

Can social accountability achieve good governance?

To promote citizen action and social accountability, Sehgal Foundation and the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), jointly presented a ten-day pilot certification program on Social Accountability Tools for Good Governance, starting March 1, 2017, at Sehgal Foundation's office in Gurugram. The rest of the training took place at Ghaghas Community Center, Nuh. Twenty-nine



participants came from grassroots organizations—Ibtada, Alwar; Lady Bamford Charitable Trust, and Faridabad. Sehgal Foundation's field and core teams participated as well.

Professor Ajay Pandey, CEO, Sehgal Foundation, spoke at the training inauguration, highlighting the significance of citizen participation and the role of civil society in realizing the nation's dream for everyone to lead a dignified life. He stressed the power of citizen action and social accountability tools that aim at transparency to make the goal of good governance achievable. He said that Sehgal Foundation's governance work promotes transparency and accountability in all government systems, but much more needs to be done at grassroots levels. He affirmed Sehgal Foundation's commitment to a long-term partnership with NIRDPR for replicating the certification program at the national level as well as promoting the foundation's Good Rural Governance program in all parts of India.

Lead trainers, Professor M. Sarumathy and Dr. K. Prabhakar, from the Centre for Good Governance and Policy Analysis, NIRDPR, described how the tools of social accountability will help development practitioners understand the definition of good governance and increase their understanding of its value as they see the impact of good governance on stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The ten-day training covered conceptual details and fundamentals of governance, good governance approaches, outputs, outcomes, impacts on government, and the difference between government, governance, and social security schemes. Specific tools were described such as citizen report cards, community score cards, budget analysis, fund utilization, and participatory budgeting as well as the concept of social accountability, its mechanism, tools, and examples of case studies. The course's classroom sessions and field-level implementation exercises

included useful demonstrations of how to bridge the gap between beneficiaries and service providers (e.g. PDS depot holders, anganwadis, etc.) by implementing the social accountability tools such as the community score card and citizen report card, at beneficiary and service provider levels.

One participant commented, “Collective community action requires special techniques and skills which were taught to us—how to be effective moderators in rural communities by leading village-level discussions in a positive, healthy, and harmonious manner and bringing the village community and service providers closer to each other. In order to check the reliability and quality of services that are provided to the community, social accountability tools are a great help while working in villages for development.”

External experts, Mr. Nilachala Acharya from the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability and Dr. Sita Sekhar, former executive director of the Public Affairs Foundation, presented sessions on budget and budget analysis and community score card, respectively.

Participants in three groups that were formed during the training program prepared presentations for use in conducting field exercises. The group and individual presentations were shared with attendees on last day of the program.



Professor R. Sudarshan, Dean, Jindal School of Government and Public Policy, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, the guest of honor, at the valedictory, praised the initiative taken by Sehgal Foundation in partnering with NIRDPR and observed that citizens truly have the power to hold government accountable, and it is their responsibility to make effective governance happen. He presented certificates to the participants on the last day of the course.

