‘Social’ Accountability (SAcc) to Improve Governance and Development Outcomes in India: Towards Lessons and Global Frontier Issues

Initial Findings from a Working Paper

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Presentation Overview

Background
• ‘Work-in-progress’ background paper.
• Review of selected Social Accountability (SAcc) cases in India:
  1. What types of outcomes have the cases contributed to?
  2. What factors shaped how the initiatives had impact and how?
  3. What broader lessons can be extracted from this for global debate, policy and practice in the field of SAcc?

Presentation Objectives
• Brief snapshots of working draft – share initial ideas, spark debate.
• Snapshot of ‘big’ messages – push debate toward ‘frontiers’?

Presentation Structure
• Part I: Background and Rationale
• Part II: Snapshot of Key Approaches and Findings in India
• Part III: Toward Global Implications and ‘Frontier’ Issues
PART I: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

‘Social’ Accountability in India: Towards Lessons and Frontiers
The Context: India

**Backdrop**
- Largest democracy in the world, federal system.
- 2005 to 2010, share of global GDP increased from 1.8 to 2.7%. 53 million out of poverty; achieved MDG 1 by halving proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day (WB CPS, 2013).
- Major progress and also ongoing challenges (Dreze and Sen, 2014).
- 1/3 of the world’s poor (c. 400 million) (WB CPS, 2013)
- ‘Governance Matters’; sub-national variation (Kolhi, 2012).
- New PM puts focus on: ‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance’.

**‘Social’ Accountability Backdrop and Global Field**
- ‘Birthplace’ of many innovations in SAcc that have matured (RTI, Social Audits, Citizen Report Cards etc.)
- Includes more recent approaches: Right to Public Services, E-Governance
- Much has been learnt (in India and globally) and more can certainly be learnt...
Rationale for the Working Paper

- **Bank-India Country Partnership Strategy (2013-2017):** ‘Inclusion Pillar’ of CPS and citizen engagement in operations/analytics in India and globally – this is one small input.

- **Responds to points raised via government/stakeholder dialogue and Technical Assistance** – how to ‘make sense’ of complex tapestry: what lessons *across* the body of cases?

- **Information fragmented** – pull it together; and bring ‘up-to-date’.

- **Contribute to debate/understanding in India/globally (internal and external to Bank)** and (re)interpret the evidence – bifurcation in policy discourse: overly optimistic SAcc supporters vs. pessimistic technocrats – towards an ‘evidence-based’ middle ground?
Definitions and Methodology

Definitions

• **Social Accountability (SAcc):** “broad range of actions and mechanisms, beyond voting, that citizens can use to hold the state to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts” (Malena and McNeil, 2010)

• Understand SAcc to be embedded in a social/political context and contributing to a range of outcomes (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010; Fox 2014; Joshi, 2014; O’Meally, 2013).

Methodology

• Qualitative desk ‘meta-review’ of cases in India from 1990s.

• Phase I: Creation of long list (163 cases).

• Phase II: Shorter list for deeper analysis (63 cases). Selected based on robustness of evidence on outcomes/factors; covering range of SAcc tools; where feasible range of states, legislation.

• Selected telephonic interviews and correspondence.
Points to keep in mind

• **Desk-based review** – time/budget constraints.

• **Reliance on ‘well documented’ cases** – exclusion of poorly documented, but potentially interesting, cases.

• **Some challenges in evidence base** – attribution/contribution.

• **Focus on synthesis** – not highly granular detail on each specific case.

*Current social accountability practice has been racing ahead of clear evidence of impact. The paucity of studies of impact (although increasing rapidly), the fragmentation of the data points, the lack of comparative evidence, and the acute shortage of mixed method studies, have all contributed to a situation where there is a strong normative belief in citizen-led accountability without a clear understanding of the conditions under which it can have impact (Joshi 2014: 33)*
PART II: SNAPSHOTS OF THE KEY APPROACHES: WHAT OUTCOMES? WHAT FACTORS SHAPED EFFECTIVENESS?
3 Main Clusters of SAcc ‘Processes’

(1) Watching

(2) Bridging

(3) Facilitating
(1) ‘Watching’: Auditing the State

**What do we mean?**

- Involving societal actors in ‘watching’ the state mainly via ‘audit’ i.e. a process of verification. Applied in various states and schemes.
  - ‘Tool(s)’: social auditing.

**Snapshot Examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Area</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and demand making</td>
<td>CREDA (Centre for Rural Education and Development Action) applied social audits in the context of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act scheme (MGNREGA). • In Ahungi Kalan panchayat, Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, back payment was due toward payment of wages for works completed. Awareness raised during social audit process contributed to the workers and ‘self help groups’ organizing a protest in front of the Block Development Office. The Sarpanch apologised for delay and released payment of Rs. 500,000 (USD 8000).</td>
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<tr>
<td>State accountability/ responsiveness</td>
<td>The Society for Social Audit, Accountability and Transparency (SSAAT) in Andhra Pradesh. Large-scale implementation of social audits under MGNREGA through dedicated staff/functionaries. • Social audits led to, in various instances, recovery of siphoned off money. • However, different studies (Aiyar et al.; Afridi and Iversen, 2013) also find that lack of proper enforcement mechanisms limited follow-up and the scope of impacts.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Samarthan (NGO) supported social audit implementation in Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh. • Improvements in delivery/accountability: improved registration of job cards, cancellation of ghost cards, registration of job demand applications with dated receipts.</td>
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(2) ‘Bridging’: Connecting Accountability Dots

What do we mean?

- Strategies for subjecting elected representatives/state functionaries to more regular/informed societal scrutiny, beyond voting (i.e. ‘bridging’ political/social accountability).
  - ‘Tools’: capacity building of elected reps, expenditure tracking, complaints tracking, disclosure.

Snapshot Examples

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| State accountability via construction of more informed and active citizenry | Praja, NGO Mumbai. Supports range of mechanisms to foster a more informed/active citizenry.  
  - For instance, tracks complaints filed by citizens at the Municipal Corporation of Mumbai and matches them questions asked and the issues raised by the Councilors at the Ward Committee meetings. They found that most of the time the discussions at the Ward Committee meetings were not related to the grievances faced by the citizens. Data is shared publically. |
| ‘Supply’ Side of Accountability | DISHA, NGO in Gujarat. Trained elected representatives with budget information.  
  - Documented results: improved ability of elected representatives to understand budget at panchayat level and track unspent amounts; increased participation of Member of Local Assembly in budget debates; increased time allocation to budget debates during Assembly; increased number of budget related queries made by the MLAs to Disha. |
(3) ‘Facilitating’: Listening and Bringing stakeholders together to solve local problems

What do we mean?

- Attempts to improve delivery via widened involvement of societal actors in monitoring/feedback (i.e. ‘listening’) and facilitating varied degrees of multi-stakeholder problem-solving based on the monitoring.
  - ‘Tool(s)’: citizen score cards, citizen report cards, ‘community’-based monitoring.

Snapshot Examples

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<tr>
<td>State responsiveness</td>
<td><strong>CfBT Education Trust, Andhra Pradesh.</strong> Used score cards to mobilise opinion around village education and then parents trained to participate in ‘School Management Committees’.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Contributed to improvements e.g. improvement in teachers attendance (from 50% to 90%), student attendance (from 20% to 60%).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>On the other hand, <strong>community health monitoring in Barwani, MP by Samarthan</strong> report more limited impacts as lack of response from Chief Medical Officer (CMO) to villager complaints, also Block Officer not convening meetings for discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building local problem-solving capacities?</td>
<td><strong>Community Score Card in Satara District of Maharashtra.</strong> Results/impacts of which is not documented, although the use of interface meetings – feedback ratings discussed between officials, service providers and stakeholders – and action planning contributed to strengthening local ‘collective’ problem-solving and interaction capacities.</td>
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**Synthesis Across All Approaches**

Three Outcome Areas: mixed results...but patchy evidence

- Clustered results into three key outcome areas (see table).
- Mixed results; in cases, poor explanation why – design flaws? Implementation? Context?
- Small ‘Islands of Excellence’: but how to sustain and scale the gains?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>'Positive'</th>
<th>'Negative', Neutral or Marginal Impacts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Area (1): Construction of Citizenship and Strengthening of Practices of Participation</strong></td>
<td>Non-participation from various groups – no effects? Raised expectations and disillusionment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved awareness of rights and of self-identity amongst citizens</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Improved rates of participation in collective activities</td>
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<td>Strengthened democratic practices such as demanding information from government officials</td>
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<td><strong>Outcome Area (2): Responsiveness and/or Accountability of the State</strong></td>
<td>Backlash and/or ad hoc responses (weak institutionalization) Limited impacts on systemic dysfunctions Raised voice but weak enforcement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved delivery of public goods and services</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Reduced leakage (even return of funds)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved implementation of government schemes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Area (3): More Inclusive Forms of Governance</strong></td>
<td>‘Elite capture’ Weak voice/empowerment of marginal groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some improvements in awareness and access to information for traditionally marginalized groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved access to jobs and entitlements by vulnerable communities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Synthesis Across All Approaches
What factors appear to explain (non-)progress towards outcomes?

1. The role of ‘political society’ (formal/informal and political/bureaucratic): in number of cases state ‘action’ found to be critical for achieving goals.

2. The importance of enforcement (‘teeth’): most frequently cited barrier to impact was the absence of an effective enabling environment for enforcement/redressal at the appropriate level(s). (But weak diagnosis of ‘why’ mechanisms not functioning).

3. The ability to be ‘locally anchored’: interventions that adapted to, and harnessed, locally-important issues and capacities seemed better able to drive change and form local alliances.

4. Prior histories of SAcc and public participation: stronger previous experience appeared to contribute to stronger capacities – on both ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ side – to act effectively; and maybe explains presence of ‘better functioning’ state-society collaborative spaces.

5. The form and function of ‘information’: the extent to which information was accessible, user-friendly and ‘actionable’ shaped the traction/impact of cases. (RTI as a critical enabler).
PART III: TOWARDS GLOBAL LESSONS AND FRONTIER ISSUES FOR FUTURE DEBATE, ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE
How to make sense of and apply all this in light of ‘global knowledge’? Not easy...
Three overarching takeaways...

1. SAcc initiatives can contribute to a range of positive outcomes.
   - ...But need to get better at measuring and explaining results (what is ‘worth’ measuring?)...can we do a better job at linking SAcc to Bank twin goals?

2. ‘Strategic’ approaches (multi-pronged with state-society co-ordination) rather than ‘tactical’ (bounded interventions on ‘society-side’ via ‘tools’) appear more promising.
   - ...But need to go further in analyzing and operationalizing the ‘strategic approach’ in practical ways.

3. The policy debate is (slowly?) moving forward
   - ...But:
     b) Incentives in ‘funders’ can run counter to ‘strategic’ approaches – pressures to lend/disburse, pressures to ‘log-frame’ results, limited preparation time.
Drilling down: six (overlapping) ‘strategic’ frontiers?

(1) Astutely opening the ‘Black Box’ of the State: Mind the Gap!

(2) Making Accountability ‘Sandwiches’ out of ‘Spaghetti’

(3) How to grow ‘teeth’ and make them ‘bite’?

(4) Beyond ‘citizens’; merging the inclusion-engagement agendas

(5) Anchoring in micro and macro contexts: solving problems over time

(6) Information, plus, plus!

Think Differently: more ‘actionable’ and appropriate forms of analysis

Act Differently: more granular, practical guidance – new ‘toolkits’
(1) Astutely Opening the ‘Black Box’ of the State: Mind the Gap!

What is the main implication?

• State form, action and ‘response’ critical:
  ➢ ...But, still (big) gap between recognition that ‘political economy matters’ and systematic understanding of underlying drivers of ‘state response’ and ‘right’ actions in response.

Toward Thinking Differently?

• Take requirement of state action – not lack of ‘demand’ – as the starting point. Some ideas:
  1) Bridge ‘gap’ between SAcc and elite networks/bargains to explain ‘will to respond’? Local settlements.
  2) Bridge ‘gap’ between SAcc and broader ‘developmental-state-building’ work?
     – *What explains more capable and developmental states?* Rather than gleaming transparency standards: (i) political elite directing the state towards economic growth/industrial expansion; (ii) efforts to address market externalities and nurture broader based political/economic coalitions for accumulation; (iii) effective basic service/redistributive mechanisms.
     – *How could SAcc contribute to building core developmental state qualities?* E.g. ‘Effective States and Inclusive Development’, (http://www.effective-states.org/). How citizenship formation contribute to inclusive growth coalitions or better implementation of redistributive programs?
     – *Steps to take this forward?* Research; integration of teams working on political economy, state-building, SAcc.

Toward Acting Differently?

• Optimize political-social accountability synergy (e.g. voter education, parliamentarians; ‘unusual’ suspects).

• Maximize vertical-horizontal accountability synergies (e.g. ‘triggering’ in-state accountability mechanisms).

• Toward astute ‘constructive engagement’? (e.g. constantly updating problem-focused PE knowledge, ‘room for maneuver’: (a) hooking initiatives on reforms with political payoffs, (b) crowding in pro-reformers/facilitating pro-reform action, (c) working with ‘aligned incentive’ actors etc (Booth/Unsworth, 2014)).
(2) Making Accountability ‘Sandwiches’ out of ‘Spaghetti’

What is the main implication?

• A final nail in the supply/demand coffin? Pro-reform actors/relationships from state and society; anti-reformers from state and society (‘sandwich strategy’)...
  ➢ ...But: on the ground it can be challenging to make ‘sandwiches’ out of the ‘spaghetti’ of complex accountability relationships.

Toward Thinking differently?

• Accountability = ecosystem of ‘push’/‘pull’, formal/informal social, political, bureaucratic relationships
  ➢ Make relationships underlying accountability ‘problem’ visible so they can be contested (e.g. Kelsall et al, 2005).
  (Loops back to elite balances of power and ‘will’).

Toward Acting differently?

• How to develop more actionable/sophisticated approaches to ‘sandwich’-making in this complexity? For example: (i) how to promote SAcc that brokers the ‘right’ forms of relationships/networks and facilitates ‘sandwiches’ by bearing transaction costs; (ii) how to avoid ‘co-option’ or ‘unsustainable’ donor-driven networks.

• Connecting dots in complex programs of reforms – strengthen societal activism only alongside building state capabilities. For instance: (i) programs to strengthen intra-state mechanisms of accountability (e.g. anti-corruption commissions) while simultaneously strengthening societal capacity to understand and trigger these mechanisms; (ii) build more ‘joined up’ practitioner coalitions – one agency, alone, is rarely capable of working on all these fronts. (Loops back to previous slide).
(3) How to Grow ‘Teeth’ and Make them ‘Bite’?

What is the main implication?
• Need to get better at dealing with ‘enforcement’ side of accountability – having ‘voice’ with ‘teeth’ and making them ‘bite’ (Fox, 2014). (Frequently cited challenge in many places).
  ➢ ...But ‘how’ to do this one of biggest frontier challenges for translating SAcc into results.

Toward Thinking differently?
• Enhanced knowledge and learning on ‘enforcement’– can we harvest global experience on how to better assess/address enforcement gaps via SAcc/governance/accountability support?

Toward Acting differently?
• Start by locating where the ‘teeth’ (or at least the gums!) really are (e.g. parliamentary committee, local collector, informal village councils).

• Then assess underlying drivers of enforcement ‘gaps’ and develop SAcc as part of a strategy to help trigger a ‘bite’.
  ➢ Focus on right locus and level of enforcement – initiatives ‘fail’ because entities involved do not have authority to punish wrong-doers (loop back to triggering horizontal mechanisms).
  ➢ Development of a technically sound ‘Grievance Redressal Mechanism’ is rarely sufficient – many initiatives ‘fail’ because they do not address underlying incentives of enforcement.
(4) Beyond ‘Citizens’: Merging the Inclusion-Engagement Agenda

What is the main implication?

• Relations of inequality/exclusion can be reproduced in SAcc; various cases have ‘shallow’ approach to inclusion (weak disaggregation, weak reporting) -- need more systematic approach.
  ➢ ...But: there are evidently no quick-win solutions on this (or any other) topic!

Toward Thinking Differently?

• Mainstream ‘inclusion’: undertake exclusion analysis as part of SAcc design and devise mitigation strategies for addressing unique needs of low capability groups.
  ➢ Think beyond ‘citizens’ or ‘communities’ – not homogenous – focus on relevant social categories, such as class, caste, ethnicity and so on.

Toward Acting Differently?

• How to operationalize top-down mechanisms for ‘mitigating inequality’ on the ground? Need for ‘inequality mitigation’ in participatory initiatives — quotas, affirmative action, top-down monitoring of inclusion dynamics (e.g. Mansuri & Rao, 2013, Rao et al, 2014) – but how to make these really ‘work’?

• Integrate bottom-up mechanisms for mitigating exclusion. For example: (1) mainstreaming a suite of capabilities investments in SAcc (e.g. literacy/livelihood enhancement, extension and para-legal outreach); (2) building effective representation of marginal voices (while harnessing ‘middle class’ critical mass).

Corbridge et al perceptive: “to expect Musahar [lower caste] children—boys as well as girls—to go to school in Bihar, or...to expect their parents to take part in Village Education Committees, is to miss the very obvious point that these families lack even the most basic assets: land, of course, but also a sense of self-worth and the prospect of secure and properly paid employment” (Corbridge et al. 2005: 149).
What is the main implication?

- Need to tailor SAcc to macro and micro-contextual factors.
  - ...But: no one magic bullet - interventions unfold in non-linear, unpredictable ways.

Toward Thinking Differently

- But not macro vs. micro – need theories of change that handle both?
  - Too much focus on ‘micro’ could justify ‘overly localized’ approach – underplay higher-level systemic issues.
  - Need to work on aggregation (‘from micro to macro and back’).

Toward Acting Differently

- Tailoring to context cannot be a ‘one-off’ exercise! How to institutionalize adaptive capacities. For instance, outcome mapping (Tembo 2012), ‘real-time’ Management Info. Systems (Rao, 2014). But how to square this circle with pressures to disburse and logframe results?

- Solving ‘locally important’ problems requires iterations, flexibility, engaging with informal institutions.
  - Can we learn from, operationalize the ‘Arms length’ approach? (Booth, various): long-term funding; focus on relationships and bearing transaction costs without imposing blueprints; high sensitivity to informality, local capacity, leadership and social contracts. But how to operationalize this?
What is the main implication?

- Confirms that information is rarely sufficient; and its form and accessibility are critical.
  - ...But information-focused SAcc still dominant; and we don’t know what ‘types’ of information best trigger behavior change.

Thinking differently

- Treat information as only one of many inputs for solving a given accountability ‘problem’. Information not the ‘end’ of an intervention.

Acting Differently

- Focus on holistic ‘Information-plus-plus’ initiatives. People may be aware of entitlements but are too scared to claim them, or delivery mechanisms may be poorly resourced or dysfunctional. Information plus capacity-building/facilitation, institutional reform, and so on.

- ‘Sandwich’ the information: information gaps not only on the ‘society’ side – case material suggested that information gaps amongst state actors can be critical.

- Information needs to be ‘problem-solving’ and (politically) savvy:
  - ‘Actionable’/‘relevant’, i.e. linked to capacities, incentives and interests of targeted users;
  - ‘User-centred’ i.e. information that is useful from user perspective (not ‘expert’ perspective);
  - ‘Available’ i.e. accessible via culturally and technologically appropriate channels; and,
  - ‘High quality’ i.e. ‘factually correct’ so as not to further confuse or obfuscate.
In sum...

• How to get better at ‘watching’, ‘bridging’ and ‘facilitating’? Six frontier issues and two cross-cutting priorities:
  1. Think Differently – shift mental models, ‘actionable’ analysis.
  2. Act Differently – new ‘toolkits’; address internal incentives.

Some next steps

• Could we forge ‘learning and practice alliances’ to take learning/practical guidance forward on these (and other) critical frontier issues?

• Could we develop a ‘next generation’ of ‘tools’? ‘How to…‘bridge political and social accountability’, ‘build a sandwich strategy’, ‘address inequality in SAcc’, ‘help SAcc to grow ‘teeth’, ‘build in adaptive capacity’?
Thank You! Over to you...
Any more ideas/examples? Comments?
Does this resonate? What next steps?

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