

Transparency, accountability in water service delivery, problems and prospects: A case of Brahmapur city in Orissa, India

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Abstract

In urban local settings, mismanagement of water is characterized by poor governance which includes faulty policies, conflicting interests among water users, weak decision-making structures with top-down approaches, lack of public participation, poor implementation, lack of funds, corruption and lack of accountability. This results in poor service delivery and inequitable distribution. Citizen's participation is increasingly recognized as an essential component of good governance practice. Accountability is a fundamental value for any political system. Citizens have the right to know what actions have been taken in their name, and they should have the means to force corrective actions when government acts in an illegal, immoral, or unjust manner. Two social accountability tools 'Citizen Report Card' and 'Urban Corruption Survey' have been used by the non-governmental organization Youth for Social Development to create public awareness, provide necessary skills to monitor and advocate for water policy and governance reform. Citizen groups were also helped to use the Indian Right to Information act (2005) to acquire and use information about their water and sanitation services and providers.

This paper has been designed to serve three basic objectives concentrating on ensuring accountability among the WASH service providers. This includes:

- *highlighting the corruption and lack of accountability among service providers in local context;*
- *demonstrating citizens' participation in demanding accountability; and,*
- *providing prospective solutions for ensure accountability through constructive engagement between water users and service providers.*

The paper also provides a few propositions to strengthen transparency and accountability among the WASH service providers.

Keywords

Urban water and sanitation, report cards, corruption survey, right to information, public participation

Introduction

The urban poor living in slums and informal settlements are the most disadvantaged with respect to access to basic services. Urban poor are not recognized as legitimate citizens of the city and are considered as burden by utilities and service providers. A majority of these informal communities either completely lack or have inadequate access to formal systems for water supply, sanitation and solid waste management. Existing governance structure makes it difficult for the urban poor to have a voice in the city's development process targeted at them¹.

Focusing on the weak performance level of the service delivery agencies, corruption lack of accountability and poor citizen participation, Youth for Social Development, a local research based NGO working to improve governance, used two social accountability tools: these are 'citizen report card' and 'urban corruption survey' in Berhmapur Municipal Corporation of Orissa province of India (see Box-1). These aimed to create public awareness and sensitization, provide necessary skills to monitor and advocate for improved water and sanitation service delivery, policy and governance reform.

This paper has been designed to fulfill three basic objectives concentrating to ensure accountability among the WASH service providers. This includes;

- to highlight corruption and lack of accountability among service providers in local context
- to demonstrate citizens' participation in demanding accountability
- to provide prospective solutions for ensure accountability through constructive engagement between water users and service providers.

Box 1: Profile of Brahmapur City and Problems

Brahmapur Municipality with an area of 79.80 square kilometer and a population of 289,742 as per 2001 census is the oldest municipality in Ganjam district of Orissa (located in southern part of Orissa). It was constituted in 1855. The recent demographic data shows the population reaching nearly half million in 2009. This is the most important town and business centre of southern Orissa. The town experiences larger pressure on account of floating population as well as its being a centre for trade, commerce, education and culture. It has a slum population of 97,018 in 100 pockets, which is increasing due to rural-urban migration.

The town has numerous problems and challenges which start from poor service delivery to the weak governance and institutional framework, resulting in slow development. The town has no organized drainage system for discharging of filth and excess wastewater. Though Brahmapur Municipality is the oldest municipality in Orissa, the local government has failed to provide basic facilities to its citizens. Provision of drinking water and sanitation is a decades' old problem. Inadequacy of water supply created a major issue among the citizens. The waste disposal and management systems have serious problems. The roads of the town are rough and muddy. The basic services in the slum areas are of poor quality. There are also very few livelihood options, denying urban benefits to the poor, women and other marginalized section and giving rise to social exclusion. Participation in civic activities of the slum dwellers (including women, youth and the weaker section) is very poor. Inefficient bureaucracy, low level of civic engagement, lack of political will and corruption has slowed down the development process.

*Source: Municipality Statistics Year Book,(2001-02), DES, Government of Orissa,
First Report of the Second State Finance Commission, 2003, Government of Orissa.*

¹ Global Experiences on Expanding Water and Sanitation Services to the Urban Poor, WSP, The World Bank, August,2009

METHODOLOGY

The Problem

People living in informal slum settlements in medium city like Berhampur in Orissa lack official water and sanitation services. The few slum communities that have official water connections are still subject to poor quality and inconveniently-timed water supply, irregular services. It is hard to get water at peak times (low pressure during peak hours), insufficient quantity (low pressure, irregular supply), quality (in terms of taste, clean and smell). These problems are very acute during summer season (that is, March to June). The heaviest burden in the community is borne by the women and children who must carry loads up to 20 kilograms and walk 4 to 6 kilometers in a day. This affects livelihood. Girl children are denied an education, in part, because of labour needed for water fetching; while women are unable to work to earn money or grow food because time spent walking, waiting in queues for the intermittent water supply to flow in urban slums. As for sanitation lack of space in the informal settlements people often defecate in open fields and road side drains in urban slums. A brief description of service provision by the PHED, Berhampur is given in Box-2.



Photo-1: Children walk 4 kilometers every day carrying water due to absence of/defective Public Tap

To empower poor and marginalized communities with information, evidence and confidence to be able to advocate for themselves, two popular social accountability tools i.e. 'Citizens Report Card' and 'Urban Corruption Survey' have been used. These tools created evidence to influence and advocate for improved transparency and accountability with the participation of communities/citizens in Berhampur city.

Box-2: Service Delivery Provisions, Staff, Budget of PHED, Berhampur
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wards Covered under Piped Water Supply-37 wards partially covered• Population Benefitted by Piped Water Supply- approximately 2,80,000• Total Quantity of Water Supply-34,00,00,00 LD (34 MLD)• Average Rate of Water Supply- 91.90 liters per capita per day• Total Number of House Connections-18,500

- Total Number of Stand Posts-1765
 - Total Number of Hand Pumps & Tube Wells-922
 - Sources of Water Supply- (Dakshinapur Reservoir-15 MLD, Rushikulya Source-12 MLD, Production Wells (70 nos.)-7 MLD)
 - Percentage of HHs access to piped water supply-approximately 30%
 - Total Staff Engaged in Water Supply- 327 (Senior-7, Middle-23, Junior-297)
 - Total Budget- 5,89,41,415 INR(Staff Salary-92,76,415+99,93,000, Works-3,96,72,000) 2007-08
- Source: Public Health and Engineering Department, Berhampur, Orissa, 2009*

ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF WASH SERVICES: DIAGNOSIS THROUGH ‘CITIZEN REPORT CARD’

Citizen Report Card (CRC) is a recognized and powerful approach to bring greater responsiveness and accountability in delivery of public services. CRC started off as a citizen-led voice initiative which over the last decade has evolved into a tool that facilitates diagnosis and creates interactive forums for sustained state-citizens engagement. CRC provides statistically verifiable indicators of citizens/ community perceptions of service provision.

Key Programme and Initiative

The entire initiative had two main components: one is the survey which studies the field reality and second is advocacy to improve service delivery based on the findings. The initiative consisted of a series of structured activities:

- consultation with the stakeholders (public officials, local NGO’s, communities),
- conducting household survey,
- dissemination of the findings through workshops
- discussion forums; and,
- an interface meeting with citizens and public officials in public hearing.

The quantitative findings and techniques of meaningful civic engagement with the public authorities resulted in strengthening the demand for accountability.

Methodology and Strategy

The technical part of the ‘citizen report card’ methodology began with ground work on scope, actors, purpose through focused group discussions with public officials (PHED and BMC staff), local NGO’s, community groups (RWA’s and citizens forum). Following this planning, a bilingual questionnaire was developed with a set of dimensions like access, usage, efficiency, quality of services, staff responsiveness, corruption, overall satisfaction of the quality of services and citizen suggestions. Samples were selected to ensure representation (1000 HHs). Then the household survey was carried out by trained volunteers during which the users of service (for

example, women in the household) prioritized experiences and perceptions of the services. Finally data was entered and subjected to a standard statistical analysis package; the results were set out a publicly digestible format and disseminated.

IEC materials were used to create citizen awareness and education on service delivery provisions and interface meetings among the citizens and the service delivery agencies were also organized through public hearing at the at the community level.

Key Outcomes

Citizen Report Card created a general awareness among communities and stimulated them to organize and demand better services. This participation triggered an improvement in services in slums where lack of drinking water is decade old issue (17 years). As a result seven slums were provided with municipal drinking water out of sixteen slums which has previously no access to municipal drinking water services.

- **A comprehensive report** on quality of service and satisfaction level influenced local government and the report provided benchmarking for future comparisons (see Box-3). The report showed citizen’s dissatisfaction (47.9%) with poor quality of services and lack of accountability among the water and sanitation service providers. This enabled citizens and communities with an evidence base to demand equal access and justice.



- **Assessment boosted advocacy.** Civil society, Residents Welfare Associations (RWA’s) and media used the findings in advocacy to improve service delivery particularly in water and sanitation. Even public officials also find it useful to improve services in different disadvantaged communities².
- **Improved access to water and sanitation services** areas lack of access WASH services since 12/17 years identified and official public taps provided by PHED. Slums with insufficient

² Where there is no access to drinking water and sanitation, insufficient water and irregular water supply

taps also provided with additional stand posts. Budget provisions for setting up of public toilets in inaccessible slums. (those are Pandav Nagar, Ambapua, Khodasingi slums) (seven out of sixteen slums provided with municipal drinking water.)

- **Community awareness** identified service delivery lacunas/gaps specifically on accountability issues and mobilized communities to influence and advocate improving services and empowered citizen groups to demand their rights and entitlements. (12 RTI camps were organized to aware citizens on provisions of service delivery and use right to information to acquire information.)
- **Active community participation developed ownership** communities developed a sense of ownership and ably stop wastage and leakage of water. The sense created care for the water and public toilets as 'community resources'.
- **Competitiveness among different service providers**³ in the race of effective service delivery and to score high at the satisfaction bar. This resulted keeping their promises and responsible on their duties and environment of accountability.

Lessons Learned: Enabling Factors and Constraints

Citizen Report Card involves a critical scientific process like research and data analysis which is difficult for community groups to use it independently without sufficient training and resources. But the same done by a facilitator NGO are very much useful for the communities to use it in influencing service delivery agencies.

Enabling Factors

- Citizen Report Card's are easier to use and administer compared to other more complex tools such as social audits, specifically in small geographical area.
- Citizen Report Card's help enhance the accountability of the public sector by supplying systematic feedback from users of services to the service providers
- They provide a platform for communities and CSOs to engage in dialogue with service providers to improve the quality of public services;
- By engaging with the media and policy makers, CRC's take the accountability debate to the next level.

Constraints

- Citizen Report Card requires high degree of technical expertise involving research (questionnaires, sampling and data analysis) which is difficult for communities to do independently. Thus much of the work is done by facilitating NGOs.
- The process requires considerable funds which are difficult to gather for a community level initiative.

³ Drinking Water (PHED), Civic Services (BMC), Primary Education (Education Dept.), Police (Home Dept.) etc.

- High degree of satisfaction in most of the report cards, criticized as one of the tricky issue even though citizens/users face many problems (e.g. more than half reported insufficient water and a third get water only one hour a day). That reflects low anticipation, citizens accustomed with problems and missing confidence on service delivery agencies. This is also due to some methodological issues such as organize questions and putting those to the respondents to get the genuine answer and also sometimes misidentification of the surveyor as government staff.

Box-3: Major Finding of Citizens Report Card in Berhampur City

Access to Basic Services- Drinking Water and Sanitation

- Only 17.8% of citizens have access to *PHED water supply* at home in the slum area.
- Most of the citizens (87%) have access to *PHED public tap/hand pump* in the slum areas.
- Only 23% of the citizens have access to *public toilet* in the slum areas.
- Only 4.5% of the slum dwellers have access to *garbage dump* near their house and this is the lowest access among all services.

Major Sources of Drinking Water

- Public tap, hand pump and tap connecting to home are the main sources
- 77.1% of the HHs use the public tap water and only 15.9% use tap at home water as source

Quality of Drinking Water Supply

- 58% of the public tap users and 63.5% of tap at home users are **getting water once a day**.
- 55.8% public tap users, 58.3% hand pump users and 49% of the tap at home users reported **insufficient water supply**.
- 44.8% of the tap at home users, 39.2% of the public tap users and 33.3% of the hand pump users are getting water **one hour on the day of water supply**.
- 51% of the tap at home user, 53.4% of the public tap user and 70.8% of the hand pump users reported that the quantity of water supply is **not adequate for their needs**.
- 70.8% tap at home users, 58.4% of the public tap users reported the water supply **time is convenient**.
- 57.3% of the tap at home users, 56.5% public tap users and 41.7% of the hand pump users find the water is **sweet, no smell and clear**.

Problem Incidence, Resolution and Staff Responsiveness

- 59.4% of tap at home users, 56.7% public tap users and 45.8% of the hand pump users had **problems with regard to drinking water services**.
- About 45% of the hand pumps users, 43.5% of the public tap users and 33.3% of the tap at home users reported problems of **insufficient water supply**.
- Among other problems reported were - **public tap is out of order**, water supply gets **disconnected frequently**, and there is **rush at the public tap**.
- 43.8% of public tap users and only 16.7% of the hand pump users **solved their problem** after interaction with PHED officials.
- 84.8% HHs satisfied with the **abilities of the staff**, 80.9% with the **behavior of the staff** and 79.2% **helpfulness of the staff**.
- 68% HHs satisfied with the **time taken to attend**, 52.8% with the **time taken to resolve** a problem, 52.8% with the **abilities of the staff** and 46.1% satisfied with the **efficiency of the staff**.

Citizen Satisfaction with Overall Quality of Services

- 52.1% of the households are **satisfied with the overall quality** of drinking water services.
- Among them 35.6% of the households are **completely satisfied** with the overall quality of services.

Citizen Suggestions

- To set up extra public taps to avoid rush at the available public tap.
- Sufficient water should be supplied during the summer season.
- Water supply should be two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening.
- Hygienic water should be supplied.
- PHED staff should be efficient and regular

- Wastage of water should be prevented at broken public taps.

Source: Quality of Public Services in Brahmapur, Orissa: A Citizen Report Card (2008), Youth for Social Development

CORRUPTION IN WASH SERVICE DELIVERY: DIAGNOSIS THROUGH ‘URBAN CORRUPTION SURVEY’

Key Programme and Initiative

Systematic steps were undertaken in addressing corruption through diagnosing of its scale and nature. A household survey was designed to study corruption perception/bribery index through a simple research methodology (following Transparency International methods), a comprehensive report prepared, and benchmarked for future comparison. The information was disseminated widely to create consciousness among public officials, community groups, local NGO's, media and the ordinary people. Finally, community groups mobilized and sensitized to check corruption through monitoring service delivery and improve corruption free services and accountability among WASH service providers.

Methodology and Strategy

The process started with few focus meetings with intellectuals, local NGO's, utility staff and communities. The experiences and perception of clients were recorded through a structured questionnaire with set of indicators like incidence, frequency, prevalence, severity, favoritism, bribe cost, bribe size and so on. Six basic services were selected focusing the poor and marginalized sections. Household interviews were conducted from 2003 representative samples from slum and non-slum regions covering 27 wards in Brahmapur city. The data was entered into a data base subjected to a standard statistical analysis package, interpreted, and then set out a publicly digestible format.

Dissemination workshops organized to sensitize public officials, community, media, intellectuals and local NGO's on dangers, bad impacts and extra costs of corruption. Interface meeting (public hearing) among citizens and public officials organized to resolve issues of corruption and lack of accountability.

Key Outcomes

Drinking water service was ranked as the 4th most corrupt agency (see Chart-2) by the respondents which scored bribery index⁴ of 33.7. The unrecognized costs figured out (bribe cost⁵ averaging 132 Indian Rupees and bribe size 1003 Indian Rupees) a serious issue in delivery of drinking water service. Four out of five households (81% or 36,450)⁶ paid bribes amounting in total to Indian Rupees 36.55 million (US\$ 790,000) specifically for the drinking water services (see Box-4).

Dissemination of the corruption survey findings moved public opinion against corrupt agencies. Media played a key role in publicizing the issue to reach wide stakeholder and communities. Service delivery agencies, specifically PHED and Municipal Corporation, have taken steps to disclose information on service delivery norms. The grievance redress mechanism was strengthened and promises were made to take to action against corrupt officials with a regular dialogue fixed between civil society (Coalition Against Corruption) and public officials on different issues.

Lessons Learned: Enabling Factors and Constraints

As with the Citizen Report Card, the Urban Corruption Survey requires a high degree of analytical skill and but the findings are useful for both the demand and supply side actors to bring transparency and accountability into WASH services.

Enabling Factors

- Urban Corruption Survey is based on simple corruption indicators encountered in day to day business with government. The indicators are easy to diagnosis within a small geographical area.
- Urban Corruption Survey enables identification of widespread bribe/corruption and actors in public service delivery, critical areas of corruption and highlights those aspects that affect the common man.
- The survey enables meaningful constructive engagement/dialogue with public officials, civil society, citizens and community groups to fight against corruption and make effective service delivery in water and sanitation.
- It creates a more transparency and accountable environment and competition among service agencies.

⁴ Bribery Index includes dimensions like incidence, prevalence, severity, favoritism, frequency, cost and bribe size

⁵ Bribe Cost=Total Bribe Transaction/Total Population and Bribe Size=Total Bribe/Number of HHs Paid Bribe (average size)

⁶ This is calculation of assuming if 81%of the entire population pay bribe the cost would be 36.55 million

Constraints

- The Urban Corruption Survey is difficult to repeat or replicate as it requires high degree of technical expertise.
- Urban Corruption Survey requires resources, commitment and intensive involvement by all the stakeholders to implement and fight against corruption.
- The facilitating NGO and community together are insufficient to fight against corruption. A network of likeminded organizations and joint efforts are required.

Box-4: Major Findings of Urban Corruption Survey

Citizens Interaction and Information

- 61.5% of the respondents faced problems in water services and 89.2% in civic services that includes sanitation
- Problems mostly associated with repair of the **water disconnection** (54.2%), applying for **new water connection** (29.2%), and payment of **excess water bills** (16.6%)
- 48% of the citizens faced problems, visited PHED office to lodge a complaint and 43.2% visited to municipal corporation(BMC) office.
- PHED remains the poorest (6th with 18.1%) in availability of information related to service provision and municipal corporation was(BMC) 5th with 25.2%
- 43.6% citizens used middleman to get information on water service.

Bribe, Cost, Size and Overall Bribery Index

- 81.1% paid **bribe to the middlemen** and 57.9% paid to the **public officials** in water services but in case of BMC services 77.3% paid to middleman and 63% paid to the officials.
- PHED rated the **2nd worst in bribery incidence** (48.5%) followed by BMC (45.4%)
- Drinking water service was the top scorer in bribery **y** (70% get their work done after payment of bribe) I followed by BMC services in third place (64.1%)
- Again in the **favoritism⁷ row in case of drinking water service** 70.1% of households favored by the service agency and BMC at fifth with 44.2%.
- Drinking water rates the **third highest bribe in size compared to other agencies** with average bribe size of Indian Rupees 1003.
- **INR 132 for drinking water** and **INR 115 for BMC services** burdens as extra per citizen as bribe cost
- Aggregately water service remains the 4th most corrupted agency with an **index of 33.70** and BMC at 5th position with **29.22 as bribery index** among six selected basic service agencies.

Satisfaction with Services

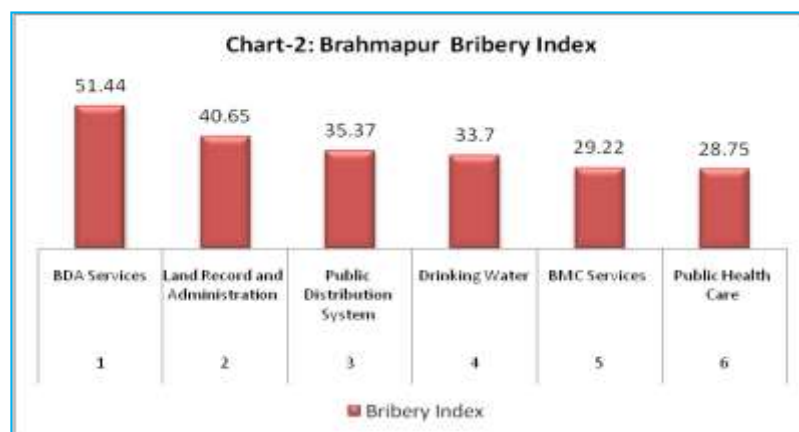
- Drinking water service ranked **2nd in the satisfaction level with 42%** of the households satisfied and BMC rated least satisfied with only 19% HHs satisfied.

Causes of Corruption

- Denial of service and harassment by the public officials is one of the most important reasons of corruption.
- Specific reasons of corruption in water service delivery are getting a new water connection 62%, regularity of water supply 23%, restoration of water supply 54%, supply of water through water tanks 31%, correction of water bill 18%, use of electric motor to get more water 26%, regularization of unauthorized water connection 14%

Source: Brahmapur Bribery Index, 2009 Urban Corruption Survey in Brahmapur, Orissa, (2009)YSD

⁷ Favoritism refers to the normal human inclination to prefer acquaintances, friends and family over strangers. It is not always, then, a form of corruption.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON WASH SERVICES: USING ‘RIGHT TO INFORMATION’

Information plays a vital role in stimulating citizen’s voice and participation in demanding accountability. Ensuring water users have access to relevant information is key to accountability. The use of Indian Right to Information (RTI) act, 2005 has facilitated citizens in asking questions and demanding answers from government. The law enables people to protect their rights (for example, to access services like water and sanitation) (see Box-5). Community groups were sensitized on how to use RTI -Right to Information act- (e.g. file RTI application, appeal to higher level, complaint against secrecy etc.). They filed a number of RTI applications on water and sanitation services. Much information was collected from PHED on water service delivery. This included not only information on service provision, budgets, and expenditures, but also critical questions of accountability such as who is responsible for low pressure, repair of public taps, access to municipal water⁸. Citizens also demanded to comply ‘suo moto’ information disclosure under Section-4, (1) (b) of Right to Information Act, 2005.⁹

Box-5: RTI: Enforced Right to Water and Sanitation

Citizen groups in slums in Berhampur used right to information law to demand water and sanitation services. Several examples established the effectiveness of the act. Raghupati Nagar slum has no access to official drinking water and sanitation for the past 17 years. Several applications and complaints had no results and the citizens tired of running offices and even requests to the local councilor failed. Citizen groups then filled applications under RTI asking status of their applications for a stand post and complaints, provision of setting up a stand post, names of officials responsible for

⁸ Earlier drinking water services were provided by BMC but now it is the responsibility of PHED which is under Urban Development Department.

⁹ 17 point information contains information on objectives, services delivery norms, budgets, roles and responsibilities and grievances mechanism and decisions making process which every public authority should disclose within 120 days of the enactment of the Right to Information Act, 2005.

water supply. One month after the RTI applications, a stand post was set up. The experience was similar in Ram Nagar, Harihar Nagar and Pandav Nagar slums, and budget provision has also been made for construction of public toilets in three slum areas. A number of defective stand posts were repaired after the filing of RTI application by the citizens. Pressure increased in low-pressured stand posts and additional stand posts were set up to improve sufficiency of water supply.

Source: Youth for Social Development, 2010

Demanding accountability: empowering Community Organizations

Community groups¹⁰ in different wards of the city disseminated the findings of both studies. The groups were sensitized on service delivery norms and findings from the studies. The processes of service delivery were demystified by explaining information related to water and sanitation. These groups were also capacitated to file general applications, to write and register complaints and also to file right to information applications on issues such as service provision, budgets, plans and expenditures in their community and also on how to deal with the public officials. YSD played a key role in mediating through conducting a public hearing which engaged both the actors to solve water and sanitation related issues. This made information available to the public on service delivery norms. It also helped improve access to water and sanitation (new and extra stand posts provided), service delivery (pressure increased, timing of water supply increased), and helped PHED staff redress grievances.



Photo-2: Citizens speak during public hearing on Water Service Delivery

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The 'Citizen Report Card' and 'Urban Corruption Survey' tools were used to diagnose problems of accessibility to WASH services (no official drinking water and sanitation, needy HHs and

¹⁰ Community groups in some areas are formal RWA's, citizen groups and in others informal groups like youth groups, sport clubs, women's groups (SHGs) etc.

community), poor quality of services (low pressure, insufficient quantity, irregularity) lack of accountability (weak grievance reporting, delayed responses, inefficiency), client dissatisfaction (poor quality services, inequality) and corruption/additional costs (petty or large scale corruption). These social accountability tools motivated the public and helped in organizing communities to monitor service delivery and also to formulate strategies to advocate for improved services. This assessment is essential not only for formulating strategies that address existing problems but also for developing systems that ensure greater transparency in the future¹¹.

Information played a vital role in providing clues to compare, to argue and to ask questions about poor quality, dissatisfaction, lack of accountability and corruption. The Indian Right to Information law strengthened the voice of citizens, helped improve services, fulfilled right and entitlements while improving the credibility of the service agencies, stimulating greater openness and trust among citizens (see Box-5).

Community groups like RWA's, women's and youth groups plays a vital role in utilizing the information/data for advocacy and demanding improved services. Lasting civic engagement and action are needed to continue to bring pressure on the government for a responsive and non corrupt system of service delivery. This makes sustainable social accountability actions and creates community ownership among the citizens.

Constructive engagement with service providers and citizens has been key feature of the initiatives. This involved developing links with interested and likeminded (champions) officials with in government structures at different levels and encouraged dialogue. This resulted in minimizing conflict and generates internal institutional response on transparency and accountability. This entire programme initiative lasts three years and costs around 60,000 US\$ to implement in an urban setting.

MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED

Proper diagnosis during planning stages is essential to ensure the impact of social accountability tools on service delivery. This also includes committed involvement of utility staff, clients and the facilitating organization (NGOs and civil society). In collection of information through surveying different stakeholders, attention is needed to accuracy with sufficient checking and monitoring. Facilitators need to articulate user feedback in a manner that encourages providers and political leaders to see the input of users as both neutral and significant. Neutrality and non-partisan action contributes to the credibility of the facilitating organization and impacts remain positive.

Corruption is less important to the citizens/clients where there is no access to service, particularly among the poor and vulnerable groups. 'Getting the work done' is a priority and the cost of corruption is

¹¹ Improving Transparency, Integrity, and Accountability in Water Supply and Sanitation (2009), The World Bank

often seen as tolerable. On the other hand fear of harassment and denial of services among the public tends to make them afraid and reluctant to fight against corruption. In order to mobilize poor people against corruption, the planned initiatives should be designed so that the bad impacts of corruption and poverty linked to corruption are well understood by everyone.

Mainstreaming of anti-corruption and demanding accountability through social accountability tools sometimes does not work with the community groups due to their fear of disfavor from the public agency and elected representatives in the community. Strong mobilization and understanding of the social accountability and sustainable citizen action/efforts will help people demand accountability. A collective voice is louder than individual voices; thus, citizens and civil society coalitions play a significant role in delivering demands to providers. Forming coalitions that include users from various social classes and income levels brings the 'louder' voices of the middle and upper classes into the process and helps to brand demands as 'user-oriented' rather than 'poor-oriented'.



Photo-3: Slum dwellers in Berhampur provided with municipal drinking water

CONCLUDING REMARK

Social accountability, adopted and practiced in this paper, is a key building block for delivering change through the use of tools and capacity building. The tools provide a way for users/citizens to improve the accountability of service providers in reform processes and service provision. The goal should not be simply for users to be consulted or for mobilization or voice-raising to occur— rather, these are means by which voice can be turned into influence, creating formal and concrete mechanisms for improved delivery of equitable and sustainable services.

Opening up the dark chambers of the state to the eyes of the public is a major move forward, but it is only a first step. Governments need to be encouraged to directly stimulate the participation of society and to institutionalize mechanisms of state-society relations., Political buy-in to the change process and the championing of the process by high-level leadership has

been identified as a key enabling factor to stimulate providers to become more transparent and accountable.

Poor people are exceptionally willing and able to work with government in constructive ways once they perceive that their participation can make a difference. In addition, effective societal participation is by no means limited to the provision of basic services. The poor care about much more than simple survival and local issues. It is a mistake to think that the poor are incapable of mobilizing themselves in the pursuit of larger social goals. We need to challenge this sort of circumscription of societal participation to “well behaved” or “enlightened” actors like NGOs and work for the full inclusion of the citizenry as a whole in the core activities of government.

Hence it can be concluded that any tool for social accountability may be effective when the plan, design and implementation are architected properly and focus on committed citizen participation and mobilizes their engagement with the government, not only to raise the voice of the poor but also to strengthen accountability.

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