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## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MONITORING: A PROCESS TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

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Owing to failure of a number of policies and programmes that were designed by the government, the decade of 1990s experienced a new wave of people centered development, which popularly began to be called participatory development. With increasing emphasis on decentralized governance, the projects initiated by the government, bilateral and multilateral agencies began to mainstream element of 'participation' by creating space in the projects for the people in designing and implementing the programmes. This, however was a great shift from an approach, which had eschewed those people from planning programmes whom it was meant to benefit the most.

In 1990s, the projects worldwide began to bring in the focus of participation of the community. Soon, community participation became an integral part of development projects implemented by the state. The projects were framed and under the provisions of the project, village level institutions (in the form of committees) were constituted to involve people in the village for their participation in the projects.

Village level institutions, the representative body of people residing in the same village, are initiated by the project through people's mandate. Purpose of forming village level institutions is to provide people ownership of the project by making them integral part of decision making, giving them control over their resources, and giving them the autonomy to implement the project their way.<sup>1</sup>

Despite strong emphasis on participation, many experiences have shown that meaning of participation in the development projects has been interpreted in various ways. Participation has been either seen as a voluntary contribution by the people in the public programmes, or their involvement in decision making processes, in implementing programmes. Participation has been concerned with the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations

on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control. Community participation has also been seen as an active process by which beneficiaries or clients influence the direction and execution of development project.<sup>2</sup>

A study on effectiveness of village level institutions (VLTs) in the state of Uttaranchal, undertaken by PRIA in 2000 has demonstrated that the meaning of participation has been reduced to an instrumental function (where the project goals have to be fulfilled) as opposed to power functions, which implies reversal in power equations and turning the powers in favor of poor and excluded. The study revealed that encouraging people's participation has been reduced to a means to achieve an end, in this way it suffers from being reduced to assume importance in ritualistic ways where people's involvement in participatory rural appraisals and planning is sought to ensure participation, even in those projects which are pre-designed. If participation is seen as a value, the process becomes important where the focus lies on integrating the powerless and excluded in various ways into a project or programme. Though the representation of poor and excluded as members in VLIs point towards the inclusion of marginalized as members of the committee, but it is difficult to establish that in reality how much say the members of excluded groups have in the decision making and how successful they have been in changing the decisions in their favor. The issue of sustainability of the projects has also been raised in many ways in the projects. By establishing committees, projects make assumption that the ownership and control would be with the people. Various kinds of capacity building efforts during project implementation stages also explain that the committees constituting villagers will take up the development in their hands once the project winds up and will be capable to sustain the projects.

In the communities, many kinds of institutions operate which can be traditional, project initiated or statutory like panchayts in India. All these institutions serve some functions within the community and affect the lives of the people in many ways. The accountability of these institutions towards the people is not very clearly established and often not taken up under the broader perspective of participation. Unfortunately, the interpretation of participation does not get extended to ensuring accountability from the institutions present in the villages or outside.

The committees formed under the projects fulfill the conditions laid out in the projects and do not vanish when the project ends about in

fact all the projects have provisions for committees for a longer duration. Therefore their existence as institutions within the community remains since they have to perform roles and responsibilities as enshrined in the project documents. These institutions do not necessarily have all the information about the project, since much information appears in very technical languages, which the committees may not be able to comprehend. The situation aggravates when the projects conclude and the outside agencies also go away. Most of the problems related to operational and maintenance emerge after the project implementation ends. Due to lack of information on where to get support from, the committees also fail to respond to the demands of the people.

There has been increasing disillusionment of citizens with the state and governance structures created under decentralization policies. The charges of corruption, lack of responsiveness have often been placed on such institutions. These incidents are ironic, since on the one hand efforts to strengthen participatory processes are going on and on the other hand, growing attention has been paid to strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of the institutions yet the link between participation and accountability remains unclear.

As participatory approaches are scaled up from projects to policies, they inevitably enter the arenas of governance and find that participation can only become effective as it engages with issues of institutional change. As concerns about good governance and state responsiveness grow, questions about how citizens engage and make demands on the state also come to the fore.<sup>3</sup>

The development interventions in the form of projects must aim at strengthening the voices of the excluded and marginalized to demand for their rights as citizens. Citizenship encompasses rights/entitlements and responsibilities/ practice dimensions. Meaning thereby that citizenship is not only demanding rights but also fulfilling responsibilities as desired or expected in a community by participating in processes, which is for the larger public good. Citizenship is closely related to democracy, and citizen is a person who governs and is governed. Therefore, it is important to note that participation and citizenship are the two sides of the same coin.

Participation is about the involvement of all stakeholders, the state and the non-state, through a process of communication, negotiation to

influence the decisions that affect their lives. Participation leads to the creation and sustenance of accountability. A sense of the right to accountability provides the basis on which citizens can act. It leads to openness and transparency in policy making. Such accountability builds up social reciprocities characterized by equity, intergroup tolerance and inclusive citizenship. Responsible and active citizenship results in meaningful participation. Citizenship, participation and accountability together form the basis of a governance wheel, which moves on in an integrated, interlinked and synergised manner and which affects each of the three in a dynamic relationship.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Meaning of Social Development Monitoring***

The social development signifies some kind of positive action in the society. It clearly demonstrates 'change and transformation' from the current situation to an expected situation of a society characterized by justice, equality, freedom, participation of marginalized groups signifying empowerment.

In this context, monitoring implies checking and examining the information about the current project/programme development to improve implementation, performance and results. In essence it means comparing the actual situation with the expected or planned situation and then taking action to bring reality and expectations together. Action is a very important part of monitoring, carried out at the local level or at the higher level on making referrals, which ensures accountability, transparency and responsibility.

Unfortunately, a cloud of myth surrounds the term monitoring. It is generally associated with a body of skills and tools, which only 'experts' in the development sector possess. These experts are the project managers or the programme managers of the government or the NGOs. The general impression is that the community is not experienced in handling a technical component like monitoring on their own since this requires special skills. This narrow view of monitoring stifles people's active contribution in solving their own problems, it is very important to demystify this view of monitoring if people's participation has to be ensured in any projects and programmes.

In fact, everyone is engaged in monitoring all the time, though we may not be aware of it. A school going child will definitely check that all her books, notebooks are kept in the bag, her dress is appropriate for

the day, her shoe laces are tied. The parents may also be interested in checking that the uniform the child wears for the day is clean, the buttons are in place, her shoes are polished and the child is carrying the books and notebooks according to the schedule of the day. If the child finds there is something wrong, she may fix the problem herself or may ask her parents to do so. This common example from day-to-day life debunks the concept and meaning of the term 'monitoring', which does not require special skills but interested actors (in this example, the child and parents) and relevant issue (preparation to go to school) to collect data on, carry out analysis and proper action.

*Social development monitoring (SDM)* is a process of inclusion of citizens in checking, observing, collecting information on the development plans, policies and programmes, taking actions on the gaps that might exist for achieving the desired results/outcomes by holding the higher authorities of the state, bilateral and multilateral agencies accountable with the purpose to promote effective and robust governance. SDM is a process, which focuses on people's rights to ascertain that their interests are not compromised, on the other hand it ensures that people in protecting their interests do not jettison the larger 'public good'. In another words, Social development monitoring is a process of strengthening accountability and governance by offering space for the excluded and marginalized to influence decisions in their favor. The social development monitoring aims at improving a situation, empowering people who have real interest in the issue by engaging them in the process and bringing sustainability by inclusion of poor and marginalized in the process.

PRIA has been involved in facilitating social development monitoring with the perspective to empower the community by enabling them to demand their rights, which they deserve as citizens and strengthen their skills as key actors in the development process by enabling them to take up actions at their level. Social development monitoring was facilitated by PRIA with the support of local partner NGOs in India and Srilanka. In India, SDM interventions in Dharali village in Uttarkashi focused on improving the functioning of the Village water and sanitation committees constituted under Rural water supply and sanitation project of World Bank. In Golapalli village in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh, the interventions focused on increasing accountability of Water users association. In Jharkhand, SDM interventions were channelised in improving the functioning of schools responsible for providing non-formal education to working children in three blocks of Jarmundi, Saryahat and

Jamtara in Dumka district. The Srilankan site Thuruwilla village in Anuradhapura was about ensuring accountability from government and Asian Development Bank on a water project which aimed at extracting water from the tank on which livelihood of people of Thuruwilla depended for centuries.

This article is based on the experiences that have been generated from all the sites where the process was undertaken.

### ***Key Steps Involved in SDM***

#### *Identification of key issue and problems*

Since monitoring focuses on an issue, concern or a problem, it is essential to know what is the problem by consulting various stakeholders in the community belonging to various institutions present within the community. Other partners who are part of the development interventions should also be consulted in order to know the concerns and issues that the people face. In the social development monitoring interventions in India and Srilanka, the concern surrounding water problems emerged in three out of four sites. The problems varied from ineffective water and sanitation committees, poor quality of water, lack of accountability of committees and panchayats, the marginalized not getting the benefits to lack of responsiveness of state authorities in implementing the projects. In Srilanka, the cause of concern for the people in Anuradhapura was their livelihood, which was about to be getting affected by the government's decision of extracting water from the Thuruwilla tank for supplying it to the city dwellers. People feared that such an action would affect their crops drastically and they may not be able to raise their two crops which they have been doing since ages, as the water in the tank would recede fast and there seemed no provision of replenishing the tank. In Jharkhand, a process of mapping of service delivery projects assisted in focusing interventions on providing non-formal education to working children in three blocks of Jarmundi, Saryahat and Jamtara. During the consultations in the community and with the various state authorities, it was revealed that parents of the children were unaware of basic provisions of the project and were rather concerned about the functioning of the school.

The process of identification of issue involves very intensive consultations and meetings with the community members, which should happen on an ongoing basis as during the project cycle, fresh concerns and problems emerge at various stages. The results of these consultations

help in providing the information on a list of concerns, list of those who are concerned and have a vested interest in the issue, detailed information about the expectations or demands of each group regarding the issue.

*Identification of interested actors and their roles*

The next step in the process of social development monitoring is to list down the actors within the community who have a real interest in the issue. The ownership of a monitoring process can only be taken up by those who have a direct stake on the issue. Within the community also, a specific concern may be most relevant to a particular group than other. Such groups need to be identified based on the issue. In Jharkhand, the parents of those children who were studying in the schools were interested actors in checking that schools functioned properly. There was no reason to organize those parents whose children did not attend the schools. Similarly, in the case of Uttaranchal, where the whole community was affected by the issue, the men and women from the poor families were more interested in getting the water regularly and were concerned about the conditions of pipes as they were sharing one standposts amongst 5-8 families than those slightly better off families who in any case were benefited by having their individual connections. In Andhra Pradesh, the villagers (men and women) were concerned about the regular supply of irrigation for their crops. Even in Srilanka, the whole village was getting affected by the government's decision to extract water from the Thuruvilla Tank in Anuradhapura.

These interested actors were put in groups and committees to be leaders in the social development monitoring process. The parents committee in Jharkhand, core group and monitoring committee in Uttaranchal and Andhra Pradesh and Thuruvilla Tank Protection Society (TTPS) in Srilanka emerged out of this process, which played important role in taking the process forward. Except the TTPS which had the membership of the whole village with a small executive body, the other groups and committees for monitoring had 6-7 members drawn from the community.

*Making indicators and action plans*

Once the actors are prepared to take up monitoring, each issue should be discussed further and small sets of indicators could be built around an issue. In Uttaranchal, the issue of ineffective water supply was further broken down into the small sets of indicators such as irregularity of water

supply, dysfunctional stand posts, quality of water (mud and silt composition), conditions of pipes. Similarly, in Jharkhand, the functioning of school was further elaborated and categorized into presence or absence of two teachers during school hours, serving of mid-day meal scheme, health check ups of children by local health department.

In Andhra Pradesh and in Srilanka, the indicators were not built rather causes of the problems were identified such as in AP, the identification of issue on irregular supply of water in the village for irrigation was owed to less depth of the tank in the village. In Srilanka, the over extraction plan of the government was to be thwarted if livelihoods of inhabitants were to be saved. In these two cases the action plans emerged out of the problems which were directed towards addressal of the problems.

This step enables in developing the clarity on the objectives on monitoring that is to evoke responsiveness and accountability from the concerned authorities.

#### *Collection and analysis of information*

The indicators preparation has to be followed by the step on how to collect data and evolve the mechanisms of analyzing it. In the case of Jharkhand, with the facilitation of PRIA and local partners, the parents committee developed a pictorial format while in Uttaranchal, the written format was developed by the core groups having all indicators listed. The data was collected three-four times in a month and presented before the teachers, and other concerned authorities in the case of Jharkhand and before VWSC and panchayts in the case of Uttaranchal.

The meetings of teachers, parents and community members with VWSC and panchayats would lead to analysis of the reasons of the problems. In the case of Uttaranchal, poor quality of water was reported due to low positioning of the tank where water used to get stored and deforestation. An action plan used to emerge from the analysis on what should be done to check the problem and who can help in solution of the problem.

#### *Taking actions at the lowest level and demanding actions from the higher authorities*

The analysis of information would lead to certain steps and actions, which have to be undertaken to check the problem. In the case of Uttaranchal,

the meetings would lead to steps and from where the support could be accessed to solve the problem. Certain actions were possible by the local community such as raising the height of the tank, while certain actions such as afforestation near the water resources and training for VWSC members on operational and maintenance were referred to the project authorities at the district level which were later taken up by the authorities. In Andhra Pradesh, the committee decided to refer the deepening of the water tank to the project officials while they also got organized to provide labour in de-weeding the tank.

In Jharkhand, the parents held meeting with concerned government authorities, circle and medical officers to apprise them of the facts and petition them for redress or corrective actions. For instance, slackness on the part of doctors in conducting routine medical check ups of students, difficulties to run centres owing to teachers post being vacant, were put before them.

In Srilanka, people organized themselves into various sub-committees based on task under the Tank Protection Society. Some played the role of collecting information on the project, while some played the role of organizing people in the village, some others played the role of 'watch dogs' to disallow entry of any project officials to commence work in the village. While some with the local partners took the responsibility to garner support from other organizations like Movement for Defense of Democratic Rights (MDDR), Human Rights Commission (HRC) and media to support the cause of the people. The case was filed in HRC, which directed the project staff to share the documents with the HRC and the people of Thuruvilla, which were kept away from them in the beginning. Simultaneously, a case has been filed in the court and stay order has been obtained through people's efforts.

Personal visits, letters to the project officials and other government authorities, invitation to them for attending various meetings organised in the community, sending petitions were carried out to come in contact with the higher authorities. Agitations, poster campaigns, religious activities were undertaken in Srilanka to influence the project authorities. Religious functions served two latent functions— organizing the whole community and conveying strong messages of unity and strength to the government officials.

### **Key Lessons**

1. *The term 'monitoring' conveys negative connotations:* The term 'monitoring' evokes fear and resentment and therefore, a non-threatening environment needs to be built to get the support from other stakeholders. In the beginning itself, the process should not appear to be threatening otherwise the powerful groups in the community and in various government departments can harm the process right from the beginning. Building trust and confidence is a pre condition for effective monitoring process. If this is seen as an empowering tool for the poor and marginalized to demand responsiveness from the higher levels and other institutions, establishing a process of communication and understanding of the purpose of monitoring process helps in dissipating doubts and fears. Where the doubts prevail, it is unlikely that a smooth process can sustain itself for long. Greater reluctance from the higher authorities might do more harm than good to the confidence of people and can seriously injure the process of ensuring accountability.
2. *Monitoring provides opportunity for citizens action:* Since monitoring is accompanied with an action, it gives spaces for the people to act and be responsible as well. While ensuring accountability from the higher authorities is essential, it is also important that the citizens demonstrate responsibility to the state and other institutions. In this way, citizenship processes can be strengthened in the community. In all the cases, citizens demanded their rights but were also convinced that citizenship does not mean only 'demanding' but 'acting' as well. Thefts of parts of the standposts, stealing pipes or clogging the pipes were some incidents which community in Uttaranchal felt that they were responsible for and agreed that they need to put check on these incidents themselves. Similarly, in Srilanka, the people were initially not compromising on the extraction issue since their livelihood was getting affected, but through the process of social development monitoring they realized that they as active citizens should not be so rigid in fulfilling their own interests but should show responsibility in acknowledging that others also need water. Their demands began to focus on ensuring that Mahawelli authority (largest water project in Srilanka) replenishes the source.
3. *Low participation of the citizens and non-availability of the*

*information to the community weakens the process of accountability:*

It was observed that the projects though aim for the benefit of the community and integrates the participation of the community from planning stage, in practice very limited efforts go in true participation of people. The participation of the community remains confined to their acquiescence on pre conceptualized and pre designed projects, involvement in rural appraisal exercises and representation in the committees. Institution building efforts remain very weak which further brittle the process of strengthening software components of the projects like participation, leadership, communication, conflict resolution and decision-making. Often, it was seen that most of the people in the community including the committee members who work closely with the project officials during the implementation stage do not comprehend the project in entirety. This situation proves disastrous when the committees who later have to manage the project do not have many answers to provide to the community members on various issues related to the project. This leads to conflicts within the community across various institutions. Instead of sharing the information and taking actions, the members begin to resort to 'escapist' approach where they run away from responding to the demands of the people and evade the pertinent issues.

Sometimes some crucial information is hidden from the community deliberately by the project officials or government officials, in the case of Srilanka the people in Thuruville were not even communicated properly and neither were shown documents, which had the provision of extraction of water from the tank. These incidents not only reveal an ugly side of the efforts of mainstreaming participation in the development projects and programmes but also puts question mark on how 'participatory' the projects are in real sense.

4. *Multiparty accountability can be established through a process of social development monitoring:* In a community, there might be a variety of institutions present, which may function independently of each other. Through social development monitoring, a process of mutual accountability can be established amongst all the institutions present within the community. During facilitating the SDM in India and Srilanka, it was observed that whether it was death assistant society (a community based organization in

Thuruvilla village responsible for providing support to the bereaved families by offering materials for cremation and performing other rituals associated with death ceremony), religious institutions in the case of Srilanka or in panchayts in case of India, their linkages with the community to some extent grew stronger as they all in the process of monitoring were held accountable by other community based institutions. The community in Uttaranchal began to question even panchayt's role in checking the effectiveness of VWSC. VWSC in turn challenged panchayt's non-transparency and lack of accountability to the community. The SDM enables in establishing multi party accountability, which is essential for strengthening the democratic processes within the community.

5. *SDM as a process can be empowering for the voiceless and marginalized:* The process of social development monitoring gives opportunity to the people to explain things as they see them, help them to analyze, to plan and to carry through a course of plan action. The focus here is on equipping them with the analytical and action oriented skills necessary to become actively involved in the development. Skills of monitoring gained during the process gets extended to other areas and sectors as well, if some good results begin to show in the community and the people realize that their efforts can result in some concrete outcomes. In case of Jharkhand, the parents after getting little confident about their endeavors as leaders in the social development monitoring began to make demands that were in the nature of just socio economic rights of the poorest of the poor sections such as demand of recognition as below poverty line families, they be provided loans against the self employed guarantee programme for small earning opportunities.

#### ***Obstacles to Social Development Monitoring***

Social development monitoring as a process is susceptible to get influenced by some factors, which can affect it negatively.

1. *Structural and administrative:* In those place where the political environment does not promote or encourage openness or citizens voices, and decision making is controlled and administrative structures are rigid to allow any space for participation to occur, there is unlikely that people would raise their voices to demand their rights and even if they would do so, there are barely any

chances of responses to come from the higher levels. Persistent non-responsiveness can lead to further disillusionment of citizens. In controlled administrative structures, the information is also not imparted to the people and people remain largely ignorant about their rights. The administrators tend to have a negative attitude towards the whole notion of active citizenship and participation in those places and countries where the control lies in the hands of bureaucrats and administrators.

2. *Social:* Even the rural people do not constitute homogeneous groups. The interests of the people vary from each other. The problems faced by the disadvantaged and excluded are often very different from those who are advantaged owing to their socioeconomic conditions, political affiliations etc. Since SDM attempts at including the marginalized, therefore the process has a bias stronger towards those who are voiceless. The process of facilitating people to be empowered to demand their rights is fraught with resistance from the advantaged and powerful groups. The support to a kind of political ideology also comes in the way in facilitating a process of social development monitoring. Those who represent a particular political party often tend to blame those who do not belong to the same political party with the sole purpose to defame them by highlighting the non-accomplishments of each other. In this way, social development monitoring faces the danger of being reduced to blame shifting forum than an action-oriented process.

Another problem is that marginalisation and exclusion is so deep rooted that dependency of citizens on others is so much that they are accustomed to leaving decisions and actions to the higher authorities than initiating some which are possible at their levels. This attitude of dependency frustrates efforts of promoting participation and accountability through a process of social development monitoring.

### ***Conclusion***

Despite the provisions of institutionalizing participation and accountability in development projects and programmes, the reality suggests that these often do not yield desired results. The inclusion of poor and marginalized in the committees initiated under projects has been a key emphasis in all the programmes, yet their voice does not get amplified often. Reluctance

of powerful within the community to transfer the power to the marginalized and voiceless, political interests of the communities, village conflicts which further intensify when the benefits aimed in the projects do not reach the people, lack of information and non-transparency, negligence of project authorities and implementing organizations put barriers in enabling people to participate in ensuring accountability of the institutions for good governance.

Social development monitoring is a process, which can strengthen accountability by enabling people to raise their concerns, find solutions to the concerns by holding the powerful institutions of state and civil society accountable. This process promotes inclusive democracy by integrating the voice of those who are usually left out in the development process. SDM leads to improvement of the situation as people take responsibility to solve the problems, which can be dealt with at the local level and simultaneously exert pressure on those institutions from whom the adequate responses to their problem should come. This process can be very liberating especially when the pressure and demand lead to appropriate actions, people realize the capacities within them which can empower them as citizens.

In democratic decentralization, when the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and other VLIs are taking responsibility of the development interventions, the accountability mechanisms can strengthen the democracy which can only take place when the monitoring by the community is recognized and integrated in all the development interventions carried out by the government, NGOs and bilateral and multilateral agencies.

#### *Notes*

1. Mohanty, Ranjita, *Village Level Institutions as Forum for Community Participation in Development: Experiences from Watershed, Forest and Drinking Water Management Project in Uttaranchal*.
2. Oakley, Peter et al, *Projects with People: The Practice of Participation in Rural Development*.
3. Tandon, Rajesh, *Linking Citizenship, Participation and Accountability: A Perspective from PRIA: 2002, IDS Bulletin, Vol. 33 No. 20*.
4. Ibid.