

Under this new paradigm, citizens are no longer considered mere beneficiaries of the fruits of technical expertise and knowhow from externally guided development programmes. Instead, they are seen as equal stake holders in the development process. In fact, popular participation as a democratic right that should be promoted in all development projects, has increasingly come to be accepted as an objective and not just as a means to development.

Citizens' participation in governance is a bilateral engagement wherein it is essential both for government agencies as well as the citizens to be fully involved in order for such participation to lead to improved outcomes such as better service delivery, change in public policy, redressal of grievances etc. The pattern of such participation has been described as a ladder with different types of engagements that represent different degrees or intensity of participation. To illustrate, these could start with consultation in order to listen to the citizens' needs and demands and would evolve into consultative meetings, customer feedback, surveys, home visits etc. A more intensive form of participation would lead to creation of institutionalized mechanisms for engagement such as citizens' active involvement in planning, budgeting and monitoring of programmes through membership in Audit and Budget Committees etc.

The Commission is of the view that mechanisms for citizens' participation in governance could be conceptualized in the following main forms:

- a) **Citizens seeking information:** Making information available (on procedures, prices, application forms, officers to be contacted for grievance redressal, etc) is the first step in any strategy to empower citizens for their interaction with government. The Right to Information Act in India has in essence already laid down the ground-work for ensuring this pre-requisite for citizens' participation in governance but it is only by greater citizens' awareness of their rights under this Act that its vision of transparency can be realized.
- b) **Citizens giving suggestions:** Listening to the voice of citizens not just during periodic elections but on an ongoing basis is the starting point of participation of citizens in governance. Such listening could be done through public hearings, surveys, referenda etc. where citizens can give their suggestions with regard to their problems as well as the possible solutions.
- c) **Citizens demanding better services:** The objective of citizens' participation is to ensure that government organizations work for the constituencies which they are meant to serve. For this to happen, government servants should be accountable not only to their superiors but also to citizens. It is only when this is realised by government agencies that citizens can voice their grievances with assurance that due attention is given to them.

The Commission is of the view that every government organization must ensure the following: (i) a fool-proof system for registration of all complaints, (ii) a prescribed time schedule for response and resolution, and (iii) a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure that the norms prescribed are complied with. Use of information technology tools can help to make such a system more accessible for citizens

- d) **Citizens holding service providers and other government agencies' accountable:** Making public agencies work and ensuring that their service delivery would meet the criteria of efficiency, equity and customer satisfaction, requires citizens to voice their grievance and their dissatisfaction in an organized manner. The mechanisms used could include citizens' feedback and surveys, citizens' report card and social audit. The Commission is of the view that citizens should be given the opportunity to rate the services provided by government organizations, on a periodic basis.
- e) **Active citizens' participation in administration/decision making:** Giving citizens on-going access to the decision-making process, beyond periodic consultations is a more mature and intensive form of