

Making Social Accountability Initiatives Work in the Performance of Local Self-Governing Institutions: District-Level Analysis in Rural Assam, India

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Abstract : Ineffectiveness of formal institutional mechanisms such as official audit to improve public service delivery has been a serious concern to scholars working on governance reforms in developing countries. Scholars argue that public service delivery in local self-governing institutions can be improved through application of informal mechanisms such as social accountability. Social accountability has been reinforced with the engagement of citizens and civic organizations in the process of service delivery to reduce the governance gap in developing countries. However, there are challenges that may impede the scope of establishing social accountability initiatives in the performance of local self-governing institutions. This study makes an attempt to investigate the factors that may impede the scope of establishing social accountability, particularly in culturally heterogeneous societies like India. While analyzing the implementation of two rural development schemes by Panchayats, the local self-governing institutions functioning in rural Assam in India, this study argues that the scope of establishing social accountability in the performance of local self-governing institutions, particularly in culturally heterogeneous societies in developing countries will be impeded by the absence of inter-caste and inter-religion networks. Data has been collected from five selected districts of Assam using in-depth interview method and survey method. The study further contributes to the debates on 'good governance' and citizen-centric approaches in developing countries.

Keywords : citizen engagement, local self-governing institutions, networks, social accountability

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