

**POLICY BRIEF NO .2
(2011)**

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Social accountability tools in the urban context in India are yet to be institutionalised. There is need to make such mechanisms mandatory in all Urban Local Bodies. This will require a policy change, along with enabling legal environment and incentive mechanisms.

Background

Accountability is broadly defined as an obligation of those holding power to take responsibility for their behaviour and actions with the ultimate objective of improving service delivery to the citizens who have given them their mandate. Technically, social accountability is understood as an approach towards ensuring accountability that relies on civic engagement in which ordinary citizens and citizen

groups participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability (Malena et. al, 2004). Establishing social accountability mechanisms has great potential for improving governance and making service delivery more effective in municipal governance through empowering citizens.

While accepting the fact that accountability lies on both sides, i.e., citizens as well as governance institutions, the accountability of the service delivery institution is primary. The critical factor for successful implementation of social accountability tools however remains the relationship and trust between the citizen and the institution.



The sustainability and effectiveness of the social accountability mechanism is realised when it is institutionalised. Sporadic efforts demanding accountability from the municipal government in India has been done largely by civil society, especially NGOs. But there is need to build these processes into the governance framework as policy. Accountability failures persist because several links in the chain of accountability – from citizens to the government – have either never existed or are severely damaged. Delivering services effectively requires a system of accountability where:

- Citizens have access to information and platforms

through which they can monitor performance and demand accountability for services they receive; and

- Governments (politicians and bureaucrats) acting as agents of citizens create incentives for performance and through regular monitoring hold implementers and service providers accountable for outcomes.

In India, social accountability as a policy has been adopted largely in the rural context, especially in flagship programmes like MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) and SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan). But efforts have been weak in the context of urban governance. The urban flagship programme JnNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) has touched on a few components of social accountability as part of its reform agenda under the e-governance reform component. But there is much scope to broaden the canvas of social accountability mechanisms to be adopted by ULBs (Urban Local Bodies).

ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS

Stages	Tools
Design of service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory Planning • Participatory Budgeting • Citizen Charter • Service Level Benchmarking
Implementation and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Monitoring • Public Expenditure Tracking • Social Audit • Grievance Redressal System
Impact assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Report Card/Community Score Card • Public Hearing

Existing Tools of Social Accountability

There are numerous social accountability tools practiced around the world in different contexts. The tools can be grouped on the basis of stages of service delivery from planning to impact assessment.

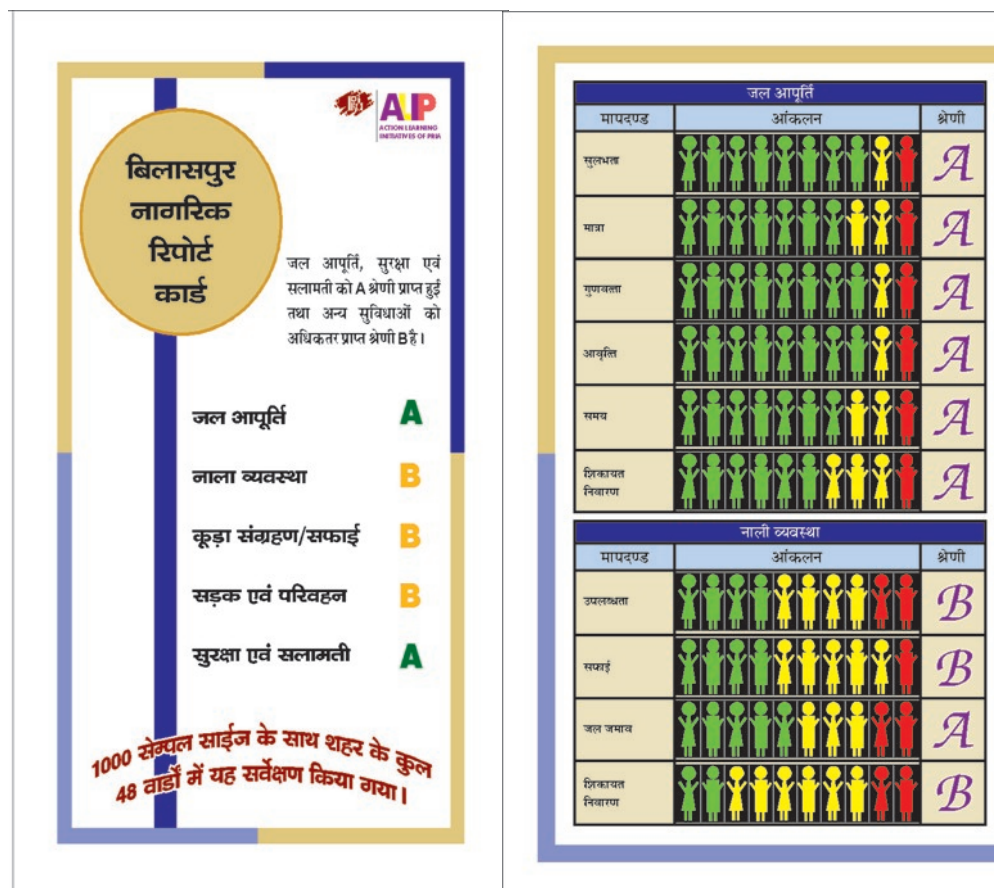
The selection of a tool depends upon the context and the issues in question. A few broad aspects should be kept in mind while selecting the appropriate tool. These include nature of the accountability problem, level of community mobilisation, extent of civil society presence and the skills availability to use a particular tool.

The present policy brief primarily focuses on measures to establish social accountability mechanisms to improve service delivery in existing infrastructure (i.e., in the post-construction phase). This paper considers the participatory planning guidelines for City Development Plans (CDPs) and Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) as a separate area of exploration.

The following improvements in actions at the municipal level should be promoted to help ULBs identify performance gaps and effect improvements.

Citizen Report Card (CRC) Survey

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) should assess their performance from the service recipient/client point of view. For this purpose, a CRC survey conducted among a sample size comprising all



income groups should be made mandatory. The findings and ratings given by the community should be made public by distributing handouts or pamphlets for reference and for establishing benchmarks (also see section on Citizen Charter below). The findings can then be used to compare improvement when the survey is conducted in the following year.

Service Level Benchmarking (SLB)

Service level benchmarking is increasingly recognised as an important mechanism for introducing accountability in service delivery. CRC findings become a considerable input in such an exercise. Annual fund disbursement to the municipality should be linked with improvement in performance resulting in better service delivery and meeting the desired target level each year.

The Thirteenth Finance Commission (TFC) has recommended that ULBs in India accord priority to service delivery and put in place service benchmarks for essential civic services such as water supply, sewerage, solid waste management and storm water drainage. The ULBs needs to notify the standards to be achieved by the end of the fiscal year on an annual basis and publish the same in the state gazette. In doing so, states can also access *performance grants* recommended by the TFC. The Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India has formulated benchmarks for key performance indicators to enable cities to measure and improve their own performance vis-à-vis the benchmarks. (For more details visit www.urbanservices.gov.in.)

Citizen Charter

The service benchmarks adopted and assessment of delivery against the adopted benchmarks should be communicated to citizens using different communication modes. This includes preparing a citizen charter detailing all services and the timeframe for compliance which should be displayed on boards in different

part of the city, government offices and ward offices, and distributed among citizens. Several progressive municipalities in the country have already adopted the citizen charter but it needs far more widespread adoption.

Citizen Grievance Redressal System

Establishing a centralised citizen grievance redressal system is a very effective mechanism to improve service delivery. All citizens should be able to lodge complaints about any municipal service and the complaint should be responded to in an agreed time period, as specified in the citizen charter. The complaint could be made over phone (on a toll free number), online or in writing. The compliance report should be assessed by the higher level officers in the ULB. Numerous ULBs such as Surat Municipal Corporation and Rajkot Municipal Corporation have implemented efficient grievance redressal systems. Few ULBs have begun to receive



Single window clearance for effective redressal of complaints

complaints through SMS and after redressal an SMS is sent to the central server and complainant too. But there is still a long way to go before grievance redressal becomes a mainstream service provided by ULBs.

Enabling Social Accountability

Institutionalising social accountability mechanisms will also require the following policy changes to be adopted.

Make social accountability mandatory in municipal functioning

Experience from different parts of India suggests that making any function discretionary negates its adoption. Creating 'invited' spaces of participation has more potential for success than 'demanded' spaces of participation. For example, formation of mohalla committees is a discretionary function in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. This rule was notified in year 2001 initially and modified in 2009 to define tasks, but till date only a few mohalla committees have been formed.

There is no doubt that making a function mandatory, where the social accountability mechanism is laid down in the policy, is key to its implementation and adoption. In MGNREGS, citizens who have the right to involve themselves in all stages of the project,

have been demanding transparency and accountability. In some towns and cities, social audits are enhancing accountability among service providers. People's campaigns in Kerala for participatory planning has worked substantially as it was mandatory in the policy.

The state can create an enabling environment for this by providing legal rights to citizens for participation and holding the local government accountable.

Create institutions in the city

In towns and cities an institution of citizens should be created which would act as a driving force to carry forward the demand for accountability by using selected tools. These institutions should be created at ward, zone and city levels.

A City Level Citizen Forum comprising representatives of all stakeholder groups can address city level issues. The City Technical Advisory Group (CTAG) or City Volunteer Technical Corps (CVTC) created in different cities under JnNURM could take up this particular role.

A Zonal Committee could be responsible for monitoring zonal level developmental work in terms of its quality and cost. It can consist of ward representatives falling under the zone. Representatives on the Zonal Committee should be citizens, not elected ward councillors.

At ward level, Ward Committees in keeping with provisions of the Community Participation Law (CPL) can be created. This committee would monitor ward level development work, including its planning. In this context, implementation of CPL in its right spirit cannot be overlooked.

Build capacity of demand side and supply side stakeholders

As demanding social accountability from public institutions is a new mechanism, especially in the urban milieu, capacity building is of paramount significance. Local community-based organisations could be promoted and their capacity built along with those of elected representatives and ULB staff. All stakeholders should be given basic orientation on social accountability tools and how to use them. Community-based organisations can be incentivised and entrusted with the role of coordination at the ward/zone level.

The ULB should also be oriented on the benefits of good governance and its components of transparency and accountability. Willing adoption of social accountability mechanisms by ULB staff will in turn build confidence among citizens. As citizens' trust in institutions mandated to provide service delivery increases, ripple effects will be seen in urban tax collection, enhancing the city's income.

Prepare guidelines on tools of accountability

A clear and precise toolkit explaining, step-wise, the process of using social accountability tools is very essential. The guidelines should be in-built in state/central government sponsored schemes. A separate toolkit should also easily be made available to citizens. Community-based organisations or local NGOs may play a major role in preparing these toolkits.

Conclusion

Social accountability mechanisms, which have great potential for improving service delivery by public authorities, are yet to be institutionalised in the urban context in India. Programmes where such mechanisms have been laid down have clearly yielded results, though with varying degree. The JnNURM reform agenda has promoted a few social accountability tools such as citizen charter and grievance redressal system. But the tools have not been adopted in their true spirit. There is need to make such mechanisms, customised for local contexts, mandatory in all ULBs. This will require a policy change. Besides an enabling legal environment, incentive mechanisms can also be set up to help adoption of social accountability tools for more effective urban governance.

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POLICY BRIEF NO. 1 (2011):
Institutional and Legal Design
of Citizen Participation and
Engagement in Urban
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Neighbourhood Level

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