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Since its enactment the Right to Information Act in India has triggered mixed responses from the community and the government. Mr. Rajendra Kumar Sharma in his article reflects on the implementation of the Act vis-à-vis the Indian social and political context. The SAc project covers Community Reporting Centre in Bangladesh which focuses on participation as a key to factor to bridge the gap between people and UPs. Dissemination workshop on NREGS organised by CUTS CART is covered under the SAc event. The SAc institution in focus in this issue is Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC), which is attempting to create awareness and build capacities of the poor and marginalized groups in claiming their rights and entitlements. SAc results & reports section covers Global Accountability Report. This report analyses organisations from the intergovernmental, corporate and non-governmental sectors and assess them on how they integrate key accountability principles into their organizational policies and the management systems. The SASANET team has been receiving contributions from a number of institutions every month. We thank

you for your contributions and look forward to receive more inputs on your experiences on social accountability.

SAc Article: Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005: Situation and Direction

- By Rajendra Kumar Sharma

Since India's independence on August 15, 1947, among the several legislations that the Indian Parliament has enacted so far, the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 is a remarkable step towards attaining the fundamental rights envisaged in the Constitution. In India the credit for RTI Act's enactment is given to the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). CSOs also consider that the enactment is primarily their contribution. However the usage of the act differs where, one group favours the argument that the Act can be used as a "weapon" to introduce complete transparency and accountability in governance, while the other group considers it as only a "tool" for seeking information. In order to ensure an effective enforcement of the Act there is serious urgency to focus on certain important factors with regards to the concept and vision such as, "why", "when" and "how the Act should be used. An effective lubricant for the enactment and enforcement of any Act is the fundamental intention of different stakeholders involved in the entire process to implement the act without a compromise.

However, in the Indian context, many times a peculiar situation emerges where the objectives to be achieved are clearly visible but there is a lack of intention and action to achieve them. During the RTI pre-enactment movement in the nation, the movement leaders and organisations propounded a

vision, that as a result of the Act, there will be a new dawn of transparency in the Indian governance system, and not only will the government be accountable for its actions but a concrete system of transparency will be put in place. But, an assessment of the Act in the past three years shows that adequate enforcement of the Act is still a far cry. What are the reasons that the information delivery at every level (applications/appeals) is not done in the stipulated time period? Why are huge number of appeals kept pending with the Information Commissions? Why haven't Information Commissioners been appointed in many States? Why have the states not been able to provide adequate and speedy resources to the SICs for their meaningful functioning? These are some questions that need answers immediately.

The tragedy is that though the executives in the Indian Governance System, during the pre and post independence period have accepted change, their accountability and loyalty is still confined to their bosses. The common citizenry in the country have also more or less remained servants or slaves to those who hold power. The transition of power from India's slavery to independence helped change the character of administration. However, though changed, the bureaucracy in India preferred the common citizen to still remain a slave or a servant. Hence, the desired change of accountability in governance cannot be achieved if the prevailing mind-set of the governance system is still oppressive towards the citizen. The power and inclination of this mindset could be gauged from the fact that even the so-called common citizen, who after attaining power becomes an active practitioner of oppression and expects other citizens to surrender. If this situation is weighed vis-à-vis RTI Act, then it is evident that majority of the appointed Information Commissioners and other officials working at the SICs are highly bureaucratic and their mindset is governed by those who hold political power.

There is another interesting discussion that emerged with the advent of RTI Act. An enthusiastic dream was woven around RTI that there will be considerable reduction in corruption with the advent of the enactment. Enthusiasm was such that many called it a "second independence" of the nation. It is true that not all people engaged in running governments are corrupt, but those who are corrupt are capable to make the Act dysfunctional and defamed. According to the latest report of the Transparency International, corruption in India has increased last year, as India slipped to 74th position in a list of 180 countries. The report does not mention a single Indian state where corruption is at zero level. The states like Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya and Sikkim have high rate of corruption. So, why is it that in spite of a weapon like RTI, citizens have failed to contain corruption? In other words "how can one protect the crop if the fence itself starts eating it?" In a nation with more than a billion people where hundreds of programmes/schemes worth thousands of crores are formulated, for which thousands of functionaries are engaged and above all if the existing regulatory institutions are not inclined to carry out their functions with full integrity, the success of the so called "weapon" like RTI Act is in serious doubt.

There is a complete disintegration in the fundamental ideology of freedom of information and lack of unified action. There is an immediate need that Acts like The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988; The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and The RTI Act, 2005 - need to be put into action as unified force simultaneously. A meaningful and worthy role of the media and CSOs is required to support and guide the common public. Empowered citizens are the greatest asset of a nation. Hence, the pace with which the media and CSOs work in creating an army of awakened and empowered citizens; it is not far that the devil like corruption would be wiped away. Though it is a herculean task to create such informed citizenry and ensure their pro-active and need based involvement, it must be done and there is no other way out.

The writer is a Programme Coordinator and Deputy Head at CUTS CART, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

SAC Project: People's Reporting Centre - Bangladesh

People's Reporting Centre (PRC) project of Democracy Watch aims to decrease the gap between the people and their Union Parishad (UP) representatives and function as a channel between the people and UP. Currently, people elect the UP members who should be delivering services to the people. However in practice there is little interaction between the UP members and their electorate and the peoples' voice is not always being heard. PRC will help the UP in strategic planning, participatory management and community participation and assist in linking UPs with community groups such as local traditional leaders, councilors and officials, the private sector and representatives from women groups. It focuses on building self-reliance within the community, and developing interdependent relations between the different layers of government. PRC will eventually spawn a monitoring system on the activities of the Union Parishad. This project is funded



Objectives of People's Reporting Centre Project

1. Poor and disadvantaged people are enjoying access to better services on Health, education, agriculture and alternative dispute resolution.
2. Involve Citizen Committees, General people, CSO, CBOs in budgeting, planning, implementation and monitoring UP activities.
3. Greater Constituency at both local and national level on accountable and transparent LGI are in place.
4. Institutional capacity of Democracy Watch staff and Partner NGOs

by Human Rights and Good Governance Programme Support Unit (HRGG-PSU) of DANIDA.

Democracy watch is implementing the project with the help of local partners. The project has 4 local partners namely, *Swapna Shahajja Sangstha* (SSS), Project for Rural Area Development & Improvement of Poor People (PRADIP), *Samajik Unnayan Sangstha* (SUS) and *Nilachal*. These partners work on a variety of issues. Some of the key issues in focus under the project include, microcredit, scholarship program for students, shelter programs for poor, training & capacity

building, election monitoring, voter education, awareness program for Union Parishad, good governance etc. Some the major projects undertaken by PRC, Bangladesh in local government include:

1. Capacity Building of UP standing committees and officials for involving citizen committees and general people to identify and address problems through participatory analysis, planning and budgeting
2. Developing strong and effective networks among UP standing committees, Govt. service providers and other stakeholders at local level for creating access to health, education, agriculture and legal services for the poor and disadvantaged groups including children
3. Act as a platform all the stakeholders can identify issues, make effective plans to address the problems and implement programme in a participative process
4. Mobilizing and sensitizing people, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), local media for demanding transparency and accountability of UP through their participation
5. Raising micro and macro issues on Local governance and pro-poor issues in the country

<http://www.dwatch-bd.org/prc/html/homepage.html>

SAC Event: State Level Dissemination Meeting - 'Assessing 2Qs (Quality & Quantity) Outputs of the 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme' (NREGS)

CUTS Centre for Consumer Action, Research & Training (CUTS CART), in partnership with The World Bank, organised a State Level Dissemination Meeting (SLDM) under the project 'Assessing 2Qs (Quality & Quantity) Outputs of the 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS),

as per the provision of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, being implemented in Sirohi District of Rajasthan, at Patel Bhawan, Jaipur on July 16, 2008. Using tools like Citizen Report Card (CRC), Community Score Card (CSC) and Participatory Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS), CUTS CART assessed the implementation of NREGS and



brought out the report of the citizens on delivery of various services entitled under NREGS. The overall objective of dissemination was to propagate the effectiveness of Social Accountability tools and its potential to improve service delivery among policy makers as well as sharing of the key findings of the assessment.

The events of the day included screening of SAc film, presentation of key findings and recommendations. SAc film '*Social Accountability in Action: Experiences from Grassroots*' showing the experiences from grassroots of using the tools of Social Accountability in getting better service delivery was shown to the participants. Om Prakash Arya of CUTS presented the key findings that emerged out of the assessment of CRC, observations during CSC, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), interviews, meetings with nearly 1025 people including service recipients (825) and service providers (200). The findings were disseminated in presence of policy makers, senior bureaucrats, Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) representatives, CSOs and media persons. Few of the key findings and recommendations are enlisted below.

Key Findings

- Provided employment during lean season in own villages itself (97 percent).
- Improved facilities in the villages (94 percent).
- Helped in reducing migration (93 percent).
- Helped in increasing the monthly income (87 percent).
- Improvement of the status of women in the family (75 percent).

Recommendations

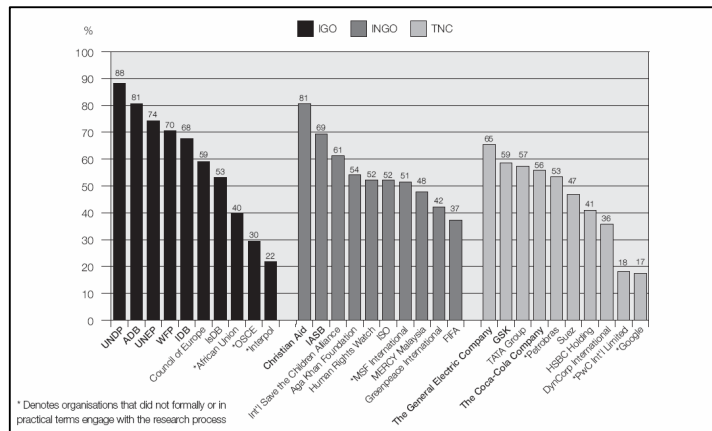
- Exclusive Programme Officers with the responsibility of only NREGS with all required infrastructure and powers (related to executing agency at grassroots) at every block.
- Direct recruitment of staff (with reasonable salary and qualification) for NREGS at *Gram Panchayat* level on contract without involvement of any external agency.
- A proper mechanism to accomplish social audit (Andhra Model, where an independent social audit council works for ensuring social audit) as per the provisions of the act.
- A parallel set up to the existing administrative set up, hiring of qualified people from the market to support for the proper implementation of the NREGS, can be established (West Bengal has adopted this model & the payment is made to them from contingency).
- A public private partnership for GO-NGO collaboration in the field of NREGS as being done in the field of education.

Source: CUTS CART

SAC Results and Reports: Global Accountability Report - 2007

The Global Accountability Report (GAR) presents an assessment of the accountability of the world's most powerful organisations to the people they affect. The Report analyses organisations from the intergovernmental, corporate and non-governmental sectors. The organisations are assessed on how they integrate key accountability principles into their organizational policies and the management systems. Together policies and systems make up an organization's accountability capability. The Report is a unique initiative that identifies trailblazers and laggards, highlights specific areas of reform, and provides a global picture of accountability trends and challenges based on quantitative measurements. In doing so, it provides a common frame of reference on accountability and extends the basic principles of democracy to the global level.

Transnational actors from across the intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and corporate sectors play an increasingly important role in our system of global governance. They provide essential services such as health care, set financial standards, deliver multilateral aid and respond to climate change. As such, they have a profound impact upon people's daily lives. But how accountable are these organisations



to the people they affect? How do citizens hold them to account for their actions, and how do people make their voices heard in their decisions? The Global Accountability Report seeks to answer these questions by assessing the capability of 30 of the world's most powerful intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and transnational corporations (TNCs) to be accountable to civil society, affected communities, and the wider public.

The 2007 Global Accountability Report highlights a mixed picture of accountability at the global level both within and across sectors. To do this, the Report assesses the existence of key accountability principles in organizational policies and management systems across four core dimensions of accountability: transparency, participation, evaluation, and complaint and response mechanisms. The organizational scores on the overall accountability capabilities is depicted in the figure below.

Why is global accountability important? While transnational actors have gained increasing influence over people's lives, their growing power has not always been accompanied by adequate accountability. Current mechanisms for holding transnational actors to account are stated based. While necessary, alone, they fail to provide citizens with adequate influence over global decision making. New tools and mechanisms are needed at all levels to make transnational actors more accountable and transparent to the individuals and communities they affect. The task of creating a more accountable and responsive system of global governance could not be greater. Unless we are able to find ways of creating broad, informed participation of all relevant stakeholders in global decision making processes, our responses to global challenges, such as climate change and poverty, will fail.

Source: Lloyd Robert, Jeffrey Oatham and Michael Hammer, *Global Accountability Report*, One World Trust, 2007. Also see http://www.oneworldtrust.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=77&Itemid=62

SAC Resources

Social Accountability, Power, Corruption and Poverty

Colm Allan, Director, Centre for Social Accountability (and Public Service Accountability Monitor), Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) Conference
The Poverty Challenge: Poverty Reduction (South) Africa, India and Brazil

26 – 29 June 2007
Elangeni Hotel, Durban, South Africa

Social Accountability, Power, Corruption and Poverty Colm Allan

South Africa Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) Conference
The Poverty Challenge: Poverty Reduction – (South) Africa, India and Brazil, 26 – 29 June 2007 Elangeni Hotel, Durban, South Africa
June 2007

In this paper the author argues that continued poverty within African states needs to be situated and explained within the context of weak social accountability systems in these states. The prevalence of corruption in African states is attributed to the weakness of these social accountability systems, rather than being attributable to the influence of irrational cultural or political beliefs, or the position of these states within the international economic order, as asserted by liberal and Marxist development theorists respectively.

Source: www.icount.org.za/downloadpublication.php?pid=12

Demanding Good Governance: A Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives by Civil Society in Anglophone Africa

Mary McNeil and Takawira Mumvuma

Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion Learning Program

World Bank Institute
Washington DC
2006

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109 pages

Stock No. 37261

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This report synthesizes a stocktaking of civil society-initiated social accountability practices in the public budgetary process in 10 Anglophone African countries—Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Three clear mechanisms for social accountability in the cycle of public expenditure are included as initiatives in the study: independent budget analysis and advocacy (IBA); participatory public expenditure tracking (PPET); and participatory performance monitoring (PPM). Independent Budget Analysis (IBA) refers to the research, advocacy and dissemination of information on issues related to official budgets by civil society and other actors independent of the government. Participatory public expenditure tracking (PPET) involves the use of civil society to track how the public sector spends the money that was allocated to it. Participatory Performance Monitoring (PPM) consists of citizen and community scorecards that solicit user feedback on the performance of public services. Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) are used in situations where demand side data, such as user perceptions on quality and satisfaction with public services, is absent.

Source: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/Demanding_Good_Governance-FINAL.pdf

SAC Institution: Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC)

The Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC) is an international research partnership exploring new forms of citizenship that will help make rights real. It involves a network of researchers and practitioners working with research institutions and civil society organizations located in seven different countries - Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom. The aim of the Citizenship DRC is to increase understanding of how to support the efforts of poor and marginalized groups to define and claim their rights. The network of researchers and activists focus attention on the relationships between poor and marginalized people and the institutions that affect their lives, and how these relationships can be changed.

In order to gain a critical understanding of the various issues surrounding new forms of citizenship, participation and accountability, the Citizenship DRC works collaboratively with partners from a wide range of civil society and research institutions in seven countries. The key partners of Citizenship DRC are:

1. Acção Para O Desenvolvimento Rural E Ambiental (ADRA - Angola)
2. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS - Bangladesh)
3. Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP - Brazil)
4. Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA - India)
5. Theatre for Development Centre of Ahmadu Bello University (TFDC - Nigeria)
6. Centre for Southern African Studies/School of Government of the University of the Western Cape (UWC-South Africa)
7. Institute of Development Studies/University of Sussex (IDS-United Kingdom)

The Citizenship DRC organizes its work through three core research programmes.

1. Deepening Democracy in States and Localities that concentrates on looking at how various types of democracies and citizenships are developed and institutionalized across different contexts.
2. Local Global Citizen Engagements explores how citizens perceive and engage with global processes and in turn, what impact global processes actually have on the meanings and practices of citizenship, given their locations in diverse historical and cultural settings
3. Citizenship, Participation and Violence examines how issues of violence, hate and fear affect the capacities of citizens to participate, and the ways in which a transition from violence to citizenship can be facilitated through participatory social action.

Specific research projects are carried out by individual researchers, country teams or international collaborating groups. As well as working in their own contexts, participating researchers also come together in international research programme meetings and workshops to share their research experiences and findings.

Source: <http://www.drc-citizenship.org/index.htm>

SAC – Did you know?

1. Any citizen in Malaysia can submit suggestions, supports, proposals and complaints directly the Prime Minister of the country through e-feedback. This e-feedback facility is available on the official website of the Prime Minister of Malaysia. <http://www.pmo.gov.my/>
2. A system of Corruption Report Card to the Mayor has been implemented in Seoul, South Korea. To ensure the principle of zero tolerance for corruption, the Corruption Report Card to the Mayor system has been initiated. Under this system, return postcards are sent to those who have business with the city government in fields prone to corruption. These cards are always placed in the city and all the district civil affairs offices in order to receive municipal proposals and ideas, as well as reports of corruptions. The Mayor reads all the postcards and make sure that each and every wrongdoer is properly punished.
3. In India, The Public Distribution System (Control) (Amendment) Order, 2004, which entered into force on 29 June 2004, enables citizens to directly seek information from a fair price shop owner.

About SASANET

South Asia Social Accountability Network (SasaNet) is an initiative taken by the Centre for Good Governance (CGG) and the South Asia Sustainable Development (SASSD) Division of the World Bank to develop a broader understanding amongst various Government and Civil Society Organization towards the potential use of SAC tools in promoting good governance. The network offers a platform for mutual cooperation, exchange of experiences among organizations, associations and informal groups. The SasaNet website (www.sasanet.org) is the electronic voice of the South Asia Social Accountability Network. It offers a comprehensive knowledge base which includes conceptual information, set of tools, best practices and case studies for facilitating enhanced social accountability in governance.

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