
- Public notices, including health and police alerts.
- e-Tendering services
- Statistical information on demographics (births, deaths, population)
- Addressing and trying to resolve taxpayer grievances
- Schedules for city transport, garbage collection, and other services.
- Tourism-related information
- Contact details for Vijayawada Municipal Corporation officials and politicians

Most of the digitization work had to be outsourced, as the internal staff was unable to cope with it. Most of the staff had never used computers. Some 220 staff and 60 officers were trained to use the VOICE modules. Staff resistance to such massive changes in their ways of working especially when they stood to lose money with reduction in corruption entailed with increased transparency was anticipated. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Staff could bypass the system to use paper-based processes.

By 2001 records were accessible to the citizens via Internet. To enable enhanced citizen engagement, the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation teamed up with private kiosk owners. Privately run kiosks, 21 to begin with, in various parts of the city could be used to access Vijayawada Municipal Corporation services. Kiosk operators, at a nominal rate, would help citizens so that those who were non-literate or computer novice could access the services. However, the results were not encouraging. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation's major challenge was to make the system work for stakeholders-citizens and businesses. In a city of a

million, only 4,000 of the estimated 200,000 households had Internet connections. There were only a couple of hits a day on the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation website. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation initially pushed for an increase in Internet kiosks.

What is most remarkable about VOICE project is its use of the interactive television platform. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation came up with this very resourceful and innovative idea of using television and telephone, which had much higher penetration in Vijayawada, to reach out to the citizens. Local cable TV operators were enlisted and the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation services were available as a TV channel with the telephone acting as the keyboard. About half of the households at that time had cable connections. The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation server was linked to bank branches to enable payments; receipts and certificates were sent by post. The hits on the website following these multi channel innovations increased to around 1,000 a day. Without the multi-channel innovation the project could not have been functioned as social accountability tool and hence institutionalized meaningfully.

Additionally, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation provides the following figures as indicators of success of VOICE:

1. The number of businesses participating in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation tendering has risen by 40% since implementation of VOICE.
2. The number of applications for birth/death certificates has doubled.
3. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation revenue has risen by 20%.
4. The number of complaints registered with Vijayawada Municipal Corporation has risen by 30 times.

Here again, as in case of Lokvani described earlier, the flatness of virtual space helps citizens bypass the vertical hierarchy in exacting accountability from the government.

The VOICE project was adequately funded. The money for initial infrastructure came from the government coffers with about 48 per cent coming from Govt. of India's IT department this figure also includes World Bank Aid. The Andhra Pradesh State Government spent 32 per cent, and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation 20 per cent. Costs paid to the developer for the underlying applications were US\$400,000 divided roughly equally between hardware and system software on the one hand, and application development on the other. The costs for the additional hardware to create the cable TV interface were much lower: less than US\$20,000 (i.e. well under 50 US cents per household).

Ninety per cent of surveyed users said they were satisfied with VOICE. There has been no independent evaluation of the project. Numbers cited above in this case study are provided by the Vijayawada Municipal

Corporation. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation also claims 97 per cent of the complaints were resolved to citizen satisfaction.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The remarkable persistence and ability to innovate from the service provider end and adequate funding by the policy makers are the two key elements which contributed to sustainability of VOICE. The failure to tap citizens though Internet kiosks did not deter the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation planners from trying harder. It enabled them to innovate, and find different ways of reaching citizens.

Key Learning Points

Effective communication is critical for citizen engagement and one need not look only to the newest and the latest media as solutions. Local and low cost media solutions offer equally powerful ways and it is necessary that both officials and citizens learn to think “out of the box”.

Issues to Reflect Over

Readers are invited to reflect on what are the current e-governance tools available to officials to enhance citizen engagement and in what new areas can such engagement take place.

Exercise Questions

Readers are invited to explore the site <http://esevaonline.com/> and to undertake a search for similar sites in their own jurisdictional areas to see what services are currently provided and what new services can be provided. They are also invited to explore feedback, grievance redressal mechanisms, and to explore the cost effectiveness of using low cost media in their jurisdictional areas? Would the use of these media require special skills?

References

<http://www.egov4dev.org/transparency/case/voice.shtml>(accessed on March 28 and 29, 2008)

<http://www.ourvmcorg/>(accessed on March 28 and 29, 2008)

Notes for Trainers

Introduction

The case studies on social accountability concepts and tools are prepared with a particular perspective and special focus. The purpose of this section on the Notes for Trainers is to try to align the author's perceptions of the cases with those of training institutions and trainers who use the cases in their own individual settings.

The case studies are designed for a primary target audience consisting of

- Policy makers/ City Officials/officials engaged in service delivery in urban governments
- Social development experts working with city governments
- Training and academic institutions working with city governments

A secondary group may also include

- Officers of the Indian Administrative Service
- The corporate sector

Style Of Writing

Each case study is written in an easily readable narrative style as a story. While Harvard case studies were taken as a starting point, the cases are designed to be more culturally and India sensitive.

Each case study could have value for different sets of audiences and in varied and changing national conditions. Each case may not follow the exact outline given below, but each study incorporates all the main points

These Notes offer trainers some ideas, thoughts, and suggestions for presenting the case studies more effectively. Trainers may adopt, adapt, or create afresh the training outlines presented here.

General Notes on Effective Training Techniques

The case study is designed for self-study as well as for “classroom” delivery. Ideally these should be used alongside presentations on social accountability concepts and tools—presentations, which would precede a study and discussion of the case.

Each case study is written according to the principles of adult learning. For example, it is recognized that adults learn best when they are free from stress and information overload, and they are able to decide for themselves what is important to be learned. The self-study questions and

practical exercises at the end of each case study are designed to enable readers to draw on their own experience to benchmark the content and to think reflectively on the issues presented. The aim is to make the content as closely relevant to their work experience as possible, and to enable them to link the knowledge gained to their own experience in order to solve problems. More than anything, the authors recognize that the users of the case studies have a significant ability to serve as knowledgeable resources in training and learning situations. Trainers should keep this in mind when using each case study as a training resource in different settings and with different groups of audiences. For example, trainers may encourage participants to cite other cases and examples from their own experience to substantiate the content of the case study.

Structuring the Sessions

The authors recommend that trainers use the case studies to structure each session to include both a lecture cum discussion and individual or group exercises. Ideally, there should be no more than 25 participants in a training group.

Trainers should use the references listed, and look up the original documents and websites cited. Trainers may also use other relevant case studies. However, they should remember to cite all references and sources in the presentation for better understanding and clarity.

An ideal duration of presentation of social accountability concepts and tools combined with the relevant case study would be three-hours. This is because it is expected that a careful reader may take about 20 minutes to read a case study. The reader may read it more than once to gain additional and better insights before any group discussion takes place.

For a three-hour session

- For an audience of policymakers: a broad summary of social accountability alongside a detailed explanation of any one case study followed by a practical session of 1 ½ hours.
- For an audience of programme and/or project management staff: a broad summary of the relevant development sector followed by a detailed explanation of the case and concluding the session with a practical exercise, either the one presented at the end of the case study or a similar one chosen by the Trainer.

For a 90-minute (1.5 hours) session

- The case study may be provided beforehand so that participants in a training programme have a chance to read and reflect on it. This way, a short time of 90 minutes can be optimized for discussion following a presentation of material. For senior policymakers: a

broad summary of social accountability concepts including a detailed explanation of any one example from the case studies cited.

- For project implementation staff: a detailed examination of a social accountability tool or process combined with a case study which highlights that tool or process in use.

Learning points to initiate a discussion

A suggested template for leading discussions on the cases described earlier could include questions and discussion focussed on the following ideas:

- What does the case illustrates
- What is the issue
- In what is there a lack of accountability,
- Who is demanding more accountability/who is willing to provide it,
- What are the enabling conditions,
- Are there champions for the initiative?
- What is the process/story of how did it all occur?
- What are the results?
- What are the challenges?
- Who are stakeholders for and against?
- With what sustainability?
- What social accountability tools and methodologies have been employed in the example, why and how selected, and are these the best tools vis a vis the objectives?
- Communication: how are the goals and objectives of the case example shared with all stakeholders, what medium, what frequency and how does this help achieve or not the goals?
- Sustainability: how the example has and will sustain itself past political changes etc, financially, institutionally, or what it will take to be sustained
- Impact—what is it, is there any?

- How assessed to date if at all?
- How would one assess impact in this case

Afterword

The use of social accountability concepts and tools by both governments and by citizens is not new. However, concerns for improved service delivery, the recognition of the importance of meeting development goals and good governance as one way of achieving these goals, have provided a new impetus to an emerging discipline.

In developing these case studies, authors were aware of the limitations faced by both government and citizens alike in their quest to meet the development agenda of the 21st century. If for governments, it means good governance and delivering on services, for citizens it means having a say in how government works on a regular rather than a sporadic basis as happens during elections.

The choice of case studies from so many available worldwide has been based on the imperative of needing good materials for the use by trainers in urban governance and within a specific Indian context. Every attempt has been made to highlight success, draw attention to key principles of good practice, and to identify weaknesses, wherever they might exist.

The rationale for including peri-urban and rural cases in this compilation is that there is cross learning and a broader selection of cases will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of this emerging field. Further many government programmes such as the Mid Day Meal Scheme or the all encompassing Right to Information Act are part of both urban and rural agenda and jurisdictional areas. Similarly, the select use of examples where e-governance tools have improved service while reducing corruption and leakages along the service delivery continuum merit a separate understanding, even if simply because the use of information and communication technologies negates and transcends the barriers of geographic and social space while providing service of equally good quality for both the urban and rural citizen.

This is an emerging field, and authors are aware of the many limitations that such a field has. For this reason, authors consider this very much work in progress and hope that as this document is revised for use with future government and civic groups, there will be more cases to learn from and much more experimentation to show that indeed, social accountability is a very important way to demonstrating and enabling good governance.

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Additional web resources

<http://www.egov4dev.org/transparency/case/voice.shtml>

<http://www.ourvmc.org/>

<http://esevaonline.com/>

<http://righttoinformation.gov.in/>

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