INDIA: SERVICE PERFORMANCE INFORMATION: INITIATIVES

The information included in the agenda paper 6, on India, at page 25, is very minimal and very limited in its coverage. A lot has been done by the Government to enhance the standards of public service delivery and monitor outcomes. The Governments at the federal (Central Government) and the provincial levels(States) have huge outlays on programmes in the primary education, public health, family welfare, sanitation, employment sectors (The outlay on development schemes of the Government of India are upwards of $ 40 billion for 2010-11).

Local Self Government Securing Peoples' Participation

India has progressive legislation to secure participation of the people in programme formulation, implementation , delivery and monitoring the results. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (1992) has been hailed as a landmark in the evolution of Panchayati Raj (institutions of self government at the grassroots) in the country because it not only aimed at giving a constitutional status and devolution of 29 functions (eleventh schedule in the Constitution of India) related to agriculture, drinking water, minor irrigation, fisheries, forest produce etc, to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (local bodies) but also provided the mechanism for regular elections and raising the financial resources for the Panchayats to function as institutions of local self government. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (www.panchayat.nic.in) at the Central level focuses on decentralization of functions, funds and functionaries to local bodies and strengthening of the same for *effective service delivery to the common man*. More and more funds have devolved to these local bodies over the last few years.

Planning at the Grassroots Level

District Planning is at the core of the schemes run by the Government. A major programme of the Government includes the Backward Region Grant Fund (www.brgf.gov.in) which represents a major shift in approach from top-down plans to participative plans prepared from the grassroots level upwards. The conviction that drives this new locally driven approach is that grass root level democratic institutions know best the dimensions of poverty in their areas and are therefore best placed to undertake individually small, but overall, significant local interventions to tackle local poverty alleviation in a sustainable manner. There are three features of BRGF that make it truly unique. First, the approach of putting the Panchayats at the centre stage of tackling local issues is one that has never been tried at this vast scale, barring the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme. Second, no central funding stream is as 'untied' as the BRGF – the funds can be applied to any preference of the Panchayat, so long as it fills a development gap and the identification of the work is decided with peoples' participation. Third, no other programme spends as much funds, nearly, 11 percent of the total allocation, for capacity building and staff provisioning.

Management Information Systems

The other flagship programme of the GOI, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGA(www.nrega.nic.in)) (outlay about $ 4

billion in 2010-11) aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by **guaranteeing** hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. There are several such programmes (e.g. National Rural Health mission (www.mohfw.nic.in/NRHM.htm)etc., schemes for housing for the ppr, primary education etc run by the Government at the Central level and the States and most of them have their dedicated management information system.

Accountability of the Public Delivery System

The public delivery system has been made accountable, as it envisages an Annual Report on the outcomes of NREGA to be presented by the Central Government to the Parliament and to the Legislature by the State Government. Specifically personnel responsible for implementing the Act have been made legally responsible for delivering the guarantee under the Act. For other schemes too, the agencies that deliver the service are required to furnish periodic performance reports to the Ministries implementing the scheme. For the National Rural Health Mission, process and output/outcome indicators have been developed (http://mohfw.nic.in/NRHM/presentations.htm) which help in evaluating the scheme (please refer to presentations under monitoring and evaluation under the link given above). Monitoring and evaluation are integral parts of any public service delivery programme. Programme Implementation units have been set up at the districts in states for various schemes, which consolidate the plans flowing from the levels below and oversee the implementation of the schemes.

Social Audit by Citizens as a Means to Monitor Service Delivery

A related development has been the initiation of social audit by the citizens of the country. An innovative feature of the above mentioned National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is that it gives a central role to 'social audits' as a means of continuous public vigilance. The provisions are mentioned in the statute. The website of the NREGA carries guidelines on social audit and this means has been used extensively by the citizens to evaluate the functioning of public functionaries and programmes in the villages across the country

Right to Information

Another major landmark has been the Right to Information act enacted by the Government of India in 2005. It has truly empowered the people of India. It is one of the most progressive legislations as compared to similar legislations across countries and ensures the right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities. Items of proactive disclosure have been prescribed in the Act. Strict time limits have been set for disclosure of information (within 30 days) by the designated public information officers and the citizen can appeal in case she is not satisfied with the information provided. Strict penalties are prescribed for any refusal of the public authorities to disclose information. Details can be perused on the website www.rti.gov.in. The right has been used extensively by the citizens to get information on service programme delivery, use of public funds etc.

Performance Audits by SAI, India

Audit reports by the SAI, India, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India are a very important means on feedback on service performance. The CAG of India has undertaken several performance audits to evaluate functioning of social sector delivery programmes and the programme implementation has been evaluated against the objectives set by the programme guidelines. Details can be accessed at www.cag.gov.in.

Budgets

Outcome budgeting has been initiated in India, with the following guidelines issued for the purpose.

(I)   Outcomes to be specifically defined in measurable and monitorable terms; intermediate outputs should also be defined wherever required.

(II)   Standardising unit cost of delivery.

(III)   Benchmarking the standards/quality of outcomes and services.

(IV)   Capacity building for requisite efficiency at all levels, in terms of equipment, technology, knowledge and skills.

(V)   Ensuring flow of right amount of money at the right time to the right level, with neither delay nor "parking" of funds.

(VI)   Effective monitoring and evaluation systems.

(VII)   Involvement of the community/target groups/recipients of the service, with easy access and feedback systems.

It is however, acknowledged that outcome budgets though formulated by various Government departments have yet to be institutionalised.

In addition information can be accessed at the website of the Planning Commission (www.**planningcommission**.nic.in)of the country which *hosts evaluation studies* of the social sector programmes. The Controller General of Accounts (CGA) also maintains a portal called the Central Plan Scheme Monitoring System (www.cga.nic.in.) to capture information on fund flow in respect of major schemes of the Government of India and aims at capturing expenditure incurred by implementing agencies across the country. State websites disclose information on scheme implementation by States.

As far as the citizen charters are concerned, the information on the charters issued by the various Ministries and departments of the Union and the States is hosted on www.goi.charters.gov.in. However, some of the issues mentioned in the agenda notes such as why some aspects of service delivery have been chosen over others, how and where the service will report performance to the public, whether performance is getting better or worse etc. can certainly be disclosed in the citizen charters. There is a need for wide publicity and strict monitoring of charters for them to evolve as effective instruments to ensure programme delivery and provide feedback.

A list of citizens charters formulated by Central Ministries/Department can be reached on the link http://www.goicharters.nic.in/charter.htm . The link also details the nodal points for contact in case of further information on citizens charter and issues thereof.