

Session 8

Session Title

Social Audit: Role of Gram Sabha and Movie Show on 'Right to Information'



- **Instructor's Guide**
- **PowerPoint Slides**
- **Participants' Note**

Session Title: Social Audit and the Right to Information		Session Guide
Instructor's Guide	Reference	Participants' Response
Session Overview		
Welcome participants to the session and remind them that their active participation is critical for the success of each session.		
Learning Objective		
Delineate: By the end of this session, we will gather an understanding of social audit, the role of NGOs in this sphere and the value of institutionalizing a process of social audits of Panchayats.		
Basic Concepts		
Explain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The object of social audit. • The recent instructions issued by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) for statutory social audit of rural development works. • Initiatives regarding the Right to Information by Mazhdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and other organizations. Distribute Participants' Note	Slide : Session 8 Social Audit and Right To Information	Participants' Note
Experience:		
Inform: We will now watch a documentary-movie on 'Right to Information' which shows how 'Jan Sunwai' (public hearing) plays a major role in social audit.	VCD on 'Right to Information'	
Thank the participants and bring the session to a close.		

Social Audit and RTI

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Social Audit and the Right to Information

Slide 2

Social Audit

- ◆ Social Audit, unlike the formal institutional audit mechanism, seeks to achieve the twin objectives of transparency and accountability;
- ◆ Increasingly, it has the potential of developing into an important tool for enhancing the effective delivery of public services and programmes by PRIs;

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Social Audit contd.

- ◆ It can also be termed as "people's audit" in consideration of the fact that under this mechanism, the people as a collective entity are afforded an opportunity of analyzing and assessing not only the issues pertaining to financial matters, but also several other aspects such as, *inter alia*, the following: (next slide)

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Social Audit contd.

- Identification of collective and individual needs of the local community;
- Selection of schemes and their location;
- Selection of the potential beneficiaries, particularly those belonging to the disadvantaged groups; and
- The manner in which the developmental and welfare programmes /schemes are being implemented, *vis-à-vis*, their declared objectives.

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Statutory Social Audit-instruction by MORD (contd.)

- ◆ The recent instructions issued by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) for statutory social audit of rural development works stipulate that:
 - the Gram Sabha should be specifically empowered to conduct social audit or collective audit by the Gram Sabha, into all public works and beneficiary oriented programmes implemented at the village level under various schemes of the MORD.

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Statutory Social Audit -instruction by MORD

- These binding instructions also require that the completion certificate for all village level public works should be awarded by the Gram Sabha and such a certificate of completion can be awarded by the Gram Sabha only after conducting social audit of the work in question.
- The instructions provide for social audit to be conducted in special Gram Sabhas to be specially convened for the exclusive purpose of conduct of social audit.

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Statutory Social Audit -instruction by MORD
(contd.)

- Social audit of all on-going development works would also be included as an item for discussion in every Gram Sabha meeting. State governments, however, need to pass detailed orders to operationalise social audit.

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Jan Sunwai

- ◆ The first *Jan Sunwai* [public hearing] was staged in Kot Kirana on Dec. 2, 1994.
- ◆ The *Jan Sunwai* demanded
 - that all public works and accounts be made transparent;
 - that a people's audit be held to assess accountability; and
 - that a system of redress be established to manage the return of siphoned money.

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Right to Information

- ◆ Closely linked with provisions for social audit are measures for enforcing transparency and Right to Information (RTI).
- ◆ Improved social audit is feasible only if Gram Sabha members have free and ready access to all relevant, demystified and comprehensible information and documents regarding the works that they are empowered to audit.

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Jan Sunwai contd.

- ◆ *MKSS* subsequently conducted several *Jan Sunwais* in different parts of Rajasthan.
- ◆ This has involved initiating public hearings, in which detailed accounts derived from official expenditure records and other supporting documentation are read aloud to assembled villagers.

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Right to Information (RTI) and MKSS

- ◆ The origins of the RTI movement can be traced from an agitation for minimum wages by the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)* or the Organisation for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants in the late 1980s, although it only took full shape after 1994.

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Jan Sunwai contd.

- ◆ The meetings are organized independently and are presided over by a panel of respected people from within and outside the area. Officials are invited to attend and local people are asked to give testimonies, highlighting discrepancies between official record and their own experiences (as labourers on public work projects, applicants for means-tested anti-poverty schemes, consumers in ration shops, etc.).

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Freedom of Information Act (FOI)

- ◆ In 1996, there was a direct agitation for 40 days in Rajasthan's Beawar town, sloganeering that "the right to know is the right to live." The people's movement for accountability in governance – for the citizen's right to know – has been a long one and it still goes on.

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Initiatives by other organisations –
Jagrook Nagrik Manch, Urmul Jyoti Sansthan

- ◆ Recently, on July 21, 2004, a *Jan Sunwai* (public hearing) organized by the Jagrook Nagrik Manch and Urmul Jyoti Sansthan at Kakoo Gram Panchayat in Bikaner district revealed that about Rs.30 lakh had been swindled from the panchayat fund of Rs. 2 crore during the past five years.

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Freedom of Information Bill (FIB) contd.

- ◆ In 2002, the Parliament passed the Freedom of Information Bill (FIB), which is however in the process of being amended.
- ◆ Nine states, including Rajasthan, Kerala, Goa and Delhi, have enacted their own RTI laws granting citizens the right to question their governments, inspect records, ask for copies of these records and make for a truly participatory democracy.

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Initiatives by other organisations contd.

A verification of photocopies of records obtained after a long struggle through applications made under the state's right to information law, showed:

- ◆ Payments were made in the names of dead persons for works;
- ◆ Many persons were paid for working at two different locations at the same time on a particular day;

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Initiatives by other organisations

- ◆ The pioneering work of MKSS in Rajasthan has triggered off similar initiatives by 'Parivartan' in Delhi as well as other organizations.

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Initiatives by other organisations contd.

- ◆ There were ten cases in which payment was made against the names of those persons who had not actually worked;
- ◆ A pond was made under the watershed programme at an expense of Rs. 2 lakh, but it served the personal purpose of the sarpanch;
- ◆ An amount of Rs. 10 lakh was deposited in the accounts of four members of the sarpanch's family.

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'Right to Information' -A Movie

- ◆ A short movie on the introduction by MKSS of participatory social auditing as a way of ordinary people seeking and using their Right to Information in a collective fashion through *Jan Sunwais* may now be seen.

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Interface between social audit and statutory audit

- ◆ There is also a need for more interface between social audit and statutory audit in order to facilitate transparency at the level of the Gram Panchayat. The Auditor should be aware of social audits that have been carried out, review the responsiveness of the Gram Panchayat to applications for information that may have been submitted by individuals / organisations and accordingly make a comment on the operationalisation of the people's Right to Information. **Home**

Session Title

Social Audit and the Right to Information

Session Overview

In this session, we will discuss the concept and practice of social audit as well as the right to information in the context of PRIs.

Learning Object

At the end of the session, we will gather an understanding of social audit, the role of NGOs in this sphere and the value of institutionalizing a process of social audits of Panchayats.

Basic concept

Social Audit, unlike the formal institutional audit mechanism, seeks to achieve the twin objectives of transparency and accountability. Increasingly, it has the potential of developing into an important tool for enhancing the effective delivery of public services and programmes by PRIs. It can also be termed as "people's audit" in consideration of the fact that under this mechanism, the people as a collective entity are afforded an opportunity of analyzing and assessing not only the

issues pertaining to financial matters, but also several other aspects such as, *inter alia*, the following:

- Identification of collective and individual needs of the local community;
- Selection of schemes and their location;
- Selection of the potential beneficiaries, particularly those belonging to the disadvantaged groups; and
- The manner in which the developmental and welfare programmes /schemes are being implemented, vis-à-vis, their declared objectives.

The recent instructions issued by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) for statutory social audit of rural development works stipulate that the Gram Sabha should be specifically empowered to conduct social audit or collective audit by the Gram Sabha, into all public works and beneficiary oriented programmes implemented at the village level under various schemes of the MORD. These binding instructions also require that the completion certificate for all village level public works should be awarded by the Gram Sabha and such a

certificate of completion can be awarded by the Gram Sabha only after conducting social audit of the work in question.

The instructions provide for social audit to be conducted in special Gram Sabhas to be convened for the exclusive purpose of conduct of social audit. Social audit of all on-going development works would also be included as an item for discussion in every Gram Sabha meeting. State governments, however, need to pass detailed orders to operationalise social audit.

Closely linked with provisions for social audit are measures for enforcing transparency and Right to Information (RTI). Proper social audit is feasible only if Gram Sabha members have free and ready access to all relevant, demystified and comprehensible information and documents regarding the works that they are empowered to audit. The origins of the RTI movement can be traced from an agitation for minimum wages by the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)* or the Organisation for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants in the late

1980s, although it only took full shape after 1994.

In 1994, a worker from Kot Kirana, a village in the Pali district of Rajasthan, complained that he was being denied his wages. The MKSS promised to fight on the condition that he would demand access to records covering the entire period of his employment. He agreed, and the campaign began which in turn set the stage for the first *Jan Sunwai* [public hearing] in Kot Kirana on December. 2, 1994. The *Jan Sunwai* demanded that all public works and accounts be made transparent, that a people's audit be held to assess accountability, and that a system of redress be established to manage the return of siphoned money.

MKSS subsequently conducted several *Jan Sunwais* in different parts of Rajasthan. This has involved initiating public hearings, in which detailed accounts derived from official expenditure records and other supporting documentation are read aloud to assembled villagers. The meetings are organized independently and are presided over by a panel of respected people from

within and outside the area. Officials are invited to attend and local people are asked to give testimonies, highlighting discrepancies between official record and their own experiences (as labourers on public work projects, applicants for means-tested anti-poverty schemes, consumers in ration shops, etc.).

In 1996, there was a direct agitation for 40 days in Rajasthan's Beawar town, sloganeering that "the right to know is the right to live." The people's movement for accountability in governance - for the citizen's right to know - has been a long one and it still goes on. Finally, in 2002, the Parliament passed the Central Freedom of Information Bill, which is, however, in the process of being amended. Nine states, including Rajasthan, Kerala, Goa and Delhi, have enacted their own RTI laws granting citizens the right to question their governments, inspect records, ask for copies of these records and make for a truly participatory democracy.

The pioneering work of MKSS in Rajasthan has triggered off similar initiatives by 'Parivartan' in Delhi as well

as other organizations. Recently a *Jan Sunwai* (public hearing) organized by the Jagrook Nagrik Manch and Urmul Jyoti Sansthan at Kakoo Gram Panchayat in Bikaner district on July 21, 2004 revealed that about Rs.30 lakh had been swindled from the panchayat fund of Rs. 2 crore during the past five years.

A verification of development expenses as recorded in the account books of the panchayat, photocopies of which had been obtained after a long struggle through applications made under the state's right to information law, showed:

- Payments were made in the names of several dead persons for works undertaken to provide relief during drought;
- Many persons were paid for working at two different locations at the same time on a particular day;
- There were ten cases in which payment was made against the names of those persons who had not actually worked;
- A pond was made under the watershed programme at an expense of

Rs. 2 lakh but it served the personal purpose of the Sarpanch; and,

- An amount of Rs. 10 lakh was deposited in the accounts of four members of the Sarpanch's family.

However, recent experience indicates that the right-to-information initiatives are stymied by, *inter alia*, the inadequacy of civil society institutions to play a role; lack of popular awareness and interest; the reluctance of the panchayat to provide information, the failure to sustain activism beyond the campaign period; the poor state of record-keeping and lack of equipment such as photocopier machines for copying documents. Although NGOs are playing a crucial role in the process, social audits, like many other community initiatives, need more champions and motivators and dedicated volunteers to sustain participatory functioning.

There is also a need for more interface between social audit and statutory audit in order to facilitate transparency at the level of the Gram Panchayat. The Auditor should be aware of social audits that have been carried out, review the responsiveness of the Gram Panchayat to

applications for information that may have been submitted by individuals / organisations and accordingly make a comment on the operationalisation of the people's Right to Information.

A short movie on the introduction by MKSS of participatory social auditing as a way of ordinary people seeking and using their Right to Information in a collective fashion through *Jan Sunwais*, may now be seen.