CAN SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY SOLVE INDIA’S SERVICE DELIVERY PROBLEMS?

Yamini Aiyar and Michael Walton
Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi
9th July, 2013
The issue - India’s current conjuncture:

- 25 years of rapid, now-stalling, growth
- A central political narrative of inclusion

Alongside:

- Dismal service quality + societal narrative of a “corrupt state”
A socio-political “response”

From a mix of civil society, parts of political elite and the judiciary.... demands and action on:

• Citizen rights vis-à-vis the state underpinned by...
• Participation—political and around service
• Social accountability

How do we interpret this?

Has it “worked”?
Plan

• Framework
  • India’s participation/social accountability/rights movement
• Assessment: RTI; social audits; community-based participation
• Brazil comparison
Framework – social accountability

“.. an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement i.e. in which individual citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in the accountability process. Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens or both.” (Malena, Foster and Singh, 2004)

---Answerability
---Sanctions

Relates to:
• Rights
• Citizenship
• Empowerment (in field of citizen-state interactions)
Need to position this within the socio-political system

The “accountability framework” as a first aggregate step:

Source: World Bank, 2004
(1) Political settlement explicit.
(2) Dynamics of civil society.
(3) Deconstructing organisations

Source: Levy and Walton, 2013
Political settlements

- A “political equilibrium” in which distribution of power is aligned with distribution of benefits
- Can be: “dominant party” or “competitive”; varying degrees of informal and rule-based mechanisms
- Rent extraction and rent-sharing central to alignment of power and benefits

India

- “Competitive clientelist” at national and state level
- Mix of rules and deals
- Functional rent-sharing arrangements: between state and business; and between state and lower groups
A very limited decentralisation within this settlement

- 73rd and 74th amendments to constitution in 1993, led to half-baked political devolution to third level

- Rural areas:
  - Evidence on some positive impact (e.g. around gender/reservation)
  - Shifting local politics—rising competition, rising rent extraction (e.g. off NREGA)

- Urban
  - Limited intermediation role for Ward Councillors
Civil society

• “the institutions, practices and networks of voluntary life that are oriented toward and legitimate themselves in terms of publicness” (Baiocchi, Heller and Silva, 2011)
• varied relations with the state, depending on degree of autonomy and degree of institutionalisation of claims:
  • autonomous and institutionalized process - rare
  • usually either dependent on state or autonomous but unsystematic, discretionary claim-making

India - diverse and active:
• from autonomous (SEWA, Pratham etc)
• to dependent (SMCs, parts of SHG movement?)
• to politicians’ NGOs
• state selective on domains in which participation is invited
Bureaucrats and organisations

- State organisations the primary site for claim-making
- Drivers of bureaucrat behavior shaped by political settlement (personalized, patronage to rule-based)
- Bureaucrats embedded within a mix of hierarchical and multi-stakeholder contexts

India – hybrid

- Meritocratic services (IAS etc) v. patronage and preference
- Politician-bureaucrat-contractor “nexus”
- Market for jobs and politician influence
- Heterogeneous across state and organisation, with islands of effectiveness (Election commission; Tamil Nadu civil service)
Example: the “system” in Andhra Pradesh

ACTORS
- Business families
- Politicians
- Bureaucrats
- Citizens/voters

FIELDS
- Construction/PPPs
- Land deals
- Mining licenses
- Liquor licenses
- Private colleges
- Private hospitals

Rent extraction and rent-sharing
Black and white money
Populist programmes
Political finance
Rent creation and development dynamics

Source: Natarajan and Walton, 2013
India’s “movement” to social accountability and rights

• A social and political response to the collision between aspirations for social provisioning and the dismal service provision of the “corrupt state”

Three sources:

• Civil society: especially MKSS and the RTI movement
• Judicial activism
• Evolving political narratives at state and national level: e.g. 2004 elections in Andhra Pradesh and national
Empirical assessment

- Systematic evidence sparse (also internationally)
- Focus here on the interaction between accountability instruments and the arms of the state
- Assessment builds on case study evidence in three areas (vignettes from AI field work).
Right to Information

• Genuinely impressive gains. Enthusiastic response from citizens. The state, a reluctant participant
• Used extensively to access the inner-workings of the state. Some examples (apart from mega corruption exposes):

  100 MCD (AI study) applications - 25% seeking information on councilor laptops, 11% on MCD committee meetings
  1000 RTI applications (RAAG) – 25% asking for details of decisions, majority requests related to service delivery
...but an incomplete transformation

• Two competing narratives, reluctant acceptance and legitimizing resistance:
  ➢ “Accountability”, “transparency”, “empowerment” with RTI as the instrument
  ➢ “Vexatious”, “frivolous” application, RTI “slowing down decision making”

• “Passion for paper” ➔ procedural compliance vs system changes

• System distortions ➔ “post-it” culture; dominant narrative “RTI slowing down decision-making”
Social audits: MGNREGA

• Engaging citizens in directly scrutinizing the state at the local level and demanding redressal

• Institutionalizing audits: AP Vs Rajasthan – top down bureaucratic (alignment between top-politician, bureaucrat, civil society) vs local civil society led (CSO activism led to push back by local politicians and bureaucrats)

• AP: 6 rounds of audits over 7 years, 21,000 GPs

• Analytical question: How do regular audits influence the workings of the state at the local level?
Social audits: MGNREGA

- Unpacked state functioning and opened it up to scrutiny
  - Issues identified through the audit (R 1-3)
- “Public nature” of the audit created pressure points on the local administration
- Weeded out petty corruption (although that remains a central to people’s concerns with the audit) ……
- But, corruption market adjusted to harder to catch, systemic forms of corruption. Local politician – bureaucrat- service provider nexus not broken
  - The corruption network: A local rent-extracting and shar...
- Limited grievance redress - weak sanctioning power within agency and across agency – part of the story
- Limited political participation – a case of too much bureaucracy, too little politics?
- In sum: top level political-bureaucratic-civil society alignment makes important gains but still unable to activate the local
Issues identified through the audit (R 1-3)

Nature of Issues

- Others/NA: 50
- Fraudulent MR: 13
- Misappropriation: 11
- Wages not paid: 5
- Delay Payments: 3
Officials implicated through the audit (R1-3)

Key officials implicated in social audits

- Field Assistant: 37
- Branch Post Master: 15
- APO: 12
- Not Available: 7
- Technical Assistant: 7
- Mate: 6
- MPDO: 5
- Computer Operator: 4
- Village Organization: 2
- Other: 2
The corruption network: A local rent-extracting and sharing syndicate

Source: Aiyar and Kapur-Mehata (forthcoming)
Community-based participation initiatives

• Widespread top-down “induced participation”
• Typical village may have ~10 sectoral committees!

But:

• Weaknesses in design…
  • Very limited substantive devolution to local committee - 2% funding in case of education
  • No decision-making powers
  Top down decision making….an example from Hyderabad
  • Process inefficiencies (PAISA surveys)
...and in implementation - education example

• “We know the status of schools” …education block official in Madhya Pradesh

• Guideline culture dominates

  ➢ SMC planning - pre-filled forms are shared with members and signatures taken

  ➢ Local officials as facilitators – making sure that formats are filled and minutes recorded
Top down decision making....an example from Hyderabad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Is SMC resolution sufficient?</th>
<th>Is any additional approval needed?</th>
<th>From whom?</th>
<th>How long will it take?</th>
<th>Who can do the procurement or appointment?</th>
<th>What documents and other things will be needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desks and Chairs</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SSA Planning</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>SSA Office</td>
<td>Approval of design; Three quotations from local suppliers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sintex Water Tank</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>SMC</td>
<td>Local purchase at PWD rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roof Repair</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>SSA Civil / JE</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>SMC + SSA</td>
<td>Approval of work and measurements; Materials bought locally as per PWD rates; vouchers of payments maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayah</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>SMC</td>
<td>Interview Notice with Date and Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment

Evidence limited, so far consistent with:

- Multiple initiatives—“looks” like a major shift in narrative and action (RTI, social audits, community participatory)
- But partial and mixed effects:
  - RTI – enthusiastic citizenry and reluctant state participation. Opened up the state but bureaucratic behavioural shifts unclear
  - SA – top down institutionalization, shifted the locus of corruption but local political-bureaucratic nexus remains strong
  - CBO’s – paper commitment. Legitimizing narrative but no investments in implementation capacity

- The main analytical point – social accountability initiatives need to be situated within political/organization context
Lessons from Brazil?

Recent scenes suggest large-scale discontent with the state.
But the story is richer
- 1988 constitution marked a critical juncture, bred of an encompassing societal movement
- Incorporated a variety of rights and participatory processes: health, education, urban
Aligned political, bureaucratic and civil society action….up to a point

- Political necessity for inclusion (+ presence of programmatic party in PT, outside and inside government) ➔ major programs (social sectors; Bolsa Família)
- Islands of intense participation—Participatory Budgeting in many cities
- Joint action on public sector reform (internal accountability) and civil society involvement
- Education: “centrally sponsored scheme”; + internal reform—including on results!; + local engagement led to steady gains on PISA
...and political system is responding to protest wave

- President Dilma Rousseff proposes referendum on range of political and service reforms
The way forward?

- Return to administrative management will not work; *aadhar* (UID) and cash transfer fine, but only touches part of system
- Adding more rights alone won’t work; right to redressal also fine, but doesn’t get to heart of system
- Deepening of local democracy necessary, and will be resisted
- Bureaucratic reforms on local state capacity
- Islands (spatial-sectoral) may grow, where politics, bureaucrat willingness/capacity, civil society base is sufficient: could lead to wider political salience