



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Social accountability mechanisms (SAMs) allow transparency and accountability of local self-governing institutions (LSGIs) in the implementation of development programs. Participatory governance literature considers social accountability mechanisms as a key component in development policy making to effectively connect the target population, the beneficiaries with the local self-governing institutions and deepen democracy. However, due to structural conditions and marginalization the beneficiaries fail to effectively contribute to participatory governance and social accountability mechanisms. Social accountability mechanisms are often used and manipulated by political elites, including the elected representatives of the local self-governing institutions, local bureaucrats and affluent villagers, leading to a governance gap that further contributed to marginalization of the beneficiaries. Although social accountability mechanisms have gained attention as an important participatory mechanism in the developing countries there is a lack of literature that adequately explores the factors that may have an impact and challenge beneficiary participation in social accountability practices in the rural areas. An important question that needs to be addressed is, ‘what explains the lack of effective beneficiary participation in social accountability mechanisms organized in local self-governing institutions?’ Drawing from secondary sources, in-depth interviews and preliminary surveys, this study examined this particular question on participatory governance in India. The study was based in Assam where we selected a focused study of villages in the district of Barpeta. Two rural development schemes, the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme were selected to analyze the problem of beneficiary participation in Assam. The study argues that participation is a necessary but

not a sufficient condition for empowering village people in rural India. We also argue that beneficiary participation in social accountability mechanisms may be influenced and challenged by patronage politics, and socio-structural conditions and prevailing cultural norms. The study also explains the type and degree of participation in social accountability practices, particularly social audit in Assam. The study argues that local governing institutions become the sites of intense political competition. Political elites use clientele relations to distribute selective incentives and benefits of the rural development schemes. Socio-structural conditions and cultural norms, such as gender discrimination, power and domination embedded in the caste system, reinforce the patronage networks which in turn, effect the participation of beneficiaries in social audit forums, door-to-door campaigns and other forms of available participatory practices in India. The study therefore tries to make a humble attempt to contribute to the literature and empirical understanding of participatory governance, deepening democracy and social accountability reforms in India.

