Civic Engagement and Accountability in Public Service Delivery: South Asian Perspective

- Abu Elias Sarker, Ph.D
- College of Business Administration
- University of Sharjah
- PO Box 27272, Sharjah
- United Arab Emirates
Introduction

- On account of the limitations of conventional vertical and horizontal mechanisms and market mechanisms, the focus has shifted to the role of civic engagement in public accountability. It is also known as downward accountability towards citizens at large.
- In fact, there is evidence that civic engagement improved accountability of public officials, thus contributing improved public service delivery.
Importance

- Malena et al (2004) have identified three reasons for social accountability:
  - Improved governance
  - Increased development effectiveness and
  - Empowerment.
Mechanisms

- Participatory public policy making
- Participatory budgeting
- Public expenditure tracking
- Citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery
- Raising public awareness about their legal rights and public services
- Citizen involvement in public commissions and hearings, citizen advisory boards and oversight committees.
Success Requirements

- Goetz and Jenkins (2001) have emphasized five key institutional characteristics of social accountability:
- Legal basis of civic groups’ participation within institutions of public sector oversight;
- Civic groups’ continuous presence throughout the process of the agency’s work;
- Well-defined procedures for the conduct of encounters between citizens and public sector actors in the meeting;
- Civic groups’ access to public information; and
- Civic groups’ right to dissent and report directly to legislative bodies.
Ackerman (2004) suggests that participatory mechanisms have to be institutionalized in order to ensure participation of the poor people and make the administration accountable. First, strategic plans of the concerned government departments could make a focused commitment. Second, new agencies can be created to serve the purpose of social accountability. Third, there could be a legal framework to enforce participatory mechanisms.
• Harry Blair (2007) has emphasized the state support in facilitating social accountability intervention.
• Here comes the question of political will and commitment
Socio-political Situation and Scope for Civic Engagement

- Some common features across the South Asian region in terms of culture
- Common legacy
- Yet, different – stable democratic tradition in India, struggling democracy in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, extremely unstable condition in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Vibrant civil society in India, incorporated civil society in other South Asian countries.
- Strong political society in India
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<td>Case Study 1</td>
<td>- Inefficiency, corruption, and lack of equity in the delivery of services.</td>
<td>- Participatory budgeting</td>
<td>- Genuine participation by women and poor people</td>
<td>- More active interests of donors</td>
<td>- Strong backing</td>
<td>- Important to see what happens when upscaled.</td>
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<td>Participatory Budgeting in</td>
<td>- Clientelism within societal organizations</td>
<td>- Devolved performance-linked funding</td>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td>- Open budget sessions</td>
<td>- Incentive structure</td>
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<td>- Participatory planning</td>
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<td>- Participatory performance assessment of UPs</td>
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<td>Case Study 2</td>
<td>- Elite capture orchestrated by rural elites, their central level patrons and land</td>
<td>- Participatory service delivery system, jointly managed by the government and NGOs</td>
<td>- Proper distribution of khas land among the poor people</td>
<td>- State support</td>
<td>- Acceptance by the state</td>
<td>- Clientelism in another form.</td>
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<td>Distribution of Khas Land in</td>
<td>- Central level patrons and land department bureaucracy</td>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td>- Lack of accountability mechanisms for NGOs.</td>
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<td><strong>Case Study 3</strong></td>
<td>Inefficiency, corruption, lack of equity in the delivery of infrastructure and social services</td>
<td>Social auditing by <em>Mazdur Kishan Shakti Sangathan</em> (MKSS)</td>
<td>Active participation of the poor. Fair wages, no system loss. Genuine participative alternative</td>
<td>Vibrant civil society Relatively better political environment , RTI Act Sympathy of some state decision makers. Executive responsiveness</td>
<td>Encourage ment by the state</td>
<td>Sometimes confrontational Kerala local government is better alternative Importance of institutionalization of participatory mechanisms</td>
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<td><strong>Case Study 4:</strong> Citizen Report Card in India</td>
<td>Mismanagement of essential public services, including corruption and non-responsiveness</td>
<td>Citizen report cards administered to seek citizens’ opinions</td>
<td>Improved public services</td>
<td>Vibrant civic groups Citizens’ competence Executive responsiveness</td>
<td>Encourage ment by the state</td>
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<td><strong>Case Study 5:</strong> Social Audits, Community Information and Epidemiological Technologies, Pakistan</td>
<td>Corruption, mismanagement in public service delivery at the local level</td>
<td>Community monitoring of service provision and government projects; baseline survey</td>
<td>Some tangible impacts</td>
<td>Complex partnership of several stakeholders including donor agencies</td>
<td>Encourage ment by the state</td>
<td>Lack of institutionalization</td>
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| **Case Study 5: Grassroots Anti-corruption initiatives,** | ▪ Inefficiency, corruption, lack of equity in the delivery of infrastructure and social services  
▪ Capture of pre-existing participatory mechanisms | ▪ Rationing Action Committees (Rationing Kruti samiti [RKS])  
▪ Autonomous supervision of ration shops.  
▪ Publicity of prices and samples. | ▪ Active participation of the poor.  
▪ Genuine participative alternative | ▪ Vibrant civil society  
▪ Better political environment  
▪ Sympathy of some state decision markers  
▪ Reformist bureaucracy | ▪ Encourage ment by the state | ▪ Doubtful technical sustainability  
▪ Importance of institutionalization of participatory mechanisms versus reformist bureaucracy. |
Lessons Learned and Implications for Public Accountability and Public Service Delivery

- **Concrete Benefits**
- There are some concrete results derived from civic engagement in public service provision. Though the results are not spectacular but they have tremendously demonstrated that civic engagement should be an essential ingredient of the public service delivery system.
• The importance of Contextual Factors
• Democracy
• Legal framework
• Strength of CSOs and mobilization by them
• Political culture
• Clientelism
The Role of the State

The state can play different kinds of role right from the legislative mandate to facilitator. The state can also constraint civic engagement as evidenced in many instances.
- Institutionalization
- Legal/policy framework
- Practice over an extended period of time
- Constructing alliances
• **Civic Engagement and Local Government**
  
  The concept of decentralized local government is very much relevant for integrating the poor people with political society. There are civic groups but they work at the behest of local governments.
  
  The cases of Kerala and West Bengal in India are the glaring examples (Ahmed, 2008; Heller et al (2007).
Skill Base and Sustainability

Lack of skill base hampers sustainability
- The Importance of Political Society
- Political society and the need for integrating the target population into political stream.
The Need for a Holistic Perspective

Civic organizations can't make significant changes alone unless state-centered mechanisms are well-developed.
Conclusion