

## **6. OTHER METHODS AND TOOLS**

This section will provide a brief explanation of additional methods and tools that have been used for social accountability activities. The methods and tools that have been covered here include Citizens' Juries, Public Hearings, Community radio, Transparency portals, Citizens' Charter, and Ombudsman. There are many other ways to strengthen social accountability, and this list is not exhaustive.

### **6.1. Citizens' Juries**

#### **6.1.1. What is a Citizens' Jury?**

Citizens' juries are a group of selected members of a community that make recommendations or action proposals to decision-makers on complex issues after a period of investigation on the matter. Citizens' juries are one of several deliberative participatory instruments that have been used to supplement conventional democratic processes in both developed and developing countries. The goal is to improve the quality of decision-making and increase the likelihood that policy formulation and implementation will be more legitimate, effective, efficient and sustainable.

#### **6.1.2. Purpose**

The process is often used to clarify and identify issues prior to policy implementation. The process can be particularly helpful to address problems of democratic deficits in particular institutional settings, with a view to enable citizens input in the decision-making processes of unelected government bodies. This helps to ensure that knowledge and policy processes respond more adequately to both local realities and local definitions of well-being and progress. As such, Citizens' juries provide a link between policy makers and citizens.

#### **6.1.3. How is it implemented?**

A Citizens' jury is normally made up of 12-50 people to hear evidence and make recommendations on issues that are of a complex nature. The jurors are expected to develop a shared view of the question/s they have been asked to address. After calling and cross-examining witnesses and considering the evidence, the Jury has the opportunity to explore the issue in detail and then make informed recommendations. Typically, a citizens' jury consults between 30 and 50 hours in the course of a week up to several months, depending on the issue concerned and availability of information.

#### **6.1.4. Who implements it?**

Citizens' juries (CJ) can be initiated either by civil society organizations who feel that citizen views on a given topic are not sufficiently taken into consideration or government authorities that want to consult with citizens before taking a decision.

The jury's sessions are usually overseen by an 'Oversight Panel' - a group of external observers or stakeholders. This panel may include representatives of the international donor community,

civil society organizations or members of marginalized groups. The composition of this panel has to be carefully balanced to include a broad range of interests and perspectives. The role of the panel is to monitor and evaluate the fairness and credibility of the entire process. This is an important way of ensuring that the methodology is trustworthy and not captured by a group with a particular perspective or vested interest.

### 6.1.5. Strengths and challenges

<b>Strengths:</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
- selectivity of the process allows for targeting marginalized groups and increasing their voice	- only a small number of people can participate
- members of the jury explore the topic in depth and produce a <i>well-informed</i> decision/recommendation	- involves considerable costs for participants and those who organize the CJ
- the small size of the group allows for in-depth discussion of the issues and extensive consideration of all participant views	- in order to arrive at informed decisions, the jury needs access to relevant, impartial sources of information and obtain accurate answers from the witnesses they question
- since the members of the juries will acquire a substantial degree of expertise in the process, their opinions and recommendations have better chances to be considered by the decision-making body	- there is no legal obligation for the authorities to act on the recommendations of the CJ

### 6.1.6. Where have Citizens' Juries been implemented?

A well known example of a Citizen Jury is the *Citizens Jury on Food and Farming Futures for Andhra Pradesh* conducted in 2000 by The Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defense of Diversity and partners.

The Jury discussed the government's Vision 2020 -- a rural development plan that proposes to rapidly increase modernization and to introduce production-enhancing technologies in farming and food processing, to reduce the number of people on the land from 70% to 40% by 2020. The jury opposed the government plan since they could see no future for the land and its people in what would be an ever-increasing integration of the state of Andhra Pradesh into the global economy through trade and investment rules, privatization and new technologies. The jury members felt that the government was concerned with raising revenues by increasing cash cropping without taking the environment and poor people into consideration.

The jury articulated an alternative a grassroots vision of food, farming and rural development. The use of chemicals, GM crops, advanced technology and growing of cash crops for export were the core issues of concern.

The jury included the following items in its final statement:

"We desire:

- A switch to a system of farming that does not need toxic chemical pesticides
- Diverse native forests instead of monoculture plantations (e.g. eucalyptus)
- The continued integration of livestock in our agriculture (including goats)
- Practices that maintain soil strength - (including livestock/farmyard manure /mixed cropping, cover crops, neem cake, groundnut husk)
- Food and farming for self reliance and community control over resources
- Agricultural systems that require low investments
- Indigenous agriculture - including an appropriate combination of silt, farmyard manure, traditional seeds, improved seeds, mixed/rotated cropping, farm-saved seed, and control over seed selection
- The maintenance of the variety and diversity of our crops and animals livestock
- Local outlets for produce, and local sources of inputs
- The formation of representative organizations of farmers should be facilitated
- That we can be linked up to farmers in different regions
- That all employees of the state should be accountable to us - including forest officials
- That the government should be responsible for providing basic services such as drinking water, monitoring prices, compensation in case of loss of life in agriculture, giving loans to small, marginal and landless farmers, and banning spurious pesticides
- That foreign aid (from white people) should follow this vision and benefit the poorest.

We oppose:

- Labour-displacing and soil-destroying mechanization
- GM crops - including Vitamin A rice and Bt cotton
- Wasting money on research and development into inappropriate technologies that could instead be diverted to help us achieve our vision
- The proposed reduction of those making their livelihood from the land from 70 to 40 per cent in Andhra Pradesh
- Loss of control over medicinal plants including their export”

## **6.2. Public Hearings**

### **6.2.1. What is a public hearing?**

Public hearings are formal meetings at the community level where local officials and citizens have the opportunity to exchange information and opinions on community affairs. A typical example would be public hearings of community budgets.

### **6.2.2. Purpose**

These meetings are open to the general public and are therefore an important tool for citizens to raise their concerns in front of elected officials and bureaucrats on the one hand and an important feedback mechanism for the officials to gain a better understanding of the citizens’ experiences and views on the other hand. Public hearings are often one element in a social audit initiative.

### 6.2.3. How is it implemented?

The following is a suggested list of things that needs to be considered while using public hearings as a social accountability tool.

1. Resources: Sufficient financial and labor resources need to be set aside for conducting the promotional campaign, the hearing and any follow-up activities.
2. Task force: Public hearings involve a great deal of planning and work. A task force (including representatives from all stakeholders) should be responsible for the implementation.
3. Timely and widespread publicity for the public hearing: The event has to be well-advertised in the community to allow people to discuss the issues under consideration with friends and family beforehand. This ensures the inclusion of views even of people unable to attend the meeting. A variety of public promotional techniques (advertisement, billboards, brochures, direct mail, feature stories, news conferences/releases, newsletters, posters, special events, word of mouth, radio broadcast etc.) should be used to attract different audiences. Essential information should be distributed well beforehand and again during the meeting.
4. Setting ground rules for participation: Ground rules should be designed and explained to the participants in order to keep the discussion productive. When setting these rules one should consider the different roles of those involved, the time frame for discussing each issue, the time each individual will be allowed to speak and how often, how the input will be used both during the meeting and for the follow-up.
5. Choice of facilitator: A professional and impartial facilitator capable of handling conflict and enforcing ground rules is crucial for the success of the hearing. A good facilitator will increase the likelihood that citizens and officials will overcome their mutual suspicions and openly discuss the issues at hand.
6. Selection of issues, time and location: The issues of the hearing should be of great relevance to the community and conveyed in a way to attract a large turnout. Time and location are equally important to ensure broad attendance. If available, audiovisual equipment should be used to ensure that participants can see and hear properly.
7. Follow-up: The organizers should summarize the hearing in an (impartial) report submitted to the public and the sponsors as soon as possible after the hearing. If individuals or officials agree in the public hearing to take action, they should report on their actions and the task force should monitor the government's action on such commitments.

## 6.3. Community Radio

### 6.3.1. What is Community Radio?

Community radio is a radio station with the following distinct characteristics:

- Community radio is an interactive medium of communication that offers a lot of opportunity for listeners to participate.
- It is distinct from other forms of broadcasting, as it is a non-profit service.
- It is owned and managed by a particular community, (community can be territorial or geographical - a township, village, district or island. It can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in a defined territory.)
- It deals with local issues in local languages and cultural context, relating to local problems and concerns. Its programs are based on audience access and participation and reflect the special interests and needs of the community.
- It is especially suited to help poor and illiterate populations be heard, be informed, learn and participate in a dialogue.
- Community radio programs are low cost both for the user and the producer.

### **6.3.2. Purpose**

Community radio by itself is not a social accountability tool. Its accessibility, flexibility and affordability, make it particularly useful for achieving social accountability outcomes.

Access to and distribution of information is a key issue for the effective implementation of social accountability initiatives. Community radios can play a crucial role in this process. Some communities have managed to bring about important social changes and development initiatives as a result of well targeted distribution of relevant information and a thorough discussion and debate of issues broadcast by their own radio station. For example, community radio has been employed in Malawi to hold contractors of public works accountable for the quality of their work. The radio program broadcasted the details of the contract so that the community was informed about what the contractor was supposed to deliver. After completion, the program reported on the satisfaction with the results. Through the program, communities became aware about which were more reliable contractors and the ones that did not provide satisfactory services.

## **6.4. Transparency Portals**

### **6.4.1. What are transparency portals?**

Transparency portals are websites that publish public financial information including budget law, budget manuals, and definitions of budget-related technical terms . Country macroeconomic data, information on domestic and external debt and budget execution for past years are also published. Several portals offer information on current-year budget execution. This information includes month-by-month revenue and expenditure information, by institution and category. This information is presented along with original approved amounts.

## 6.4.2. Purpose

The portals are directly linked to the financial management information system which means that users can track, with minimal lag time, how budgets are being executed and how tax revenues are evolving. However, the scope and detail of the information published varies considerably country by country, depending on the regulation, quality of the website and the government's commitment to transparency. If updated regularly, these portals can increase transparency by conveying a large amount of information to citizens that have internet access.

## 6.5. Citizen's Charter

### 6.5.1. What is a Citizen's Charter?

A Citizen's charter is a document that informs citizen's about:

- the service entitlements they have as users of a public service,
- the standards they can expect for a service (time frame and quality),
- remedies available for non-adherence to standards, and
- the procedures, costs and charges of a service.

Separate charters are usually designed for distinct services and/or organizations and agencies. Sometimes, citizens' obligations or acts that are subject to fines are also listed.

### 6.5.2. Purpose

The Citizen's charter aims to improve the quality of services by publishing standards which users can expect for each service they receive from the Government. The charters entitle users to an explanation (and in some cases compensation) if the standards are not met. If citizens are well informed about their rights as clients of public services and about existing complaint mechanisms to voice grievances, they can exert considerable pressure on service providers to improve their performance. The charters also play an important role for other social accountability mechanisms. The standards which service providers commit themselves to are useful yardsticks for monitoring and evaluation of service delivery.

### 6.5.3. How is it implemented?

For successful implementation of a citizen's charter, the following points should be taken into consideration:

1. Involve all stakeholders in the process: Users, government officials and service providers should be integrated into all stages of the process: designing the charter, monitoring implementation and follow-up.
2. Do Not promise more than you can deliver: While users should be given a chance to voice their demands, it is important that the charter contains only commitments that the provider can realistically fulfill. However, the standards should be set at a level that encourages the agency to improve performance.

3. The citizen's charter is a process: Designing the written document is not a one-off exercise with a final outcome. The document is just one step in the process of strengthening social accountability. To have an impact, it needs to be disseminated widely, be put to use, and reviewed periodically.
4. Dissemination and awareness building: In order to achieve the goal of improving service delivery it is important that:
  - o the charter is written in a simple language
  - o the charter is well known by both users and providers (staff at all levels)If the public is well-informed about their user-entitlements and able to voice their concerns in case of unsatisfactory performance, this will give the providers a feeling of being watched and put pressure on them to perform well.
5. Enforcement: There is a danger that citizen's charters remain a paper-exercise because the complaint mechanism is ineffective. Often, the users have limited scope for action if their complaints are ignored although in some instances, the charter is made a legally binding document. For good enforcement, the provider needs adequate internal complaints handling procedures. External dispute handling mechanisms should be put in place.

#### **6.5.4. Where have they been used?**

Citizen's charters have been employed in many countries around the world, including the UK (who was the pioneer for this accountability mechanism), Canada, Australia, Malaysia, India (at sub-national levels).

Examples of citizen's charter documents in India can be found at the website of the Praja Foundation, Mumbai.<sup>7</sup>

### **6.6. Ombudsman**

#### **6.6.1. What is an Ombudsman?**

An Ombudsman is independent from the executive and the judiciary and is funded by the legislative body. The office of the ombudsman can take various forms. It can be a general-purpose or specialized agency that receives and investigates citizen complaints against bureaucratic actions, an agency charged with protecting citizen's human rights, or an agency to protect other rights and interests (e.g. environmental protection). Ombudsman offices can be established at the national or sub-national levels. The powers of the ombudsman also vary. Some can receive complaints and conduct some initial investigation while others can only mediate or recommend solutions. Some ombudsmen also have standing as complainants related to judicial actions. Under some models, the ombudsman plays an important role in legal and judicial reform.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.praja.org>.

### **6.6.2. Purpose**

The role of the ombudsman is to protect the citizens against violation of their rights, abuse of powers, error, negligence, unfair decisions and maladministration in order to improve public administration and make the government's actions more open and the government and its servants more accountable to members of the public. Many countries installed ombudsman offices because there were no satisfactory mechanisms in place to redress individual grievances. According to the International Ombudsman Institute, approximately 120 countries around the world had established an ombudsman office at the national level of government as of 2004.

### **6.6.3. Strengths and Challenges**

The advantages of proceeding with a complaint through an ombudsman office are several:

- Anyone can file a complaint written or in person.
- The investigation is informal, cheaper and faster than official complaint procedures.
- In some places, the ombudsman is perceived as an impartial alternative to corrupt official structures.

The disadvantage is that the ombudsman can only make recommendations which are not binding.