

Event Report of Country Consultation of India Meeting on Community of Practice on Social Accountability (COPSA) India International Centre, New Delhi

Background

'Consumer Unity & Trust Society' organised a consultation meeting of stakeholders (working in the areas of governance and social accountability across India) at New Delhi, on February 08, 2012. This particular event was the first meeting under the Community of Practice on Social Accountability (CoPSA) project which will cover five South Asian countries, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India with the support of 'Affiliated Network of Social Accountability in South Asia Region' Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Objective and Purpose

The objective of the meeting was to gather the experiences and suggestions for the designing of a community of practice on social accountability in South Asia region. It was also mandated to facilitate networking among stakeholders (practitioners, researchers, universities, NGOs, government actors, the media etc.) and mainstream social accountability and integrate it into country/region specific work by generating systematic approaches across networks and regions to faster problem solving and reducing response time to the needs and inquiries of the Community of Practice (CoP).

Participation

More than 23 participants from Orissa, Karnataka, Gujarat Delhi and Rajasthan actively took part. Representatives from the World Bank, DfID India, World Bank Institute, Inter-Cooperation, Solution Exchange, Transparency International India, Centre for Civil Society, Unnati, ANSA, CUTS and ANSA partners also attended the meeting. These participants were from funding agencies, practitioners of social accountability tools and people who are managing web portals and community of practice in various parts of India representing above mentioned organisations.



Proceedings

Introductory Remarks

In the introductory remarks George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS international introduced the concept of the CoP by defining it as 'a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better, through regular interaction within the group'. He said CoP is not a club of friends or a network of people, but a group having identity defined by a shared domain of interest, having mutual relationships that enable them to learn from each other and the members who are practitioners.

He further said that there are several CoPs existing but this particular CoP on Social Accountability is an attempt for civic engagement and bring the people to create a platform to learn from each other in a face to face and interactive way rather than merely based on online activities. The live activities which the CoP includes peer learning, outreach activities, capacity building activities in a living manner. He provided a brief overview of the project activities and proposed country consultations scheduled on various dates as well. He also flagged off expectations from the workshop to take this initiative forward. He thanked ANSA for entrusting the responsibility to CUTS as a regional anchor for CoP on Social Accountability for South Asia which includes Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and India. He also thanked all the participants and encouraged them to take active part in the discussions.



Inaugural Remarks

Roland Lomme, Governance Adviser, The World Bank, India said that using social accountability tools is the most effective and economical way to bring good governance, if results are produced. He further said that social accountability is quite a known concept now within the circle of donor agencies that with low cost techniques and tools, it can leverage 1000 million programmes by spending US\$20mn and improve service delivery for beneficiaries. But there is a doubt about the tangible outcome of social accountability, which particular initiative would address. He stated that The World Bank is engaging CSOs under the governance and anti-corruption governance strategy in a consistent manner as the work of CSOs is indispensable in India. But the governance framework for NGOs is absent in India, however efforts have been made by the Planning Commission of India in this regard, which is extremely important.



Community of Practice on Social Accountability (CoPSA) is unique intervention initiated by Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS International) in partnership with Affiliated Network on Social Accountability – South Asia Region (ANSA-SAR) based in Dhaka, Bangladesh supported by the World Bank Institute, Washington DC, having a component of civic engagement to create a platform to learn from each other through face to face interaction, along creating and sustaining a web based community, mainly focusing on the South Asia region covering the countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and India. The purpose of consultation was to discuss the framework of design, possible approaches and supportive mechanisms for facilitating the CoPSA, which was attended by representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) from various states working on accountability issues.

He further said that engaging governments is easy than engaging NGOs which is a challenge. In India the NGOs are getting organised and there is no issue between the government and the civil society. So it is difficult for the Bank to rely on the bottom up approach only. The only concern of the Bank is that NGOs will deliver what they are supposed to and produce the indented results.

There is lack of framework of governance for NGOs and Government of India, Planning Commission and the Bank are working in this regard.

He also mentioned the work done by the ANSA or WBI and difficulties in mainstreaming in Bank programmes with the concerns that some mechanism has to be found for the effective monitoring of the delivery of activities by the government programmes funded by the Bank in the remote areas like Orissa which is affected by security concerns is extremely important. Finally he talked about his fiduciary responsibility and control and the effective use of social accountability tools and said that external factors are also equally important for the success of any programme. He gave an example of social audits which is working in Andhra Pradesh only because if it is left with the villages itself than it does not work therefore this pilot of COPSA is extremely important and Bank is keenly looking at it.

Opening Remarks

Shomikho Raha, Governance Adviser, DFID India in his opening remarks said that social accountability is much more a demand side issue and this initiative of 'Community of Practice (CoP)' should aim at enhancing the credibility of demand side accountability programme with measurable and credible results. He also said that our practices are not clearly articulated by the practitioners and the people who develop frameworks etc. are generally mere academicians, who does not have hands-on experience. His address provoked participants on four primary issues related to diagnostics, partnerships or new ideas, results or matrix and financing aspects of any practice.

He cautiously said that academics are engaged in designing the frameworks of practice but contrary to this it should be done by concerned practitioners. He posed a question how CoPSA can help practitioners in articulating and publishing the knowledge which can work in a defined context? He also said from these initiatives such as COPSA, donor agencies will also be benefitted by getting results in the programmes, development effectiveness and empowerment through the use of social accountability tools.

Raha touched upon the Theory of Change by saying that understanding of the context is very important and NGOs should devote sufficient time on this so that they can articulate the context and understand that why social accountability tools are working in one context and not in others so that results can be shown in a better manner and advocate for better budget utilisation. He further stressed upon empowering local voices as well. The question of how social accountability is going to work is extremely important for funding agencies.

Presentations

Naimur Rehman, Chief Operating Officer of ANSA-SAR talked about envisioning the CoP on social accountability tools by elaborating the philosophy and design approaches and said that investment in CoPSA is a strategy to create linkages between different actors, practitioners of social accountability for knowledge exchange, mobilizing innovation and new ideas and using those knowledge and innovations for advancing the practices and action on the ground. He provided a brief introduction of ANSA and said that it was started to create linkages and synergies among different actors and institutions for deepening the knowledge on social accountability concepts and practices; therefore ANSA SAR is funding 24 innovative programmes. This investment is made after realising the need to anchor such emerging practices and learnings from each other.

He further opined that design of COPSA shall be a good mix of formal and informal structure



which allows diverse members other than ANSA-SAR for cross learnings in a wider manner. Naimur also talked in detail about the meaning of CoP and said that it is not simply a network of knowledge or experience sharing but bringing those practitioners together to put it in their work. He mentioned that as per the original framework of CoPs all four CoPs would be interlinked with each other since all tools can be complementary for each other. He laid stress on mainstreaming social accountability as well and said that outcome of demand side initiatives is very

important not only or donors but for the implementing organisations. Results have to be produced at micro and macro level which can influence the systemic issues too.

Om Prakash Arya, Senior Project Coordinator, CUTS presented the outline and purpose of the CoP on SAc tools by mentioning the context in which it can or cannot work. He also mentioned various



aspects of design of CoP and talked in detail about the meaning of CoP, about the project and taken the group through various activities of CoPSA which includes in country consultations, regional inception cum design meet, establishing online platform, sensitisation of funding agencies/government, capacity building of members, promoting innovation and periodic evaluation of CoPSA.

He defined the purpose of the CoP and said that it is to strengthen and institutionalise the accountability mechanisms in the system so that

there is a maximum use of it. He underlined the importance of community participation so that produced results are better and good relationships among the members so that members can have a feeling of belongingness in CoP. He stated that this CoP will nurture the knowledge and enhance the networking to mainstream the SAc tools but for this all stakeholders including funding agencies has to be sensitised and results are produced.

Dr. Joy Elamon, Chief Executive Officer, Inter-Cooperation, New Delhi shared his valuable views related to sustaining web based communities, opportunities and challenges. He further said that such CoP is a good way to bring all levels of practitioners on a platform in which there is no hierarchy among members with due respect of their individuality with enough incentives for individual and institutions. He highlighted the key role of the moderator and core group which has to be little bigger than two members and decentralised in nature having grassroots practitioners, learning circles, action groups and regional forums having good usage of



latest technology, experiential and validated knowledge.

He put forth suggestions to build and run successful CoPs and negated the concept of active and passive members and told that all the members are active whether they take part in discussions or not. He also shared his experiences of being a moderator of decentralised online community.

He suggested about the potential members in which all the members are treated equal and there is no hierarchy among them with due respect to their individuality because mobilising the members and keeping them active is a tough task and can be resolved by giving personal touch and adding emotions and live faces. He highlighted the key role of the moderator and core group.

Sarah Figge Husain, Training Specialist in UN Solution Exchange (Global Team) shared her relevant experience and said that it is extremely important to know about the potential and suitability of each member with regional balance. She said that it is good to define the view of the CoP whether it is short stage or long term at initial itself. Further she underlined the importance of the design exercise of such initiatives and said that conceptualisation of the way forward and realisation of the main objectives at the initial stage of design level is extremely useful. She also emphasised on the importance of analysing the facts related to potential members and strategies to make them active in the community, regional balance of members, objectives, and measurement of the success of such CoPs and other related key steps in the process.



Open Session

During the question answer session participants raised their questions and given their suggestions as well. It was discussed that though the contours of CoPSA may be complex but not complicated. It was said that the used approached in the proposed CoPSA has to be well defined so the attempts are more focused. This CoPSA shall emerge as a case in a financially sustainable and decentralized manner in terms of resource mobilisation and participation in various processes in a transparent and accountable manner.

Regarding the members at individual level incentives has to be created including the institutional members as well which brings larger commitments as well in the initiatives. There was discussion was around a portal on Right to Education in which most of the stakeholders were actively involved though it is a big challenge to incentivize the members to keep them active which can be done by keeping an expert panels who can respond the queries of members of community promptly and frequently asked questions can be listed for reference purpose as well.

Community based content curation is also extremely important since it includes community in the process and second is community based peer reviews of the implementations. It is also important to

learn the failures of the previous similar initiatives so that same are not repeated. It is also relevant to make such initiatives financially sustainable.

Summing up and Vote of thanks

Madhu Sudan Sharma, Project Coordinator, CUTS summed up the proceedings and said that this meeting has been extremely important in the sense of getting suggestions and views in the line of designing the CoP names as accountability solutions. He thanked all the participants for their active participation and fruitful association in future as well.

Highlights

- Important suggestions came out to design the CoP
- Donor agencies sensitised on the theme of CoP

Outcome

This country consultation of India has been extremely fruitful in the sense of meeting out the objectives and mandate. In the meeting following key suggestions were put on forth by speakers and participants.

1. It was evidently emerged out that SAc is quite known concept now within the circle of donor agencies that with low cost techniques and tools, it can leverage US\$1000mn programmes by spending 20 million and improve service delivery for beneficiaries. But there is a doubt about the tangible reality of SAc.
2. It was highlighted that the component of CoPSA can be developed as a knowledge market where members can buy knowledge not necessarily by paying in cash. And common identity of members, mutual relationship among them and community of real practitioners rather than of academicians are three features of any CoP
3. Design of CoPSA needs to be a good mix of formal and informal structure in order to nurture and build it and to make it relevant for members and convenient for learners and contributors
4. It was also advocated that there are lot of incentives for people to be part of such CoPs
5. It was asked that how CoPSA can help donor agencies to meet out their fiduciary responsible by getting results in the programmes of governance, development effectiveness and empowerment through the use of social accountability tools
6. The investment in CoPSA is a strategy to create linkages between different actors, practitioners of SAc for knowledge exchange, mobilising innovation and new ideas and for advancing practices and actions on the ground.