

ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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Abstract

Government of India's allocation for rural development programmes is ever increasing. For effective utilization of these resources, the Ministry of Rural Development has developed a multi-pronged accountability frame work for all its programmes with Financial Audit, Social Audit, Geo-tagging, IT based Direct Benefit Transfers, transaction based MIS, geo-tagging of assets, citizen centric mobile apps like Gram Samvad, Meri Sadak, Awaas, National Level Monitoring, annual Common Review Mission, creating a cadre of internal auditors, independent evaluation studies by academic institutes. These measures are not only helping the Ministry monitor these programmes better but has also enhanced downward accountability to the public. The paper describes this accountability framework, analyses it's working and suggests ways to make this framework robust.

1. Introduction

With growing recognition of good governance as pre-condition of sustainable development in last two decades, the concept and practice of accountability has attracted attention of academicians, policy makers and practitioners. Accountability has emerged as an important element of good governance along with participation, transparency, rule of law, responsiveness, inclusiveness etc. It has become central in governance reform advocated and supported by international aid agencies (Rodan and Hughes, 2012). While Oxford dictionary defines accountability as 'fact or condition of being accountable; responsible' the Cambridge dictionary defines it as 'the fact of being responsible for what you do and able to give

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a satisfactory reason for it, or the degree to which this happens. Earlier accountability was limited to choosing or dislodging governments by periodic exercise of voting, it is now being enforced on regular basis beyond elections. Traditional approach to accountability involved three mechanisms: power to vote, administrative accountability and legal accountability (Robinson 2013). With enhanced transparency after passing of Right to Information or Freedom to Information in several countries and proliferation of private and social media, people are more aware of actions and lack of actions on part of public authorities and its consequences on their lives. Such accountability has come to be known as social accountability. According to the World Bank (2004), social accountability involves the right to know, question and participate, to better services, to stop corruption, to end poverty, and to demand that commitments are respected.

People are also upwardly mobile and are not willing to remain silent observers of problems faced by them. Several countries of the world in last few years have witnessed movements that have changed governments. 'Arab Spring' was a series of anti-government protests that spread across the Middle East in 2010 against absence of freedom and low standard of living. 'Occupy Wall Street' in New York, USA in 2011 was an anti-government movement against inequality, political corruption and crony capitalism. India too witnessed local movements such as "India Against Corruption" and movement for Lokpal Bill. Recent wave of farmer's protests were against agriculture not being profitable enough due to low agricultural prices. With the increase of tax payers in India, people are eager to know how their tax amount is being utilized. They want to be part of decision-making and also want to monitor implementation more actively.

India is a signatory to global Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development comprising of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These Goals are comprehensive, universal and aims to leave no one behind. These cannot be achieved without achieving its targets in rural India. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India is committed to eradicate poverty and hunger from rural India and usher in all round development of rural masses and geographies. Accordingly, the ministry is

implementing a number of programmes which aim, inter-alia, at bridging the rural-urban divide, guaranteeing wage employment, ensuring food security, providing self employment, creating rural infrastructure, providing dignified shelter and restoring lost or depleted productivity of natural resources like land, water and biomass. MoRD implements various rural development schemes namely, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), Shyama Prasad Mukherjee National Rurban Mission (NRuM), Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) and Prime Minister Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (Watershed Component) in rural areas of the country through State Governments and Union Territory Administration.

Over the years budgetary allocation for these rural development programmes has been enhanced substantially from Rs. 58,623 crore during 2013-14 to Rs. 1,12,404 crore during 2018-19. New schemes have also been introduced for development of rural areas. In addition, State governments are also contributing their share to these programmes. Apart from this allocation to the MoRD, there are other programmes such as Swachha Bharat Mission- Grameen, National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP), National Health Mission-Rural (NRHM), Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) grants etc of other Ministries. whose funds are being spend in the rural areas. In the Budget 2018, total allocation for rural areas to the tune of Rs. 14.34 Lakh Cr.

Increased budgetary allocation for rural development programmes coupled with this government's motto of minimum government and maximum governance makes it imperative that a robust accountability framework is in place which not only strengthens the administrative accountability but also social accountability. In response, the Ministry of Rural Development has created a multi-pronged accountability framework by improving upon earlier mechanisms and introducing new ones. In next section of this paper, some of these accountability mechanisms are described.

2. Accountability Framework in Rural Development Programmes

Accountability framework, in government context, is a framework of regular/periodic assessment of performance and also management of schemes. MoRD's accountability framework includes Management Information System (MIS), National Level Monitors (NLM), Geotagging of assets, District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees (DDCMC), Common Review Missions (CRM), Mobile App Based Citizen Feedback, Internal Audit, Social Audit, Independent Evaluation of Schemes, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and Public Information Campaigns. While some of these such as MIS, NLM, internal audit, Evaluation etc. are mainly instruments for 'horizontal accountability', App based grievance redressal, social audit etc. are mechanisms to enforce 'vertical accountability'. Horizontal accountability refers to the internal checks and balances within the state and vertical accountability is exercised directly by citizens (Aiyar and Walton, 2014).

2.1 Web-generated MIS Based Monitoring

Management Information System (MIS) has emerged as an important tool for generating data which helps in the management functions by facilitating decision making. It plays an important role in real time monitoring the progress of implementation of schemes and programmes. MIS focuses on inputs and outputs. As the number and allocations of rural development programmes have grown over the years, MoRD has developed web based MIS for all these programmes. These MIS have been developed by government agency National Informatics Center (NIC). Developing and operating these MIS involves (i) Assessment of the information needs of programme division and other levels (ii) Collection of information (iii) Classification of information (iv) Feeding and storage of information (v) Retrieval of information in form of reports (vi) Analysis of information and finally (vii) Decision-making on the basis of analysed information. While developing MIS following principles need to be kept in mind for these MIS to be effective: (i) Use of a log-frame, (ii) Authentication and validation of information, (iii) Periodicity and regularity of data feeding or reporting (iii) Easy accessibility of information

to authorities and public (iv) Utilisation of data for management decisions and community monitoring, and (v) User-friendly. MoRD programme divisions, State and district authorities have been using these MIS extensively for monitoring and review of the progress of implementation of schemes. Reports generated from these MIS are the key tool for categorizing States, identifying problem areas and problem States and discuss them during Performance Review Committee (PRC) meeting held twice a year.

Among the MIS of MoRD, rural connectivity scheme PMGSY Online Management, Monitoring and Accounting System (OMMAS) is among the best which facilitates operational requirements of planning, scheduling, monitoring, tracking and execution in implementing the PMGSY. Monitoring of private contractor building roads is done by OMMAS which has the facility of automatic checking of information flowing from contractors to government managers. In addition, to enable every citizen to see on a map details of rural roads under PMGSY, Geo-spatial Rural Road Information System (GRRIS) has been created.

Another good MIS of MoRD is of MGNREGA. NREGAssoft version 1.5 is a local language enabled work flow based e-Governance system and is available in offline as well as online mode to capture all the activities under MGNREGA at Center/State/District/Block and Gram Panchayat (GP) level. Each stakeholder can access relevant information through the portal. This is working as an important management tool for progress monitoring, course correction by the programme division.

NSAP-MIS apart from providing details of programme implementation also has application tracker, a service for tracking individual application status i.e. approved or rejected, sanctioned or not, etc by entering application number. Information about documents required and guidelines to fill the form is given. PMAY-G there is Awaas Soft. For DAY-NRLM there is NRLM e-gov application. All other schemes have their own MIS.

2.2 Monitoring by National Level Monitors

For independent third-party monitoring of various schemes of MoRD, a comprehensive system of National Level Monitoring (NLM) was launched in the FY 2003-04. Currently there are 75 institutions listed as NLMs. These NLMs conduct three types of monitoring: (i) regular monitoring of major schemes in two phases covering all the rural districts of the country in a year. In each phase, an NLM is assigned to visit 3 to 4 districts. In every allotted district, the NLMs are required to visit 10 villages spread over 3 pre-specified blocks. They interact with the beneficiaries to find out the impact of the schemes at the grassroots level. (ii) Special Monitoring of Individual Schemes under which NLMs are deputed to cover a particular scheme or some specific aspects of a particular scheme only and report on the issues/ processes in detail. Limited number of Special Monitoring rounds are undertaken every year for in-depth coverage or certain specific features of a programme/ scheme. These visits are undertaken based on the requirements suggested by the programme divisions. (iii) In case of complaints of serious nature from people's representatives, NGOs, etc. regarding mis-utilization of funds, irregularities, etc., NLMs are deputed to verify facts or for a preliminary enquiry. Under the current scheme, NLMs monitor implementation of MGNREGA, DAY-NRLM, DDU-GKY, PMAY-G, PMGSY, NSAP, SAGY, PMKSY (Watershed), Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) and Performance of GPs.

To monitor quality of roads under PMGSY, a three-tier Quality Control mechanism viz. Project Inspection Unit (PIU), State Quality Monitors (SQM) and National Quality Monitors (NQM) is envisaged under the PMGSY for ensuring construction of quality road works. The NQM is required to inspect three districts in a single visit in one State in each of the 2 months. NQM spend not more than 3 days in each district inspecting normally between 2 to 4 works on each day (2 works in progress or 1 work in progress and 2 completed works or 4 completed works). The States, districts as well as blocks where the inspection of the works is to be carried will be indicated while allocating States. NQMs play a vital role in overseeing the Quality of PMGSY road works. With their long experience and expertise, the NQMs provide valuable insight into the programme and guidance to the executing agencies. These NQMs carry out Quality testing of PMGSY works as per prioritization, mainly in order to ensure that the programme implementation and State Quality Control System is working

satisfactorily. The NQMs make constructive suggestions relating to procedural aspects in addition to locating problems at individual work level. The State Quality Controller is responsible for reporting compliance on the issues raised by NQMs.

2.3 Verification of Assets through Geo-tagging

Process of tagging any object, infrastructure with geographical information such as longitude, latitude, place name, distance and accuracy data in the form of geo-spatial metadata such as QR code, RSS feeds, SMS messages is called geo-tagging. These geographical information are connected to Global Positioning System. Geo-tagging of assets helps government agencies and people in many ways including understanding flow of funds, creating inventory of the assets, planning of assets for future, bringing in transparency, informing beneficiaries about the facilities available.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Department of Rural Development (DoRD), Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), New Delhi and National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), ISRO, Hyderabad, for geo-tagging of the assets created under MGNREGA, on June 24, 2016. Geo-tagging exercise is a national level initiative involving linking ISRO-Bhuvan with "NREGA-Soft". Geo-tagging of completed assets is done through Bhuvan Mobile Platform using Android-based mobile app developed exclusively for MGNREGA for field-level data capturing, as well as asset visualization capabilities & report generation tools. This includes capturing of GPS location of the asset, along with photographs by MGNREGA Spatial Enumerators (MSEs). The Gram Rozgar Sahayaks (GRSs), Technical Assistants (TAs) or any other functionary at Gram Panchayat (GP) level are to be designated as MSE to carry out the above mentioned responsibilities. There can be one MSE for one GP, multiple MSEs for one GP and one MSE for multiple GPs. The MSEs are to be registered on the mobile application and authorized by GAS, accordingly. Moderation/ validation is done by GIS Asset Supervisor (GAS). GIS Asset Supervisors (GASs) are Programme Officers or other officials at the block-level, who are to be designated as GAS. They are responsible for validation of data or information captured by the MSEs.

The GAS is to be registered on Bhuvan portal and authorized by SGNO. They must ensure that all the geo-tags uploaded by MSEs of GPs of the block is moderated within 48 hours of the upload. As on 10th January 2019, summary of assets geo-tagging in MGNREGA is as follows:

Total	Not geotaggable	Yet to geotag	Yet to moderate	Accepted	Rejected
36685665	331151	2131951	41373	34115482	58572

Under PMAY-G, photographs of the houses are being captured in AwaasSoft at different level of the completion namely- existing site (Old House), proposed site, plinth, roof cast, completed and toilet completed. Geo-tagged photographs at different stages helps in - monitoring the quality and progress in house construction. Uploading of geo tagged and time stamped photographs of beneficiaries in front of their existing dwellings, using the mobile Application viz. Awaas App, has been made mandatory for sanctioning houses under PMAY-G. As on 10.01.2019 approximately 1.08 Cr. houses have been geo-tagged under PMAY-G. Under PMGSY, State Quality Monitors (SQMs) are required to capture the geo-referenced photographs through mobile App developed for the purpose and upload these in OMMAS along with the quality grading abstract of each item / sub-item of work inspected. These inspection details are made available in public domain.

For monitoring of physical progress of works utilizing Fourteenth Finance Commission grants, MoPR has developed mActionSoft – a mobile based solution to capture photos with Geo-Tags for the works which have asset as an output. Geo-tagging of the assets are done in one stage for completed work and in at least three stages in ongoing works viz. (i) before start of the work, (ii) during the work and (iii) on completion of work.

2.4 Monitoring by DISHA Committee at District Level

Government of India formed District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees (DDCMC) or DISHA Committees in all the districts of country to monitor and review implementation of all schemes of Government of India including those of MoRD. DISHA Committees

have replaced the erstwhile District Vigilance & Monitoring Committees constituted by MoRD. The programmes to be reviewed by DISHA Committees include MGNREGA, DAY-NRLM, DDU-GKY, PMGSY, NSAP, PMAY-G, NRuM of the Ministry of Rural Development.

The Chairperson of the DISHA Committee is the senior most Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from the district. The other Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha) representing the district are Co-Chairpersons. One MP (Rajya Sabha) representing the State and exercising option to be associated with the district level Committee of that district (on first come basis) is also designated as Co-Chairperson. All Members of the State Legislative Assembly (MLAs) elected from the district, all Mayors/ the Chairpersons of Municipalities, Chairperson of the district level Panchayat, five elected heads of Gram Panchayats including two women, one representative each of SC, ST and Women to be nominated by the Chairperson are among other members of the Committee. The District Collector/District & Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner are Member Secretary of these Committees. The meetings of the committee held once in every quarter (third Saturdays of April, July, October and February) of the year. Mandate of DISHA is to (i) ensure that all programmes are implemented in accordance with the Guidelines, (ii) look into complaints/alleged irregularities received in respect of the implementation of the programmes, including complaints of wrong selection of beneficiaries, misappropriation/diversion of funds and recommend follow-up action, and (iii) review the flow of funds including the funds allocated, funds released by both Centre and the State, utilization and unspent balances under each Scheme. To support the functioning of DISHA Committee and to facilitate structured and effective meetings, a web portal called 'DISHA Meeting Management' (DMM) has been developed.

2.5 Review of Schemes by Common Review Missions

The Common Review Mission (CRM) was initiated by MoRD in 2016 with an objective to review the implementation of important rural development programmes in the country in selected States. Since then

there has been four review missions (2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019). Following is the list of States covered under four CRMs conducted so far:

1	First CRM, 2016	Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Tripura
2	Second CRM, 2017	Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana
3	Third CRM, 2018	Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim and West Bengal
4	Fourth CRM, 2018-19	Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Telangana, Tripura and Uttarakhand

CRM comprises of a team of bureaucrats, academicians and technical experts. In the Fourth CRM conducted in December 2018 and whose report was submitted in January 2019, there were 32 Members for 8 States. Fourth CRM was headed by Ex-Secretary to the Government of India and Members included retired and serving bureaucrats and technocrats, academicians from NIRDPR, NIPFP, IIFM, NISG, TISS, IIT, CSD, IRMA, IHD, Patna University, Nirma University etc.

The mission involves one day orientation workshop session in Delhi, where the Secretary and Joint Secretaries of MoRD and also Ministry of Panchayati Raj apprise the team members about Ministry's initiatives, terms of reference for the CRM team, guidelines of the programmes and also highlight the areas which require special attention of the team members. Following the orientation workshop, each team visits their respective states. During their visit, they meet the Chief Secretary/ Pr. Secretary (RD&PR) and interact with the programme officials of the state in which they are briefed about the implementation of programmes in the State under review. Then the team visits selected GPs in selected districts and meet field functionaries and beneficiaries to get a first-hand account of implementation of schemes, implementation challenges, impact,

grievances of beneficiaries. Districts, Gram Panchayats/ villages to be visited done by MoRD and CRM team in consultation with State Governments concerned. On return from field visit, each team presents their report before the senior officials of MoRD. Later these reports are shared with State Governments concerned by the MoRD for their comments. Taking these comments into account, CRM teams finalise the report and submits to MoRD for follow up action. Apart from State reports, synthesis report in the form of national report is also prepared.

2.6 Mobile App Based Citizen Information and Feedback

Gram Samvaad is a citizen centric mobile app, created by MORD to serve and empower the rural citizens of India, by facilitating single window access by citizens to information at GP level on various Rural Development programs, covering inter-alia programme objectives, scope and performance. The App presently covers 7 programs of MoRD and also information on Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) grants and releases there under. It is envisaged that this app will help in information dissemination, introduce greater transparency and promote accountability at various levels.

“Meri Sadak” is a mobile app to enable users to give their feedback regarding pace of works, quality of works etc. of PMGSY roads to the Nodal Departments in the State Governments/ National Rural Roads Development Agency (NRRDA). The user can take photographs at the site and submit along with feedback. After submission of feedback, the user can monitor the redressal of his / her feedback through this app. The respective State Quality Coordinators (SQC) of the Nodal Department implementing PMGSY will provide an interim response to the user.

AwaasApp mobile application can be directly used by any PMAY-G beneficiary or his/her representative to report the physical progress of house under construction in order to obtain next installment of financial assistance. App can also be used by designated PMAY-G house inspectors to inspect the houses constructed under PMAY-G or other rural housing schemes which are monitored through AwaasSoft. Application aims at capturing the good quality photograph with time-stamp and Geo-coordinates of the houses at each construction stage, so that next

installment of financial assistance can be provided to beneficiary without any delay. Uploaded images are to be further verified by Block office on AwaasSoft in order to complete the inspection process.

'Janmanrega'- a Citizen-centric Mobile Application (CCMA) is an instrument for information flow to and from ground-level, which will connect citizens with the system. An initiative towards good governance, Janmanrega is an interface to improve quality of public services. Beta Version of this Android Application is now available at Ministry's MGNREGA Website that will allow locating already geotagged more than 1.78 crore MGNREGA Assets within Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Bhuvan Map Interface along with their attributes.

Kaushal Panjee- Skill Register, is a mobile app for Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) on which rural youth can register her/him self and get connected to skill development agencies and banks. Youth can get information about mobilization camps, training centres, job melas, start of batches etc.

These ICT based feedback mechanisms are useful in terms of easy access, in-built mechanisms for follow up and also absence of human interaction and threat of retaliation.

2.7 Internal Audit

In recent years, there has been growing realization and appreciation of the role of internal audit towards better control and outcomes of government programmes and projects. Over the years rural development programmes have grown in terms of budgetary allocations and also in terms of total number of persons benefiting out of these programmes. As per the guidelines issued by Controller General of Accounts (CGA), the Chief Controller of Accounts (CCA) of MORD has been conducting internal audit. There is a manual of internal audit for this purpose. Similarly, State governments also have their own system of internal audit through Directorate of Internal Audit.

MoRD constituted an Expert Advisory Group on Internal Audit in the year 2017 which studied the internal audit mechanisms in the rural development programmes. The Committee observed that Internal Audit Manual (IAM) focuses primarily on compliance audit and does not place sufficient emphasis on the identification and mitigation of risks in the audit of Ministry's programmes. Later to address this deficiency, various programme divisions of the Ministry have conducted detailed analysis of risks including both in design and implementation of programmes. The Committee recommended that IAM should have (a) conceptual framework of internal audit (b) mechanisms and procedure of compliance audit and (c) scheme-specific implementation methodologies, risk matrix, risk registers, reporting formats etc. Introduction of risk based internal audit will help conduct comprehensive evaluation of programme objectives. It may help develop skills to identify concerns needing attention and remedial action. MoRD is developing an internal audit plan fixing a target of number of field units to be internally audited with allocation of fund. This will require a large pool of trained internal auditors with expertise in financial and technical auditing, skill to analyse data and familiarity with the scheme and geography. A Centre for Internal Audit in Rural Development (CIARD) is also being planned. To bridge the gap in required number of trained internal auditors, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) has started to conducting four week certificate programme in internal audit for retired and serving Accounts Officers and other Government Servants. Three such batches have already been trained. There is a target to create a strong cadre of 5000 certified Internal Auditors in during the FY 2018-19.

MORD has also created a Grameen Internal Audit Portal (GRIP). It is an open source application to facilitate both online as well as offline internal audit. It also serves as store-house of past audit records. Various types of online audit reports can be automatically generated through this application.

2.8 Social Audit of Schemes

Social Audit has emerged as an important social accountability tool which promotes transparency, participation, grievance redressal, consultation

apart from downward accountability which together lead towards good governance. Social Audit as a process in which, details of the resources, both financial and non-financial, used by public agencies for development initiatives are shared with the people, often through a public platform such as the Gram Sabha in rural India. Social audits allow people to enforce accountability and transparency, providing the ultimate users an opportunity to scrutinise development initiatives. Broadly, this process of social audit involves the following components: (a) availability of information/ details of the resource, financial and non-financial, used by public agencies for development initiatives, (b) organising the ultimate users/ beneficiaries/ people and (c) scrutiny of the information by the end users/ primary stakeholders of that development initiative (Sinha, 2013). Defining the social audit in government settings, Social Audit Manual of the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India (2015) has observed that social audit is an audit jointly conducted by the people. Further it says that social audit can be described as verification of the implementation of programmes/ schemes and its results by the community. The Manual clarifies that the social audit process goes beyond accounting for money that has been spent to examine whether the money was spent properly and has made a difference to people's lives. A circular from the MGNREGA Division, Ministry of Rural Development (2016) has suggested following minimum principles for social audit: (i) Access to Information (Jaankari); (ii) Participation of Citizens in the Process of Decision Making (Bhagidari); (iii) Protection of Citizens (Suraksha); (iv) Citizen's Right to be Heard (Sunwai); (v) Collective Platform (Janta Ka Manch); and (vi) Report Dissemination (Prasar).

MGNREGA officially introduced social audit in rural development programmes for the first time. Article 17 of this Act provides for conduct of social audit by Gram Sabha twice a year. Later MGNREG Audit of Scheme Rules was notified in the year 2011 to operationalise and streamline social audit. Twenty six States have already set up their State Social Audit Units to facilitate conduct of social audits.

Apart from MGNREGA, in 11 other schemes social audit have been taken up by a few States. It would be most appropriate for well-established Social Audit Units to take up social audits in other schemes, including important

ones like the National Food Security Act (NFSA). The Working Group on expanding the scope of social audit has recommended that social audit of other schemes be taken up. The Secretary to Government of India, MoRD has also written to all Chief Secretaries in January 2018 urging States to take up social audit of all Rural Development programmes. NSAP guidelines (para 6.10.2) provides for conduct of social audit by the Gram Sabha / Ward Committee. Social Audit under NSAP is to be held at least once in every six months.

To create a human resource base to facilitate conduct of social audit of all rural development schemes, certificate programmes have been developed by NIRD&PR in partnership with Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai for District, Block and Village Level Resource Persons. A Policy decision was taken by the MoRD to have women Self Help Group members as the Social Auditors after formal certificate programme for them. It is planned to build a community cadre of 50,000 Social Auditors drawn from women SHGs in 2018-19. This will ensure large scale Social Audit of rural development initiatives across Departments ushering in a new era of accountable governance in rural areas.

2.9 National Level Evaluation of Scheme/s by Academic and Research Institutes

While the MIS and other monitoring mechanisms are used for monitoring progress, identifying challenges and undertake mid course correction, they are unable to focus much on the outcome in terms of impact on the lives of targeted people and geographies. For assessing outcome of these schemes evaluation is needed.

In order to assess the outcomes to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of the schemes and programmes, MoRD organises evaluation and impact assessment studies on a regular basis. Evaluation of its policies, programmes, schemes, projects and interventions is treated as an instrument of accountability. In order to ensure credibility, third party independent evaluation has been adopted as the mode of evaluation. To ensure the usefulness of findings, programme divisions are involved in specifying the objectives and selecting the most appropriate method.

These studies are ex-ante, ex-post and/or mid-term. The instruments are concurrent evaluation, evaluation and impact assessment (pilot or otherwise). In general, the evaluation and impact assessment studies are expected to capture the ground realities regarding the implementation processes and the impact of the programmes/schemes. These evaluation research studies concentrate mainly on sector, area and programme/scheme specific issues relating to theories, hypotheses and assumptions of government interventions in the rural areas. Research methodologies are adopted keeping in view the recent developments in the field of social research. Findings are used to design and implement central government interventions at the all-India level. Studies that cut across various government schemes/programmes are given priority.

Ministry engages UGC affiliated universities, colleges and reputed research institutions/ agencies with proven track record of research. There are three modes of accepting research proposals. Suo-moto proposals are submitted at any time during a year and are considered periodically. Proposals are also invited by the Ministry, depending upon need, from a research institutions identified on the basis of recognized capabilities in the concerned area, depending upon specific needs of policy making and implementation of Scheme. Selection of invited proposals is done through a competitive bidding process. In addition, MoRD also directly commissions research studies to one or a network of research institutions.

Findings of these evaluation studies are examined by senior officials of concerned programmes divisions for policy and operational decisions. Findings are also used by officers during their visit in the States/ districts and also in review meetings. Reports of these evaluation studies are also shared with Cabinet Secretariat, PMO, NITI Aayog, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) etc. These findings are also used to redesign schemes or to launch new schemes.

The National Evaluation of DAY-NRLM by Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), of MGNREGS Natural Resource Management initiatives by Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), New Delhi, of PMGSY by Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad and of PMAY-G by National Institute of Public Finance (NIPFP) New Delhi have been completed and

are available on website of the Ministry. Besides this, NIRD&PR, Hyderabad has been commissioned a range of studies on MGNREGS whose findings will also be in the public domain very soon.

2.10 IT Based Direct Benefit Transfers

Direct Benefit Transfer is a process of transferring cash benefits and subsidy directly to the bank account of beneficiary instead of providing it through government offices. This was introduced in the year 2013 with the aim of reforming Government delivery system for simpler and faster flow of information/funds and to ensure accurate targeting of the beneficiaries, de-duplication and reduction of fraud. More than 22 crore Jan Dhan Accounts in banks, more than 100 crore Aadhaar and about 100 crore mobile phone connections provide a unique opportunity to implement DBT in all welfare schemes across country including States & UTs. DBT has brought efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability in the Government system by eliminating intermediaries and infused confidence of citizen in the governance. In 8 schemes of MoRD, DBT is applicable. These schemes are DDU-GKY, PMAY-G, MGNREGA, Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS), National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and DAY-NRLM.

MoRD has introduced National Electronic Fund Management System (NeFMS) in 24 States and 01 Union Territory. This process has reduced delay in allocation of funds for payment of wages to the States and has also removed parking of funds at various levels. As per NREGASoft, around 99% of the wages are being paid electronically into the Bank/Post Office accounts of MGNREGA workers through eEFMS.

2.11 Public Information Campaign

MoRD has conducted campaigns to inform and educate people about the benefits and processes of various schemes with a presumption that informed people will not only claim their rights but will also monitor implementation of schemes in their areas. From 14th April to 5th May 2018, Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (Village Self-Governance Campaign) with objectives, inter-alia, to obtain feedback on ongoing programmes and to

enroll eligible poor and vulnerable households in new initiatives of government. During this campaign public disclosure of disaggregated funds and activities to be carried out in GP areas was made through big size wall painting or flex. IEC material of various schemes were read out in Gram Sabha. Similarly, MoRD in association with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) undertook a campaign to prepare convergent participatory Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) in all the 2.48 Lakh GPs during the period between October 2 to December 31, 2018. All the GPs installed a public information board of the size of 20 feet x 10 feet at a prominent space with background information of the GP, important gaps as emerging from the Mission Antyodaya parameters, along with physical & financial progress of interventions under the schemes for proactive public disclosure.

3. Challenges and Ways to Improve Effectiveness of Accountability Framework

While the MoRD must be appreciated for creating a multi-pronged accountability framework which not only strengthens administrative oversight but also facilitates social accountability, there are some deficiencies in functioning of this framework. In this section of the paper, those deficiencies are described and possible ways to removing them is suggested.

Internet based accountability systems such as web based MIS is very much dependent of internet connectivity in rural areas. In the year 2011 an initiative to create a national optical fiber network (BharatNet) was launched with a target to connect all 2.48 Lakh GPs with high-speed broadband connectivity. However by the end of 2018, only 1 Lakh GPs have been connected. Then rural areas in several States do not get enough electric supply. Approximately 37,000 GPs do not have their own office. All these factors make it difficult for GP level officials to upload data on MIS. All GPs should be provided with office building, office equipment, alternate source of energy (solar power) and broadband connectivity on time-bound manner.

In far-flung hilly areas where road connectivity is poor, frontline functionaries are finding it difficult to geo-tag assets due to poor mobile

network in those areas. Many times these functionaries when register on the app, they get too many assets for geo-tagging. On returning to a place with good connectivity, photos get rejected and they have to do it all over again. For difficult hilly terrains, less number of assets need to be given to geo-tag and also reasons of rejection may be studied and situation improved.

Many States have deputed serving officers or appointed retired government officials as the Director of Social Audit Units without following the due process. NIRDPR (2018) study found that in six States Directors of Social Audit Units are holding the position as additional charge. Two States are still to appoint Director for their Social Audit Units. Apathy on the part of the implementing agency is a major problem. The implementing agency requests for postponement of social audit, fails to provide documents on time, does not send independent observers for the Gram Sabha, and fails to take action on the findings of the social audit. In some places, the social audit resource persons face political pressure, threats and active opposition in their work. Independent Directors with fixed tenure should be placed in all States and implementing authorities be sensitized.

Follow up action on the findings of NLM are not taken by implementing authorities in time which ought to be taken in time-bound manner. Same is the case with Common Review Missions. Several design and operational recommendations made by earlier CRMs have not been acted upon yet. Meetings of District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees or DISHA Committees are not held regularly. To be effective, its meetings should be regular with active involvement of District Magistrate/Collector and Chairperson MP. Time-bound follow up action on decisions in the meetings must be ensured.

In many GPs, the flex information board are not fixed and instead put up at the time of meeting and then removed. GPs do not have clear instructions on where to meet expenditure on these citizen information boards. In some other GPs, painted information boards are not regularly updated.

While DBT is working well, banks need to appropriately code the deposits in beneficiary and panchayat bank accounts so that the source of funds is clear and unambiguous for monitoring purpose. Limited access to banks and inadequate number of banking correspondence makes it difficult for beneficiaries to withdraw the cash benefits. It is also observed that in many Grameen Banks, accounts are not e-KYC compliant, leading to continuation of old practices like using thumb impressions by non-literate beneficiaries.

All these monitoring and accountability mechanisms have largely functioned separately and independent of each other. There is a need to integrate these accountability mechanisms where data from one mechanism can feed into other. Further, accountability mechanisms of the Government of India and those of State Governments function separately and there is no coordination and cross learnings. For better utilization of these accountability mechanisms 4-5 youth, SHG Members in every GP may be oriented on uses of these mechanisms. GPs actively using these mechanisms may be identified and recognized at the national level.

4. Conclusion

Accountability framework created by the Ministry of Rural Development over the years has started bearing its fruits. Inclusion and exclusion errors have come down, field experiences shows that implementation of schemes has improved, delay in the process has come down and there is a perceptible reduction in deviant practices. This has facilitated the adoption of transparent system of record keeping, public information and citizen grievance redressal system. However, by removing a few deficiencies, capacity enhancement of frontline functionaries and better coordination among these mechanisms will make this accountability framework more effective.

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