

- (iii) taking certified samples of material;
- (iv) obtaining information in the form of diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts where such information is stored in a computer or in any other device

**Section 4 of Right to Information Act** mandates proactive disclosure by every public authority. Such proactive disclosure is very comprehensive and detailed picture of working of public authority. This has to be open and accessible to every citizen all the time. A citizen has a right to inspect such proactive disclosure free of cost. Citizen also can check and scrutinize it. Indeed, citizens can conduct audit of proactive disclosure of public authority.

**Section 5, 6 and 7 of Right to Information Act** lay down the procedure of designating public information officer, and procedure of making application and processing application for seeking information held by or under the control of a public authority. This includes inspection of works and records, files, documents of public authority. This also includes right of citizen to visit office of public authority and to take sample of materials used for government work.

**Section 18 of Right to Information Act** is very revolutionary provision for redressing grievances and complaints as regards to implementation of Right to Information Act. It is of the nature of public interest litigation and wherever a citizen finds difficulty in accessing and scrutinizing government information, there is remedy of making complaint to information commissioner.

**Audit of Proactive Disclosures under RTI Act**

**(a)** All budget allocations, beneficiary lists, muster rolls, bills, vouchers, accounts, etc. must be available for public scrutiny.

**(b)** All applications for licenses/permits and certificates issued by local self-government institutions must have a serial number. Registers indicating date of application and date of clearance in each case should be available for reference by any applicant. If possible, copies should be publicly displayed.

**(c)** Public assessment of tax, exemptions, grants, etc., to ensure there are no complaints of undue preferential treatment. RTI Act mandates all Public Authorities to disclose all lists and details regarding beneficiary selection, budget cost estimates, etc. to be public documents. A daily notice to be posted at the site of all development works, lists names of workers, wages paid, cost and quantities of material, transport charges, etc.

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# माहिती अधिकार मंच

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### SOCIAL AUDIT- THE NEED FOR BETTER DEMOCRACY

*SALT (Social Audit Local Team)*

*By Bhaskar Prabhu & Anand Castelino,*

*and*

Social Audit has been there from the 1950s, but has become very important and useful for us after the enactment of 73<sup>rd</sup> & 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment as well as the recent enactments of Right to Information Act and Right to Service Delivery. These Acts and Rules, in whatever form they are in different states, have an in-built mechanism for social audit as a means towards achieving their objectives of transparency, accountability, containing corruption, removing injustices, improving governance and alleviating poverty.

**1) What is Social Audit?**

- **Social Audit** is a process in which, details of the resource, both financial and non-financial, used by public agencies for development initiatives are shared with the people, often through a public platform such as Gram Sabha in rural areas and Ward Sabha in urban areas.

**2) Why is Social Audit needed?**

- Social Audits allow people to enforce accountability and transparency, providing the ultimate users an opportunity to scrutinize development initiatives
- The main reason for the push for social audit is the huge disconnect between what the people need, what the government thinks it needs, and what is actually done.

Following explains the situation without social audit. ( Inputs of [www.hanumant.com](http://www.hanumant.com)).

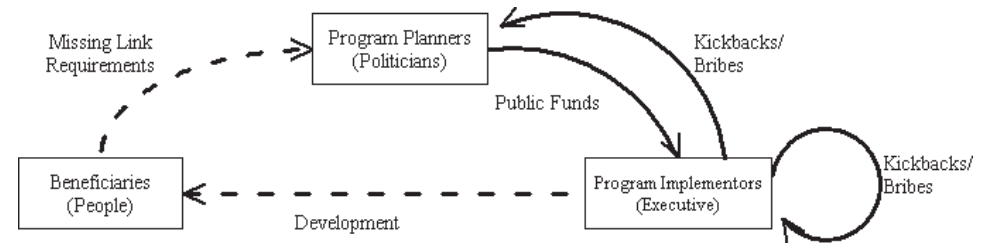


Figure 1 - Situation without Social Audit

- 3) Objectives of Social Audit
  - a. Accurate identification of requirements
  - b. Prioritization of developmental activities as per requirements
  - c. Proper utilization of funds
  - d. Conformity of the developmental activity with the stated goals
  - e. Quality of service

**4) Who is needed for Social Audit**

- a) SALT (Social Audit Local Team)
- b) Public Authority representative
- c) Any other stake holder

However SALT can conduct the audit even if there is no participation from the Public Authority concerned.

**5) When is Social Audit to be done?**

Social Audit is a continuous process and can be done at any time and for all purposes

- e.g
- a) For getting new schemes that will help citizens
  - b) For improving a procedure or process of administrative work
  - c) For monitoring works being done by Public Authorities
  - d) For auditing financial and non-financial functions of government

Thus, Social Audit can be done prior to a work, during the process of the work and even after the work is completed

**6) What are the steps followed for Social Audit?**

- a) Select the process/scheme/work that needs to be audited
- b) Identify all the stake holders (including government bodies) connected to this process/scheme/work
- c) Discuss with relevant stake holders the details of the subject, the norms specified by them to be followed, the documents that they generate in the process of implementation, the internal checks/audit/supervision done by them, the completion and closure procedure, the guarantees/warranties /defect liability period/etc, the penalties/fines/etc that are leviable.
- d) Collect all relevant information regarding the subject from the web-site of the government department or from its Sec-4 suo-moto publication or through inspection of the office and the documents therein (as mandated under RTI Act)
- e) If the information is not declared suo-moto under section 4 of RTI, then use applications through RTI for collecting all the information needed regarding the subject to help conduct the audit.
- f) A team who will analyse and study the information received and compare it with the specified norms for materials, quality of work, quantity and people participation.
- g) The team will then use spot inspections and interviews with local persons/ stake-holders and compile a report of what has been done well and correctly, what could have been done better, what has not been done and what norms / procedures/documents have not been followed. (Standard document templates will be developed for these steps)

- h) The team will then publicise their report through Jan Sunwani in the local area and if needed also publish it through media.
- i) The report together with minutes of Jan Sunwani and any press reports will be submitted to the relevant Public Authority for their consideration and follow-up action.

**7) What are the benefits of Social Audit?**

- a. **Transparency:** Complete transparency in the process of administration and decision making, with an obligation on the government to suo moto give people full access to all relevant information.
- b. **Participation:** An entitlement for all the affected persons (and not just their representatives) to participate in the process of decision making and validation. Involvement of people in developmental activities ensures that money is spent where it is actually needed. This results to reduction of wastages and reduction in corruption. Increased awareness among the people results in promoting integrity and a sense of community among people
- c. **Consultation and Consent:** In those rare cases where options are predetermined out of necessity, the right of the affected persons to give informed consent, as a group or as individuals, as appropriate.
- d. **Accountability:** The responsibility of elected representatives and government functionaries to answer questions and provide explanations about relevant action and inaction to concerned and affected people.
- e. **Redressal:** A set of norms through which the findings of social audits and other public investigations receive official sanction, have necessary outcomes, and are reported back to the people, along with information on action taken in response to complaints.
- f. Improves the standard of governance.
- g. Raises public awareness and knowledge.
- h. Promotes citizen empowerment and strengthens community voice by allowing community members to provide feedback, gather evidence, interpret findings and develop solutions.
- i. Promotes local democracy and collective decision-making.
- j. Enhances policy-makers' understanding of stakeholder concerns and encourages them to take steps to address these.
- k. Can result in improved design and delivery of programs and services.
- l. When institutionalised, social audits allow for regular monitoring of public institutions; enhance the legitimacy of state actors, and foster greater trust between civil society groups and government.
- m. **Social auditing can also contribute to enhanced transparency by creating demand for information and helping to establish the right to information in service delivery planning and implementation.**

NOTE: Social Audit is very much required after RTI Act due the following sections:

**Section 2 (j) "right to information"** means the right to information accessible under this Act which is held by or under the control of any public authority and includes the right to—

- (i) *inspection of work, documents, records;*
- (ii) taking notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records;