

# Citizens' Report on Governance and Development 2008-09



**Social Watch India**

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Citizens' Report on  
**GOVERNANCE AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
2008–09**

**NATIONAL SOCIAL WATCH**



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# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>17</b>
Parliament under Social Watch: Senseless Tumult, un-kept Promises	17
Parliamentary Performance	18
Distribution of Time amongst Different Businesses	18
Attendance of the Members	18
Performance of ‘Celebrity MPs’ in the Parliament	18
Corporate Bigwigs and Functioning of the Parliament	19
Assessing the Role of the Committees	19
Question Hour	19
Growth and Equity: Policy Demands, Commitments and Performance	20
Priorities in Public Spending by the Central Government	20
Budget Outlays for Flagship Schemes of the Central Government	21
Centre-State Fiscal Relations: Moving Towards Equity?	21
Health and Healthcare under NRHM	22
Unorganized Workers and Social Security	22
In the Era of Knowledge and Markets: End of India’s Farmers	23
Special Economic Zones: Implications for Regional Disparity	23
Right to Information: Performances, Perils and Pitfalls	24
Access to Justice: State of the Indian Judiciary	24
Reinventing Local Governance: Expression of Interlocking Strategies and Programmes	27
Rural Governance: Structural Reforms for Deepening Decentralization	27
Joint Statements with the State Governments and the MoPR	27
Devolution of Functions	28
Transfer of Functions to Panchayats and Effective Implementation of Programmes	28
Panchayat Elections	29
District Planning Committees (DPCs)	29
Performance of Key Development Programmes and PRIs	29
National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)	29
Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF)	30
Urban Governance	30
<b>1. PARLIAMENT UNDER SOCIAL WATCH: SENSELESS TUMULT, UN-KEPT PROMISES</b>	<b>31</b>
Conducting the Business	33
Parliamentary Performance	34
Parliamentary Time Lost	35
Legislative Business: A Weak Link	36
Attendance of the Members	39
Participation of MPs in the Parliamentary Debates	40
Performance of ‘Celebrity MPs’ in the Parliament	40
A Social Audit of Functioning of the Committees of the Fourteenth Parliament: 2006–07	41
Contextualizing Committees	42
Assessing the Role of the Committees	44
Role in Legislation	45
Question Hour: The Story Continues	50

Conclusion	52
<b>2. GROWTH AND EQUITY: POLICY DEMANDS, COMMITMENTS AND PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>59</b>
Priorities in Public Spending by the Central Government	59
I. Sectoral Overview	60
Education	60
Health	61
Rural Development	62
Women	62
Children	62
Dalits and Adivasis	63
II. Budget Outlays for Flagship Schemes of the Central Government	63
Conclusion	66
III. Centre-State Fiscal Relations	66
Allocation Criteria and the Finance Commission	68
Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Thirteenth Finance Commission	69
Taking into account the Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) for the central government's Plan outlay	69
The Equalization Grant	70
Goods and Services Tax (GST)	70
The Fiscal Reform Strategy	71
IV. Health and Healthcare under NRHM	72
The NRHM Era	73
Design Issues	73
NRHM Performance	73
Strengthening NRHM: Some Policy Prescriptions	75
V. Unorganized Workers and Social Security	76
Locating Unorganized Sector and Workers	76
The Social Security Bill	78
Design	79
Financing	79
Targeting	79
VI. End of Indian Farmers	82
VII. Special Economic Zones: Implications for Regional Disparity	87
Why SEZs	88
Implications of Location and Concentration of SEZs for Regional Disparity	88
SEZs and Nature of Agricultural Land Outflow	90
VIII. Right To Information: Performance, Perils and Pitfalls	92
Improvement in Service Delivery	92
Problems Being Faced in the Implementation of RTI Act	92
Strengthening the RTI: Some Policy Recommendations	95
Conclusion	95
<b>3. ACCESS TO JUSTICE: STATE OF THE INDIAN JUDICIARY</b>	<b>107</b>
I. Judicial Self-Restraint versus Active Judicial Intervention: A Debate on the Principle of 'Separation of Powers'	107
The Principle of 'Separation of Powers'	107
Justifications for Judicial Self Restraint: Justice Katju's Arguments	108

Justifications for Greater Judicial Intervention: Justice Sinha's Counter Arguments	109
The District Consumer Forum, Chamoli Case, 2007	109
Significance of 'Judge-made law' in Creating New Rights	110
'Judicial Prodding' Does Not Challenge Jurisdiction of the Legislature and the Executive	110
Separation of Powers Matures into Interdependence of Powers	111
Judicial Oversight Necessary to Ensure Justifiable Social and Economic Entitlements	111
A Nuanced Approach Needed	111
<b>II. Mapping Judicial Response through Court Verdicts in 2007</b>	<b>111</b>
Cases on Constitutional Governance and Political Accountability	111
'Cash for Query': A Legal Wrong and a Moral Wrong	111
No Immunity to Laws under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution	113
Discontinuance of Supreme Court Intervention in the Taj Corridor Project	113
Cases on Environment and Development Rights and Civil Liberties	114
The Case on Mining in Niyamgiri Hills	114
Filling up the Legislative Void in Managing Environmental Hazard in Ship-Breaking	115
Protecting Quality of Life in Jodhpur	115
High Courts on Municipal Planning, Decentralization and Panchayats Decision-making	116
High Courts on Prison Reforms and Custodial Violence	117
Right to Privacy Upheld by AP High Court	117
Madras High Court on the Rights of Railway Porters	118
Enforceability of the Right to Education Emphasized: Kerala High Court	118
Right to Information Upheld by the Mumbai High Court	118
Cases on Forced Land Acquisition, Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Issues	119
The Special Case of Nandigram	119
Land Acquisition for Companies:	
Mandatory Procedure Needs to be Followed by Companies	121
Right to Protest for Rights of the Adivasis and the Displaced Upheld by MP High Court	121
Rehabilitation as a Right: MP High Court in Omkareshwar Dam Project	122
<b>III. Important Legal Principles in Governance and Development Law Discussed in 2007</b>	<b>123</b>
Human Right to Property Emphasized	123
The Doctrine of 'Level Playing Field' in the Globalization Era Enunciated	123
'Proportionality Doctrine' and Its Role in Government Decision making	123
Supreme Court Makes Clear 'Everything that a Judge Says is not Law'	124
Holding Government to its Contracts	124
<b>IV. The State of the Judicial System: Specific Issues in Judicial Accountability</b>	<b>125</b>
Sitting Judges, Not Retired Judges, Should be Heading State Legal Services Authorities	125
Accountability of Lawyers and the Lawyers' Bodies	125
Free Court Services Only if Provided in Law	126
Jurisdiction of Lok Adalat Limited to 'Compromise' and 'Settlement'	126
The Anguish behind Disposal of Cases in Law Courts	127
Multiple Criminal Codes on the Anvil?	128
Statement on Addressing High Cost of Legal Services	128
Problems Identified by the Supreme Court in the	
Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Processes	128
Conclusion	130
<b>4. REINVENTING LOCAL GOVERNANCE: EXPRESSION OF INTERLOCKING STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES</b>	<b>137</b>

Introduction	137
<b>I. Rural Governance</b>	<b>138</b>
Structural Reforms for Deepening Decentralization	138
Joint Statements with the State Governments and the MoPR	138
The Critical Issue of Functions	138
Transfer of Functions to Panchayats and Effective Implementation of Programmes:	
Some Experiences	142
Health: Involvement of Panchayats and Utilization of Untied Grant to Sub-Centres	143
Effective Improvement in Mid-day Meal System (Anganwadi) and the Role of Monitoring Committee: A Case from Chhattisgarh	145
Women taking Responsibility of Public Distribution System	146
Conclusion	146
Panchayat Elections	146
Political Empowerment of Women, SCs and STs through PRIs	148
Who gains from Central Finance Commission's Resources?	149
District Planning Committees (DPCs)	151
Emerging Trends	152
Challenges Ahead	152
Performance of Key Development Programmes and PRIs	154
Status of NREGA and Role of PRIs	154
Comparison of States under NREGA	154
State Performance of NREGA: Performance Index	155
Promise of 100 Days' Employment and its Achievement: A Reality Check	155
Unclear Focus and Priority for Most Deserving Backward Regions	158
Accountability of NREGA and Social Audits	158
CAG Report on NREGA	158
Learning a Lesson, Social Audit and NREGA: Case of Rajasthan	160
Enhancing Transparency and Access to Information: ICT in Panchayats	161
Role of ICT and e-Governance in Panchayats	162
Functioning of e-Choupals in Rural India	162
Backward Region Grant Fund	164
Release of Fund	165
People's Agenda on Decentralized Governance: Influencing Political Parties' Election Manifestoes	166
<b>II. Urban Governance</b>	<b>167</b>
The Context	167
The Scheme	169
Objectives	169
Urban Governance and Service Delivery: A study of Bhopal City, M.P.	171
The Progress of the Scheme (until May 2008)	172
The Downsides, Limitations and Critical Issues Experienced So Far	173
Urban Governance: Towards Another Mess or Towards New Frontiers	177
Conclusion	177
<b>Annexures</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>191</b>

# LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES AND BOXES

## TABLES

1.1	Number of Days and Sittings in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha	34
1.2	Time Lost in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha	35
1.3	Time Distribution for Legislative, Financial and Non-financial Business in 2006–07	36
1.4	Time Spent on Bills in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha	38
1.5	Participation of Selected Celebrity MPs	42
1.6	Number of Bills Referred to SCs/JSCs/DRSCs from the Seventh Lok Sabha to the Fourteenth Lok Sabha	46
1.7	DRSCs of the Lok Sabha (Reports Presented on Bills during the Tenth to Twelfth Lok Sabha)	47
1.7A	DRSCs of the Lok Sabha (Reports Presented on Bills during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Lok Sabha)	48
1.8	DRSCs of Rajya Sabha (Reports Presented on Bills during Tenth to Fourteenth Lok Sabha)	48
1.8A	DRSCs of Rajya Sabha (Reports Presented on Bills during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Lok Sabha)	49
1.9	No of Questions Asked (both Starred and Unstarred) in 2007 in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha	51
1.10	Time Spent on Question Hour	51
1.11	Ministry-wise Break Up of Questions Raised in the Year 2007	52
2.1	Union Budget Outlays for Flagship Programmes and Schemes (Figures in Rs. Crore)	64
2.2	How Has the Fiscal Adjustment of the Central Government (during 2001 to 2006) Come About?	68
2.3	Formula for Allocation of Shared Taxes	69
2.4	Adequacy of Critical Inputs in Public Health Facilities (Percent)	72
2.5	Demand for Grants of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (in Rs. crore)	74
2.6	Demand for Grants of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (in Rs. crore)	74
2.7	Allocations for Selected Key Programmes in the Union Health Budget (in Rs. crore)	75
2.8	NRHM Component of the Union Health Budget (in Rs. crore)	75
2.9	Unorganized Manufacturing: Major Indicators	77
2.10	Average Emoluments (in Rs.)	77
2.11	Percentage of Workers by Type of Worker and Gender in Unorganized Manufacturing	78
2.12	Percentage of Workers by Nature of Employment and Gender in Unorganized Manufacturing	78
2.13A	Top Five Industries in terms of Productivity 2000–01	78
2.13B	Industries with Lowest Productivity 2000–01	78
2.14	Share of Female Workers in Major Industries in Unorganized Sector	81
2.15	Gross Capital Formation (Investment) in Agriculture as a Proportion of GDP	83
2.16	Statement showing Cases of Suicide by Farmers	86
2.17	Number of Suicides Reported under the Head 'Self-employed (Farming/Agriculture)' in the Reports of National Crime Records Bureau	86
2.18	Level of Urbanization and Location of SEZs	89
2.19	Share of SEZ Units in Districts Peripheral to Large Metropolitan Cities	89
2.20	Non-primary Workforce and SEZ Concentration	89
2.21	Total no. of SICs from Different Backgrounds	94

3.1	Vacancies of Judges in Various High Courts (Position as on 6 August 2007)	127
4.1	Agreements Emerging in MoUs Signed by MoPR with Different States	139
4.2	Transfer of Functionaries	140
4.3	Legislative Transfer of Functions to Different Levels of PRIs	143
4.4	Selective Recommendations to Strengthen Devolution in M.P.	144
4.5	Short-supply of Food Items	145
4.6	State-wise Allocations to PRIs in the 11th and 12th Finance Commissions (in Rs. crore)	150
4.7	Status of DPCs	152
4.8	Performance of Selected Districts of the Most Backward Regions under NREGA	159
4.9	Release to the all States covered under RSVY-BRGF during 2007–08 (as on 26 February 2008) (in Rs. crore)	165
4.10	Structure of Project Finance under JNNURM by Source of Assistance (in percent)	170

## FIGURES

1.1	Number of Days on which the Houses Actually Sat	34
1.2	Average Hours Worked in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha	35
1.3	Hours Worked by Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha 2000- 07	36
1.4	Time Spent on Legislative, Financial and Non-Financial Business of Lok Sabha during 2001–07	37
1.5	Time spent on Legislative, Financial and Non-Financial Business of Rajya Sabha during 2001–07	37
1.6	Attendance of MPs in 11th Session of 14th Lok Sabha	40
1.7	Attendance of MPs in 12th Session of 14th Lok Sabha	40
1.8	Attendance of MPs in 211th Session of Rajya Sabha	40
1.9	Attendance of MP's 210th Session Rajya Sabha	41
1.10	Average MP Participation in Debates (Age-wise) Lok Sabha	41
1.11	Average MP Participation in Debates (Age-wise) Rajya Sabha	41
2.1	Transfers from Centre to States Recommended by Finance Commissions: Share in Taxes vs. Grants	67
2.2	Percentage of Non-Agricultural Casual Labour with Wages below Minimum Wage 2004–05	80
2.3	Non-farm Regular Wage/Salaried Employees not Eligible for any Social Security Benefits (2004–05)	80
2.4	Proportion of Unorganized Manufacturing Workers by Nature of Employment and Gender 2005–06	81
4.1	Composite Ranking of States Implementing NREGA	156
4.2	Issues in Urban Governance and the JNNURM Solution	168

## BOXES

1.1	Fourteenth Lok Sabha at a Glance	33
1.2	Nandigram and Singur Rocks the Parliament: Insufficient Discussion on the SEZ Act	37
1.3	Important Bills in Parliament in 2007-08	39
1.4	Corporate Bigwigs and Functioning of the Parliament	43
1.5	Committee on Empowerment of Women	45
2.1	Unorganized Manufacturing Sector: An Overview (2000–01 to 2005–06)	77
2.2	Declining Farm Incomes	85
2.3	Concerns with the Debt Waiver Scheme for Farmers	87
2.4	RTI: A Boon without Disguise	92
2.5	SDM, Bara went to the Gulrahai Village	93
3.1	Judicial Self-Restraint Promotes Judicial Independence and Separation of Powers	109

3.2	Summary of the Principles relating to Parameter of Judicial Review in relation to Exercise of Parliamentary Provisions	112
3.3	Calcutta High Court Intervenes in Nandigram	120
3.4	Steps taken by the Government to Address Lengthy and Costly Process of the Courts	129
4.1	Critical Review of MoU: A Case of Madhya Pradesh	139
4.2	Poor Implementation on Round Table Findings	142
4.3	Activity Mapping and Devolution of Functions: A Study of Madhya Pradesh (M.P.)	144
4.4	Management of Health Programmes through Non-health Components: A Case of Community Led Initiatives for Child Survival (CLICS), Maharashtra	145
4.5	Panchayat Election in Orissa, 2007	147
4.6	Fifty percent Reservation for Women in PRIs as a Political Mandate: The Story of Rajasthan	149
4.7	Implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act	157
4.8	Bridging the Gap between the Macro and Micro in the Process of Policy-making: A Study of Bundelkhand	159
4.9	Social Audit Reveals Large Scale Scam	161
4.10	Indian Government brings e-Governance Services to Panchayat Levels	162
4.11	Importance of ICT in the Rural India	163
4.12	Recommendation for Effective Governance in PRIs	167
4.13	Urban Governance: Critical Issues	167
4.14	Main Findings and Major Recommendations of the Citizens Report Card	171
4.15	JNNURM as Centre Over-reaching its Federal Role	173
4.16	Investment Proposed in CDPs	174
4.17	Reforms: Implementation Status	176

# PREFACE

Stable democracy is a necessary condition if the rights of the people are to be realized and the very concept of freedom to become meaningful for the millions living on the periphery. However, India is facing today numerous problems of sustaining such a stable democracy. What makes democracy more meaningful and stable? Democratic functioning has to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between effectiveness and legitimacy in order to achieve such objectives. Admittedly, there are some countries which fall in the extreme categories of having low scores on both counts and others having high scores. India has to strike a balance between the myriad forces and factors and is in intermediary category where at times effectiveness is higher and legitimacy is low and other times it is the other way round. The two factors (i.e. effectiveness and legitimacy) are inextricably interrelated where one affects the other. Stable and meaningful democracy necessitates maintaining a desirable level of equilibrium between effectiveness and legitimacy.

Institutions of governance therefore become a crucial link in maintaining the aforesaid equilibrium rendering democracy more stable and meaningful and yet the institutions themselves under various pulls and pressures have become the 'weakest link' in the crucial process. The health of these institutions, therefore, is of great significance to sustain the twin challenges of democracy and development.

It is at this crucial juncture that Social Watch process has expressed its commitment to contribute and intervene in form of 'Citizens' Report on Governance and Development' which looks at the performance of the four nodal institutions of governance, namely; the Parliament, the Executive, the Judiciary and the institutions of Local Self Governance. The Report seeks to create an alternate governance discourse by putting the knowledge and information about the performance of these institutions in the public domain. The Report is presented to the citizens as an advocacy tool in the hope that it will empower civil society to ask relevant questions which will give a push towards people oriented governance.

We are sure that this year as well the Report will reveal some interesting insights about the working of these institutions generating considerable interest among the civil society groups, Media, academia, policy makers and legislators. We are glad to share that our 2007 Report has been able to impact and attract attention from the highest policy making bodies. A civil society delegation representing the National Social Watch Coalition had a meeting with the Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh where we discussed the importance of the institutions of governance and also apprised the Hon'ble Prime Minister about the Social Watch Process in India. Prime Minister stressed that a political watch dog such as Social Watch is necessary to monitor the institutions such as judiciary and the Parliament. This was followed by a meeting with the Planning Commission where the members of the Planning Commission actively participated in the discourse and discussions.

It is heartening to see that Social Watch has recently undertaken the initiative of publishing perspective papers and organizing informed discussions around it to bring forth the specific issues relating to the agencies of governance. The first such paper in the series entitled 'Law under Globalization' provides an insight into recent trends in both law making processes and judicial behaviour with a view to understand how the logic and instruments of globalization is directly affecting the rule of law. The second in this series proposes to look at the working of the parliamentary committees.

It is our pleasure to announce that Social Watch process has taken root in 14 States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh. While many States like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Chhattisgarh have come out with their own State Social Watch reports, many others like Maharashtra, West Bengal and Rajasthan are in the process of preparing it. We are glad to note that eventually all these States will be able to

contribute in some way to the National Social Watch Reports as well. The State contributions have been able to establish the crucial micro link by including some insightful and interesting case studies from grassroots.

We would like to acknowledge numerous contributors of the Report this year which not only broad based the process but also made this Report wholesome and rich in terms of its content and coverage. The names of these contributors are mentioned on the first page of this Report. We express our thanks and gratitude to the convenors/editors of National Social Watch Coalition to steer the process forward and provide their valuable feedback. We also thank Arnout Scholtens (Wageningen University, Netherlands) and research intern, SANSAD for his technical and statistical support. Above all we would like to express our indebtedness to all our coalition partners for extending their valuable support without which the process could not have reached this stage.

**John Samuel**  
National Social Watch Coalition

# INTRODUCTION

These times are marked by various policy initiatives and challenges that are being channelled by the institutions of governance. New patterns and innovations mark the emerging designs in the policy making. On one hand there is a spiral of ever evolving developmental experiments and on the other there are challenges of various kinds. Challenge of reaching out to the farthest corners, reaching out to the marginalized communities, intentions and delivery. There are other kinds of challenges as well in form of demands from the citizens on the periphery; from the civil society groups. The governance landscape is facing this dilemma of being evolutionary and at the same time facing up to these challenges which are equally evolutionary in nature.

Institutions of governance have a pivotal role in solving many of these dilemmas and challenges by managing the policy initiatives in an effective manner. Yet, the institutions have started showing signs of serious fatigue and atrophy, which can be seen in the ‘cracks’ which have appeared on the fringes. These institutions are faced with pulls and pressures, which can be seen in their working and performance.

There is an urgent need for action at the institutional level to make them accountable and transparent to the aspirations of the millions and play their constitutionally defined role in the process of democracy and development. A constant ‘watch’ along with objective evaluation and monitoring of these institutions is the call of the day. It is with this objective in mind that Social Watch Report attempts to evaluate the four key institutions of governance, namely the Parliament, the Judiciary, the Executive and Local-Self Government.

## PARLIAMENT UNDER SOCIAL WATCH: SENSELESS TUMULT, UN-KEPT PROMISES

This section looks at the performance of the functioning of the key institution of governance, the Parliament. The institutional capacity of Parliament to act has been minutely observed with specific focus on the years of 2007 and 2008 and analyzes its key dimensions longitudinally, the net result is far from heartening. In many respects, the two years under consideration have marked a further deterioration from the not-so-high standards set during the past few years. The trend of falling standards, in terms of the functioning of Parliament and parliamentarians, has been recorded by earlier year reports. What is striking about the two years under consideration is that the deterioration has intensified in areas where it had set in earlier and in the process the corrosion has moved into hitherto uncharted territories.

The conduct of business in Parliament, marked by reduced number of sittings, insufficient apportionment of time to the main functions of deliberating and legislating as well as the frequent and prolonged disruptions due to commotions and pandemonium in both the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha, has been a matter of concern for a long time and this sorry trend has further accentuated in the years under consideration. There was not a single session of Parliament during these two years, which did not lose valuable man-hours on account of unruly incidents. But this was not all. The year 2008 even witnessed the virtual abrogation of a whole session of Parliament. The monsoon session of 2008, customarily held in the months of July or August, was pushed to October, practically merging it with the timing of the winter session.

To maintain the longitudinal analysis of the Parliament functioning, the present section maps the ethics in conducting business, performance of the Parliament in terms of number of sittings, time lost, attendance of members in both the houses, time spent on bills, participation of members in parliamentary debates, etc. Going beyond the existing framework the chapter deals with the participation of the members in both the houses with special status namely the celebrities and corporate bigwigs. Finally the attempt has been made to understand the committee system of the Parliament to give an overall picture of the functioning of the institution.

## **PARLIAMENTARY PERFORMANCE**

If one looks at the falling figures of the number of days and sittings from the 9th to the 12th session of the fourteenth Lok Sabha, the picture that emerges is quite dismal. From 9th to 12th session the Lok Sabha was in session for 176 days out of which it had 86 sittings. Rajya Sabha shows a similar trend where from 209th to 211th session it met for 144 days and had 44 sittings. This declining trend continued in the 13th session, the first sitting of year 2008, with merely 28 sittings out of 71 days. During the same period Rajya Sabha sat for merely 30 days. What is more worrisome is that while the numbers of sittings are declining, even during those fewer sittings precious legislative time is lost due to adjournments and pandemonium in both the houses. Cost of running the Parliament has increased substantially from Rs.100 per minute (in 1951) to Rs.18, 430 per minute (in 2004–05) and to Rs. 26,000 per minute recently.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF TIME AMONGST DIFFERENT BUSINESSES**

There is a continuous decline in the time distribution of the legislative, financial and non-financial businesses conducted by the Parliament in recent years. It has been found that in 2007–08 the Lok Sabha devoted only 20.9 percent of its time for legislative business and the Rajya Sabha spent only 30.5 percent of its time. The bulk of the parliamentary time was devoted to non-financial business, with the Lok Sabha devoting 35.65 percent and Rajya Sabha 46.89 percent on such business.

## **ATTENDANCE OF THE MEMBERS**

On examining the attendance records of the 11th and 12th sessions of the fourteenth Lok Sabha, it was seen that more than 75 percent members are below the median point of 16 or more days of attendance. As can be seen most of the MPs attended between 11 and 15 days in total. Not only that, the number of MPs whose attendance ranged from 0–5 days increased in the 12th session. The participation of the members in the parliamentary debates shows their involvement in the whole functioning of the system. However it was distressing to find that the participation of young members was lower in comparison to other age groups.

## **PERFORMANCE OF ‘CELEBRITY MPS’ IN THE PARLIAMENT**

For the first time the report has taken 12 members of the Parliament from both houses for its analysis and it has found that their attendance in the parliamentary sessions is not showing a good trend. None of these MPs have attended more than 20 percent of the total number of days in each session. Five members have attended 10–20 percent whereas seven have attended less than 10 percent. With regard to their participation in the debates the picture is bleak: in the Lok Sabha these members did not participate more than four times in the year 2007, and five members (in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha) did not participate in the debates even once. In the Rajya Sabha the picture is slightly better, where three members participated 18, 10 and 15 times respectively, whereas others have participated two and three times respectively.

## **CORPORATE BIGWIGS AND FUNCTIONING OF THE PARLIAMENT**

Looking at the performance of eight such members, selected on the basis of their corporate status it has been found that unlike the celebrity MPs, the participation of corporate MPs in Parliament is much better. On an average all eight members raised good number of questions and five of them attended more than 50 percent of parliamentary sittings except Vijay Mallya and Rajeev Dhoot who attended only 20 percent of the Parliament sittings. Most of the corporate MPs are members of the parliamentary standing committees and consultative committee attached to the ministries. The

objective of the whole exercise of analyzing the corporate bigwigs in relation to functioning of the Parliament is to address the question of conflict of interest which comes up repeatedly. There have been suggestions highlighting the need for a monitoring mechanism to study such conflict of interest issues and control them.

## **ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE COMMITTEES**

The analysis of the committees gives the overall view of its functioning by reviewing the reports submitted by different committees and points out major factors affecting the functioning of the committee system. The major observations in the functioning of committee system are that in a short span of time, the standing committees produce variety of perfunctory reports, which are not taken seriously by the government and media. Their reports are mostly based on government-supplied information, which reduces their exercise from 'examination' to 'formalization'. There are various extraneous factors affecting the committee's functioning, which need systemic therapy in terms of party and electoral reforms.

The analysis of the existing parliamentary committees gives some simple solutions to enrich their functioning and encounter the challenges faced by the present committee system. Firstly, there is an urgent need to rationalize the system and coordinate it better. The suggestion to replace the three financial committees by one committee on national economy is worthy of consideration. The populist approach in making issue-based committees should give way to optimum and effective utilization of existing infrastructure. Secondly, the DRSCs have been entrusted with too much of work to be done in a limited time period. Mechanism of SCs and JSCs should be used to review the bills and the standing committees should be left with financial oversight functions. Finally, the discussion on the reports should ensure a wider public debate to keep the government alert and ensure the effectiveness of the committees.

## **QUESTION HOUR**

Question Hour stands to hold the government accountable and put the knowledge in the public domain. It generally constitutes 9–10 percent of the total time of the Parliament. The observation of the questions raised in different sessions in recent years shows that it has not received the attention and importance that it deserves. We found number of questions which were very much generic and sought information which is easily available in different government websites, and which showed the lack of seriousness while asking questions and answering the same. In a number of cases the answers given against questions is mere reproduction of old figures and data which shows the lack of communication between the parliamentarians and concerned ministries. There are other examples also where the same member has asked the same question more than once. Ministry wise distribution of questions often does not reflect the importance of issues.

The institutional aspect of Parliament as a vehicle which carries the governance agenda forward is also under serious strain because the main functions that the Parliament is supposed to perform in a parliamentary democracy has undergone a significant decline.

## **GROWTH AND EQUITY: POLICY DEMANDS, COMMITMENTS AND PERFORMANCE**

The Constitution of India provides guidelines to the central and State governments through the Directive Principles of State Policy for effective governance and ensuring the very ethos of socialistic democracy and equitable growth. This section will evaluate the policy demands, commitments and performance in recent years. Though there is commitment from the government but there is a growing sense of disillusionment with the efficacy of these commitments. Budgetary allocations for these initiatives—despite some increase—are found wanting when seen in terms of the

enormity of the problems that pervade different sectors, be it health, education or agriculture. Moreover, the delivery systems for many of these programmes remain plagued with inefficiencies and corruption so that the poorest have only rarely benefitted from these policy changes. Questions are being raised about the efficacy of these initiatives to make the Executive more transparent, accountable and responsive.

Considering the commitments and performances of the present government, the present section will explore different issues and focuses of the government. The first two sections of the chapter are focussed on public spending in various sectors which includes education, health, rural development, women, children, Dalit and Adivasis and budget outlay of flagship schemes of central government. The above two sections critically examine the formation of different policies and its implementation at various levels and highlight the existing gaps between the two. While evaluating the health of the policy-making process in recent years, the other sections of the chapter focuses on the emerging pattern of centre-State fiscal relations, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), unorganized sector and social security, issues pertaining to agriculture and policies related to the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Finally the chapter concludes with the evaluation of functioning of the Right to Information (RTI) Act as a tool for ensuring effective governance system in the country.

## **PRIORITIES IN PUBLIC SPENDING BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**

This section mainly focuses on the Budget of 2008–09 and outlines the expectations and overall sectoral allocations from the budget as it was likely to be the last full budget of the present government. The 2008–09 Union Budget increased the total outlay for the Ministry of Human Resource Development (which incurs a very large part of the Centre’s total spending on education) by 20 percent from the previous year. However, in terms of proportion of the country’s GDP, the budget for the Ministry of HRD increased from a mere 0.63 percent in 2007–08 (Budget Estimate—BE) to 0.72 percent in 2008–09 (BE). There is an increase of 15 percent on the outlay for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare over the outlay made in 2007–08. However, this increase is not reflected in the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)—the flagship health programme of the Ministry—which saw an increase of a mere 9.5 percent—from Rs. 10,928 crore last year (i.e. 2007–08 BE) to Rs. 11,974 crore in 2008–09 (BE). Even in the fifth year of this government, total public spending on health in India hovers around 1 percent of GDP. It is quite disturbing to note that the total Union Budget outlay for the economy of rural India such as agriculture and allied activities, irrigation and flood control, village and small industries and rural development combined together has fallen from 2 percent of the GDP in 2006–07 to 1.84 percent of the GDP in 2007–08 and 1.7 percent of the GDP in 2008–09.

However, some of the welcome steps taken by the government was reflected in the 2008–09 budget, such as outlay earmarked for women (as shown in the Gender Budgeting Statement) has increased from 3.3 percent of the total Union Budget in 2007–08 to 3.6 percent, and introduction of child specific schemes which accounts for 5.35 percent of total outlay of the Union Budget in 2008–09.

## **BUDGET OUTLAYS FOR FLAGSHIP SCHEMES OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**

To assess performance, this section of the report focuses on an analysis of trends in allocations across flagship social sector programmes. Through this analysis, the report argues that funds provided for these flagship schemes are grossly inadequate and hence government performance is poor.

As the section indicates, outlays have been stepped up progressively in the last five union budgets, particularly for schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Mid-Day Meal (MDM), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP). The increase in outlays over the last few union budgets appears modest for schemes like Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), National AIDS Control Programme and Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

In case of SSA, the union budget outlay had been gradually augmented from Rs. 4,754 crore in 2004–05 (RE) to Rs. 12,020 crore in 2007–08 (RE). However, the budgeted amount has been reduced to Rs. 11,940 crore in 2008–09 (BE).

The budget outlay of MDMs has been increased progressively from Rs. 1,508 crore in 2004–05 (RE) to Rs. 7,200 crore in 2008–09 (BE) but it should be noted that the coverage of the scheme has also expanded to upper primary schools along with the primary schools in all blocks of the country. Considering the expansion of the coverage of MDMs the allocated funds will not be sufficient to cover such a wide expansion of the scheme. The same has been pointed out in case of ICDS as the fund has been increased from Rs. 1,934 crore in 2004–05 (RE) to Rs. 5,665 crore in 2008–09 (BE) but it will not be sufficient to universalize the scheme. The trend is found similarly in other programmes and schemes. Though there is an increase in the funds allocated in the last budget, however, the analysis of different flagship programmes shows that problems pertaining to shortage of funds for some of the important components/interventions within many of the flagship schemes have persisted over the last four years. At the macro level, the present government's overall Union Budget outlay for important sectors like education, health and rural development does not present an appreciable picture.

### **CENTRE-STATE FISCAL RELATIONS: MOVING TOWARDS EQUITY?**

There is a clear connection between the fiscal consolidation targets and the changing dynamics of Centre-State fiscal relations. The analysis in the period between 2001 to 2006 shows that there was an increase in tax revenues by 3.2 percentage points (from 8.2 to 11.4 percent of GDP); reduction in non-tax revenues by 1.1 points, increase in central transfers to States by 0.95 points and transfers to State/district level autonomous bodies by 1.1 points. Centre's own expenditure was reduced by 2.3 percentage points to achieve the revenue deficit to GDP target of roughly the same magnitude, which indicates that there is an inherent process of centralization. The increasing control of the Centre has been reflected in the nature of grants, decline in overall transfers, increasing expenditure responsibilities of the States, increase in committed expenditures, and increase in relative command over total resources by the central government in relation to its expenditure.

While analyzing the allocation criteria in the finance commission, the Twelfth Finance Commission (TFC) grants for education and health have been in the nature of 'matching grants', which require commitment of funds from respective State governments. Considering the functioning of the Twelfth Finance Commission, it is also suggested that the thirteenth Finance Commission should revisit the idea of providing 'matching grants' to the State governments.

In terms of the overall Centre-State fiscal relations, there is accentuation of imbalances, both vertical and horizontal imbalances, especially during the period of economic reforms. Increase in these inequalities means the balancing act, which the constitutionally mandated transfer mechanism had to do, has not been achieved. The principal reasons for increasing inequality are the very mechanism of federal transfers, the nature of restructuring of public finance and the single-minded obsession towards sustainability or efficiency of financial allocations that has been instituted after the economic reforms.

### **HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE UNDER NRHM**

The weakening of state intervention and increase of privatization in healthcare system is becoming a major challenge in contemporary India. This questions the functioning of the delivery mechanism and pro-poor policies of the government. Recognizing the intensity of the problem of public healthcare, the government has introduced the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) considering the vulnerability of rural poor. This section evaluates the policy measures relating to public healthcare by highlighting both the failures and successes of the policy measures. While analyzing the NRHM, it points out three major weaknesses in its design. First one relates to targeting, and second to the financing of programme. It is designed to fund vertical schemes rather than a comprehensive service package. For example NRHM funds flow for separate schemes, like Rs. 10,000 for untied funds for the sub-centres,

Rs. 100,000 for rural hospital maintenance if Rogi Kalyan Samitis are formed, Rs. 750,000 per block for training ASHAs etc. instead of determining what resources would the proposed package of comprehensive health services require in order to implement it effectively. Finally, the health sector has witnessed a growing trend towards privatization which has resulted in public-private partnerships. In the last report we witnessed how the model of public-private partnership was a failure in the delivery of public healthcare system.

The budget allocation in the subsequent years i.e. in 2006–07 and 2007–08 has also not given a good picture of the particular sector. Overall public sector allocations for health remain low—at about 1 percent of GDP. An interesting trend in health sector expenditures is that there is an increase in central government allocations and concomitant decline in State government expenditures. While governments have created infrastructure, like hospitals, primary health centres, sub-centres, etc., they have not endeavoured to assure that the complete inputs for the efficient functioning of these are provided. The government’s own RCH facility surveys highlight the pathetic conditions of public healthcare facilities, which is largely due to inadequate resources being allocated, but very little has been done to use this most valuable information to improve public healthcare facilities.

## **UNORGANIZED WORKERS AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

Social security is the major concern in a country like India; according to the 61st Round National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) survey, the unorganized sector constitutes 394.9 million workers in India. India’s total workforce is 457.5 million and a mere 62.6 million workers are employed in the organized sector. Of the total workers in the organized sector, only 33.4 million workers had job and/or social security, therefore the remaining 29.2 million workers qualified as unorganized (often called informal) workers in the organized sector. Further, only about 1.4 million workers in the unorganized sector have some job and/or social security. The major concern of this section is to evaluate the existing policies on social security and examine the new unorganized sector bill which was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 10 September 2007. This section highlights the weaknesses of the bill in three categories: designing, financing and targeting. Finally the section recommends that the bill be titled ‘The Unorganized Workers’ Social Security Bill, 2007’ and the word ‘sector’ should be deleted. It is hoped that with this expansion of area, the unprotected workers of organized sector will also get legal cover for social security. Further, the definition is also proposed to be reformulated in order to facilitate inclusion of agricultural workers.

## **IN THE ERA OF KNOWLEDGE AND MARKETS: END OF INDIA’S FARMERS**

India, being the land of villages, the major sections of the economy and labour force depend upon agriculture. The ongoing crisis in agriculture, failure of the crops and the growing rate of farmer suicides draws attention towards an alarming need to revisit agricultural policies and their effectiveness in the present circumstances. By dealing with the agricultural history of post-independence period, this particular section tries to draw a link with the World Bank aided and Ministry of Agriculture supported National Seeds Project in 1967. Perhaps the biggest weakness with this initiative is that it fails to ascertain the real reasons behind the terrible agrarian crisis, and instead imposes environmentally-unfriendly alien technology. The government has embarked on the faulty promise of a ‘second’ green revolution. By evaluating the failure of mere imitation of policies and its blind implementation in India, this section gives an overview of how the agricultural sector is becoming the victim of unfair trade liberalization.

Finally it is pointed out that the debt waiver policies of the UPA government is a good initiative but as mentioned it is an *ad hoc* approach to mitigate the prolonged agricultural crisis and farmer’s suicides. Among other limitations, it is also pointed out that it does not address the issue of debt owed by farmers to money lenders which accounts for almost half of total farm debt. It should be noted that 48.6 percent of farmer households were reported to be indebted and the largest sources of loans (in terms of percentage of outstanding loan amount) were found to be banks (36 percent), followed by moneylenders (26 percent) which is ignored in the noble initiative.

## **SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL DISPARITY**

This section gives an overview of the government's policy on Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Firstly, it undertakes a spatial analysis and examines the implications of SEZ locations. Then it examines the implications of SEZ policy on agricultural land. With a brief background on SEZs, it highlights the location and concentration of SEZs causing regional disparity. The relationship between SEZ locations and levels of urbanization of districts does not tell us the whole story. A spatial analysis shows that most of the SEZ units are located on peripheries of the eight largest metropolitan cities. The largest cities in India are the points of concentration of economic activity and development.

The present analysis reveals that the developers apply for areas with locational advantages, which, as profit making entrepreneurs, they are probably expected to do. However, even in the two stages of screening, first informally by the respective State government and subsequently more formally by the Centre, it falls under the purview of the State to evaluate these proposals by their merits. The major concern raised in this section is that the SEZs policy should be reformulated in a way so that it does not appear as if state is playing the role of an agent transferring resources from a relatively deprived section (farmers and agricultural labourers) to privileged section (developers and owners of large industrial units).

## **RIGHT TO INFORMATION: PERFORMANCES, PERILS AND PITFALLS**

Right to Information (RTI) Act is considered as the most effective tool for ensuring effective governance in the present time. This is one of the major steps of the present UPA government. The present section tries to give a detailed analysis of the functioning of the RTI Act with insights from the citizens' perspective. To map the performance of the RTI Act it evaluates the composition and functioning of the commissioners. By giving a disintegrated figure of the state information commissions, it provides the figure of the backgrounds of the State information commissioners. Secondly, it figures out the amount of delays found in providing information both at the Centre and State levels. Finally the section ends with some concrete suggestions to ensure the effective functioning of the RTI Act by providing RTI help lines and strengthening the information commissions with strict guidelines.

## **ACCESS TO JUSTICE: STATE OF THE INDIAN JUDICIARY**

The review of Indian Judiciary focuses on the debate of courts venturing into the domain of legislature and the executive, mapping of the judicial response, including the performance of the courts, through significant judgments of the Supreme court and the High Courts. An attempt has also been made to assess the state of the judicial system, and important legal principles in governance and development law that were discussed by the courts in 2007 are explained.

Locating the debate on judicial self restraint and judicial intervention within the framework of 'separation of powers', the chapter examines the issue by juxtaposing it against Justice Katju's and Justice Sinha's viewpoints. A more nuanced approach is needed to examine the question of where, why and how to draw the line between legitimate and improper judicial activism. The arguments above should at least serve to emphasize that the debate need not be seen as some sort of turf war between the executive and the judiciary (as if there is one monolithic view in both these 'organs')—which is unfortunately how most of the media has seen the issue throughout last year. If at all it has to be seen as a battle, it should more appropriately be seen as a battle of ideas, ideologies and approaches to jurisprudence. It becomes all the more necessary that civil society takes a more nuanced approach to the issue instead of being just swayed by headline-grabbing 'judiciary versus executive' hoopla.

An analysis of judicial response through the court verdicts covers the whole gamut of cases on constitutional governance and political accountability. Starting with the case of 'cash for questions' it closely examines the question of legal wrong vs the moral wrong. In another case of great significance, from the standpoint of

constitutional law, a question arose as to whether legislations can be immunized from legal challenge (on the ground of fundamental rights) by Parliament as a consequence of their insertion into the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. The Supreme Court held that laws included in the Ninth Schedule in the period post April 1973 do not have absolute immunity. The case against the present chief minister of the State of Uttar Pradesh, amongst others, on the Taj Corridor Project also came up for hearing last year. On the facts of the case, the Supreme Court noted that it had been taking all steps which have been thought necessary and proper in the matter but it need not go further in the case.

Cases on environment, development rights and civil liberties are also examined. The case on mining in Niyamgiri Hills throws up quite a few questions begging to be answered: Did the Court 'bypass' questions specific to the project and gave its green signal based on national interest and for larger development needs? Why did the Court not deal with the objections of its own Central Empowered Committee (CEC) in this case when generally it goes by CEC recommendations? How did the Court reconcile the fact that while the MoEF gave its clearance, the CEC had strong environmental arguments against the project? Why did the Court ignore the main questions pertaining to the case and instead proceed to give a 'virtual go ahead' after suggesting a rehabilitation package? In a case where the infrastructural stability and adequacy of a ship-breaking yard at a port was in issue, the Court formed a committee of technical experts to look into the matter. The committee's report contained recommendations on management of occupational safety, health issues and handling of hazardous materials and wastes. Reference was also made to the welfare of the workers. The case again was a ringing reminder that especially on environmental matters, 'judge-made law or a judge-inspired law' constitute a significant part of the environmental laws of the country. In response to another 'environmental' petition before the Supreme Court, which stated that stray animals, such as, bulls, dogs and cattle were roaming in and around Jodhpur city, Rajasthan freely, the Court upheld the decision of the High Court, which stated that it was imperative that the authorities of the city of Jodhpur relocate the dairies which were creating nuisance for the citizens of the city and gave a range of directions to settle the issue. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in the High Court of Madhya Pradesh for declaring the provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Nagar Tatha Gram Nivesh Adhiniyam, 1973 as unconstitutional. The High Court rejected the contention. It said that Article 243-W of the Constitution says that subject to the provisions of the Constitution, the legislature of a State 'may' by law endow the municipalities with powers including those in relation to the matters listed in the Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution, which includes town planning. In another interesting case from Kerala, the Panchayat had granted permission to start a crushing unit within the limits of the Valakom Grama Panchayat in Kerala. But later when the composition of the Panchayat changed, the permission granted earlier was cancelled. The High Court noted that the owner of the stone crushing unit was made to run from pillar to post.

In an important case last year, the High Court of Madhya Pradesh dealt with the issue of the improvement of the conditions in prisons and passed certain directions to the State for ensuring equitable wages to the prisoners, payable for hours of labour put in by prisoners. In a lesser-known case, a policy decision by the Railways to introduce the trolley system was challenged by the licensed porters on the ground that it would endanger their only means of livelihood. The High Court held that entrusting the trolley system to a private contractor, who would engage his own people, will directly affect marginal livelihood of licensed porters and it therefore violates Articles 19 and 14 of the Constitution. Kerala High Court re-emphasized the enforceability of the Right to Education declaring the importance of the Right to Education under the Constitution while interpreting the provisions of the Kerala Education Act and Rules. In a significant verdict on the issue of the Right to Information, the Mumbai High Court held that the person seeking information is not required to give reasons for the information he seeks and ordinarily such information must be made available to him.

The section dealing with the cases on forced land acquisition, displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation issues cites the example of Nandigram where Calcutta High Court upheld the position of law and gave a range of directions to help the situation there, on the question of safeguarding the fundamental rights of the people of Nandigram. A recent Supreme Court judgment has significant implications for acquisition of land for companies.

The Supreme Court in this judgment dated 12 October 2007 held that acquisition of land by the state can be either for 'public purpose' or for a company and it cannot be for both. It has been made clear that the distinction between acquisition of land for public purpose and acquisition of land for companies is the 'source of fund' for the acquisition. MP High Court upheld right to protest of the Adivasis and the displaced. MP High Court reiterated rehabilitation as a right in Omkareshwar Dam case. The High Court citing earlier cases on the subject said that the Supreme Court has held that so long as the displaced persons are rehabilitated and resettled in such a manner that they are in a better position to lead a decent life and earn their livelihood in the rehabilitated location, their fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution would not be violated by construction of a dam.

2007–08 also saw some discussions on important legal principles and development law. The Supreme Court in an important verdict in 2007 laid down that the right to property is now considered to be not only a constitutional right but also a human right. In a case where the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Ltd. (MSRDC) floated a global tender for completing the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) between Mumbai and Navi Mumbai, the doctrine of 'level playing field' in the globalization era was enunciated by the SC.

In an important clarification, the Supreme Court held last year that when we are considering the observations of a high judicial authority like this Court, the greatest possible care must be taken to relate the observations of a judge to the precise issues before him and to confine such observations, even though expressed in broad terms, in the general compass of the question before him.

A verdict of the Supreme Court last year on a petition filed by the Supreme Court Bar Association raised points of considerable importance. The Bar Association pointed out that appointment of a retired judge as chairman of the State Legal Service Authority in different States has the effect of stalling the effectiveness of the functioning of the State Legal Service Authorities. The Supreme Court held that the position of the chairperson of Legal Services Authority at the State level is very crucial. A sitting judge would be a far better person, and he can exercise his powers more effectively, when compared to a retired judge.

Accountability of lawyers and lawyers' bodies was another issue which was dealt by the courts and is discussed in detail in the report. In another case decided by the Supreme Court last year, it was made clear that free services of the courts should not be seen a given right in any case. On another occasion, Supreme Court noted that jurisdiction of Lok Adalats was limited to 'compromise' and 'settlement'. The anguish behind disposal of cases in law courts was expressed by the SC when a suit filed for declaration and possession of the suit land in the trial court in 1957 ultimately got decided in the Supreme Court in 2007. One important reason behind the delay in disposal of cases is the strength of the judges in courts and the vacancies that continue to exist in courts across the country.

In reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, the Minister of Law and Justice clarified recently that a committee constituted under the chairmanship of Prof. Madhava Menon has submitted a Draft National Policy on Criminal Justice to the government on 1 August 2007. The draft policy has recommended classification of all offences under Indian Penal Code into four codes, namely, social welfare offences code, correctional offences code, penal code and economic offences code.

Problems were identified by the Supreme Court in the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes. Arbitration and conciliation are two important ways to decongest the courts as they provide alternatives to the long drawn process of resolution of disputes. However, in 2008, the Supreme Court had to comment adversely on some unhealthy trends that have crept into these processes.

On a close review of the initiatives of the government, one is tempted to conclude that they are typically in the nature of 'supply-driven' solutions to a much larger problem. Especially if it is understood that most people do not have the means, capacity or willingness to access the legal system, then any search for 'justice for all' has to have a critical 'demand side' dimension. In that sense the judicial system needs a demand-orientation.

## **REINVENTING LOCAL GOVERNANCE: EXPRESSION OF INTERLOCKING STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES**

The performance and the functioning of local self governance presents a marred picture of the unresolved questions related to what can be termed as the 3 Fs: functions, functionaries and funds. On the one hand the Central government points to the inefficiency of the State governments' approach to programme implementation. The State governments, on the other, blame the Centre citing examples of its intrusion into their domain. However, this is not to deny the fact that local self government can serve as a major tool for the empowerment and upliftment of the marginalized sections of the society. A meaningful intervention in the process of policy making would require ensuring the effective functioning of local self government. This is the right time when we can engage in the debate of policy shift from a supply driven to demand driven approach. This section will try to highlight the key initiatives in rural and urban governance which have either promoted or negatively affected the decentralization process in the country.

The section on rural governance looks at both the structural and functional aspects of the Panchayati Raj system. Structural reforms for deepening decentralization evaluates the joint statement between the State governments and the MoPR, transfer of functions to Panchayats and effective implementation of different programmes like health, Mid-day Meal scheme, public distribution system and women participation, Panchayat elections and empowerment of the marginalized sections like SC, ST and women and district planning committees etc. The delivery functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are examined by giving a closer look at some of the key development programmes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) etc. Finally the chapter highlights some of the key policy recommendations as people's agenda in the decentralized government.

## **RURAL GOVERNANCE: STRUCTURAL REFORMS FOR DEEPENING DECENTRALIZATION**

### **JOINT STATEMENTS WITH THE STATE GOVERNMENTS AND THE MOPR**

Since 2005 the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj has signed Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with as many as 19 States and one Union Territory for the devolution of funds, functions and functionaries. MoUs apart from having functional utility, also stressed on the need for innovative thinking. The innovative steps required to strengthen local self governance varies from State to State, which is dealt with in detail in the section. MoUs not only show a sense of urgency towards fulfilling certain issues for successful decentralization of power but are also signed agreements which can be used to exert pressure on the State governments to hold them accountable against the commitments outlined in the MOUs.

### **DEVOLUTION OF FUNCTIONS**

The functions of the Panchayats as listed under Article 243 G, now part of the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, covers 29 subjects. These 29 subjects are handled by more than a dozen ministries and departments of the central government. All the subjects under Article 243 G would be expanded (counting all the functional activities) and accordingly broken into activities, which in turn would be assigned to Panchayats at different levels. This point was missed by practically all the States, including Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal, which in turn created considerable confusion. This confusion was further intensified when the Centre failed to create a 'district list' on the lines of 'central' and 'State' list when piloting a bill to create a third tier of governance. Consequently, what were transferred to the PRIs were some innocuous functions such as monitoring and supervision. Even these

functions are handled by the line department functionaries, over whom the Panchayats have no control. Even in activities such as awareness building, social mobilization for vaccination (a la the Pulse Polio programme), beneficiary selection for some welfare programmes, or at the most, remaining engaged in construction work under the ubiquitous JRY programme and the recently introduced NREGS programme, Panchayats, were merely engaged in rendering assistance to line departments in implementation of these schemes. This was far from devolution, where, the implementation of a programme was conceived and designed at higher level of government.

MoPR responded to this by introducing activity mapping which entailed breaking each of all the 29 subjects in as many activities as possible and assigning them to the Panchayats at different levels. The orders issued, however, were incomplete since it entailed matching orders of the concerned line departments which were never issued, making the orders inoperative (West Bengal being case in point). Exceptions notwithstanding, most of the States began with a wrong checklist owing to a lackadaisical attitude or a lack of understanding. For instance, it was not realized that the sole consideration of adopting the decentralization route was to seek improvement in *service delivery*. Hence a service should be reference point, not the department, which may be handling a part of the multiple delivery system of that service or it could be the same function being handled by more than one department (elaborated in the case of health sector in the section). Activity mapping and assigning of activities are multi level/stage/pronged exercises and hence complicated by all means. Therefore, it requires soft handling and 'persuasion' should be the key word while dealing with the States which are yet to complete this exercise.

## **TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS TO PANCHAYATS AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES**

The PRIs and Gram Sabhas have demonstrated their capabilities in managing various activities fairly efficiently whether in health or education. The difficulty faced by Panchayats largely occurs when there are unclear instructions or unclear accountability, i.e. joint responsibility of the government and the Panchayat. A glaring example of such ambiguity is perceptible in case of health where the untied fund, provided under NRHM shows poor utilization of resources in the absence of detailed activity mapping and a clear transfer of responsibilities to Panchayats. Similar cases are cited in the section which deal with Mid-day Meal scheme (Anganwadi) and the role of monitoring committee.

## **PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS**

Direct democracy at the grassroots was the overarching objective of this mechanism, marking a departure from the prevailing system of representative democracy at the level of Parliament and State assemblies. Panchayat elections were held in six States of Assam, Goa, Manipur, Maharashtra, Orissa and Sikkim. Apart from Orissa and Sikkim, none of the other States held elections on scheduled time. From the experience of Panchayat elections held in 2007 one can conclude that the objective of fair elections on scheduled time remains far from achieved. Another worrying trend is the growing tendency in certain States towards promoting unopposed elections. An encouraging aspect has been a growing progression of the actual representation of women in Panchayats which has gone up over the two to three rounds of elections since then, exceeding 1/3rd proportion. A fairly large number of women do contest and win from general seats. States such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have reserved 50 percent seats for women in all the three tiers of Panchayats while Sikkim has reserved 40 percent of the seats, which is commendable.

## **DISTRICT PLANNING COMMITTEES (DPCS)**

Article 243ZD (3) (b) of the Constitution provides that the State may specify institutions and organizations which may be consulted by every DPC in preparing the draft development plan of the district. In order to strengthen and equip the DPCs, the MoPR provided financial support through the Backward Regions Grant Fund. An amount of Rs. 250 crore has been especially earmarked for the capacity building of Panchayats in 250 districts covered under the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme. Securing assistance for the Panchayats and the DPCs is one of the components of capacity building which can be funded from the allocation of Rs. 250 crore which is discussed in the section on BRGF. With all these guidelines and incentives, only two-thirds (17 of total 26) of States, as per the latest available information, have claimed to have constituted DPCs. This will have adverse effect on the implementation of programmes such as BRGF and SSA if the DPCs are not constituted or sufficiently empowered.

## **PERFORMANCE OF KEY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND PRIS**

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)**

In the year 2006–2007, a budget of Rs. 11,300 crore (Rs. 113,000 million) was set aside to implement the programme in 200 districts spread in 27 States. As this employment guarantee programme was extended to 130 new districts in April 2007, the NREGA allocation was enhanced to Rs. 12,000 crore for the year 2007–2008. The increase of the number of districts without increase in the allocation of funds questions the main objective of the programme to focus on the poorest districts. When the programme covered 200 districts, the average allocated funds were Rs. 56 crore per district but with the addition of 130 new districts, the average fund per district decreases to Rs. 36 crore.

Apart from the problems of insufficient allocation, the programme is plagued by delay in setting up implementation structure, shift from supply driven to demand driven approach, inadequate and ineffective awareness campaign, massive siphoning, even embezzlement of funds.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can play an important role in enhancing transparency and facilitate the access of information. This can support the transparency mechanisms like social audits by reaching the information to the poor and marginalized citizens. The development of ICT can bridge the gap between the urban and rural governance by facilitating the Panchayati Raj system to access and provide the information for an efficient and holistic governance process. One such example of the role of ICT are the E-chaupals which offers farmers the information, products and services they need to enhance productivity, improve farm-gate price realization, and cut transaction costs.

### **Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF)**

There is a common assumption that there is a close connection between the socio-economic backwardness of a region and the poor performance of Panchayats due to the lack of resources to support the planning procedures of the local bodies. Keeping it in mind the government has initiated the BRGF to support the planning procedures of the backward regions of the country for an effective performance in the local governance. The release and timing in the release of funds has been the major constraint in the implementation of the BRGF scheme right since its inception. Though till 2 December 2007, the amount released under BRGF was only 27.02 percent of the total sanctioned money, while answering a Rajya Sabha question (No. 273 on 28/02/2008) it was mentioned by none else than the Minister of Panchayati Raj himself that the MoPR 'had released Rs. 2,965 crore under RSVY/BRGF till 31 December 2007. The amount sanctioned till 26 February 2008 is Rs. 3291.79 crore.' The fund released for the financial year 2007–08 under the head of the BRGF shows that maximum amount was released in the month of December, i.e. almost 40 percent was

released only towards the end of the current financial year. However, till February-end 30 percent of the total fund under the head of BRGF was found unspent.

## **URBAN GOVERNANCE**

This section is an attempt to review JNNURM as a strategy to address current issues of urban governance and also the issues emerging from the implementation of JNNURM. Urban governance covers a much wider area than JNNURM but since the inception of JNNURM, urban governance has come to mean rightly or wrongly only JNNURM. Though JNNURM has come to mean urban governance for governmental agencies yet not much has been written or researched about JNNURM and its impact. The scheme of seven-year duration launched formally on 3 December 2005 has completed two and half years of its operations and from budgetary allocation point of view it has completed three years and is in the fourth year of its existence.

The JNNURM scheme is for duration of seven years (2005–2011) with a planned outlay of Rs. 50,000 crore as an Additional Central Assistance to State governments for 63 selected cities, which includes cities with million plus population (35), State capitals and special cities (28) discussed in the particular section. Though it is a noble initiative of the government to address the issues of urban governance with some of the potentialities to address the problems, however, the programme encounters some major challenges of implementation. Both the potentialities and the challenges are discussed while evaluating the section on urban governance.

## INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED



**Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD)** works with the deprived and the underprivileged towards the goal of people-centred development. Its participatory development action enables people to pursue their need fulfilment through their own institutional means. Its training and capacity building support to development organizations produced a cascade of effective learning at the grassroots and increasing professional efficiency in development action at all levels. By building up alliances with agencies of shared intent, it attempts to bring on a pro-poor agenda in the mainstream of development policies and practices.



**National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS)** is a membership-based organization that has been working on various people-centred advocacy initiatives across the country. NCAS has a decade-long history of training people on advocacy and undertaking people-centred advocacy initiatives. NCAS works on various socio-economic rights essentially from the perspective of the marginalized. NCAS is also involved in Media Advocacy initiative, Advocacy Learning and Praxis and Governance and Advocacy. The theme in NCAS work is bridging people and building ideas. NCAS sees the Social Watch Process as an essential component towards this end.



**Samarthan Centre for Development Support** promotes participatory governance and development. The organization is committed to strengthen democratic processes building leadership of Women, Dalit, Tribals and other disadvantaged section. Civil society organizations have a critical role as social change agent, therefore promotion support and strengthening civil society institutions in development is also key endeavour of Samarthan. Samarthan also believes in building examples of participatory development and governance, therefore, is actively involved in field action at the grassroots to build people's institutions.

## NATIONAL SOCIAL WATCH COALITION PARTNERS

**Madhya Pradesh:** Samarthan, Bhopal and Madhya Pradesh Voluntary Action Network (MPVAN), Bhopal. Samarthan promotes participatory governance and development thus encouraging leadership of Women, Dalit, Tribals and other disadvantaged sections of the society.

**Orissa:** Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), Bhubaneswar works towards achieving people-centred development for the deprived and under privileged through direct intervention as well as building up alliances with agencies of shared intent.

**Maharashtra:** Youth for Voluntary Action (YUVA), Mumbai, implements its development agenda by engaging with local, community-based organizations strengthening existing organizations to respond effectively to local development issues.

**Vikas Sahyog Pratisthan (VSP),** Mumbai, is a group of voluntary organizations working for the upliftment of poor and deprived sections of society with its area of expertise being in nature farming, water conservation, promoting role of youth in village governance and co-operatives.

**Karnataka:** (Karnataka Social Watch) Rejuvenate India Movement (RIM), Bangalore, which is a conglomerate of 11 Non-Government Agencies. It works towards effecting positive changes by generating actions that are practically effective and morally compelling while upholding the principles of participative democracy, genuine volunteerism and self-empowerment.

**Community Development Foundation (CDF),** Bangalore believes in collective efforts to bring about meaningful change and sustainable development in adult literacy, children and human rights, gender issues, education and health aspects.

**Tamilnadu:** Tamilnadu Social Watch (TNSW), Chennai is a resource-cum-research centre involved in social public policy monitoring and lobbying at the State level. The major contributions have been Dalit budgeting and in budget awareness in civil society along with the Tamilnadu Social Development Report 2000.

**Centre for Policy Studies (CPS),** Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul Distt., Tamilnadu  
People's Forum for Social Development (TNPFS), Chennai.

**Andhra Pradesh:** Centre for World Solidarity (CWS), Hyderabad, is a support organization with partners in nearly five states working with a rights-based development approach towards Panchayati Raj, Minorities, Tribal Rights, Education, Forestry, Alternative Agriculture and Natural Resource Management, Human Rights Issues and women's rights and gender mainstreaming.

**Dalit Bahujan Shramik Union (DBSU),** Hyderabad, working with Dalit organizations on dalit issues and rights.

**Uttar Pradesh:** Uttar Pradesh Voluntary Action Network (UPVAN), Lucknow, is a conglomerate of nearly 225 vibrant civil society organizations of UP. It operates through the advocacy resource centre, networking, alliance-building centre, gender resource and information resource centre and takes up issues for advocacy which affects the voluntary organizations and their struggle to ensure justice and equity for the marginalized.

**Bihar:** Vidyasagar Samajik Suraksha Seva Evam Shodh Sansthan, Asian Development Research Institute.

**Chhattisgarh:** Mayaram Surjan Foundation (MSF), Raipur runs a research & documentation centre and conducts programmes to build up grassroot democratic values and practices, promote value-based and development-oriented journalism and prepare youth to take lead in building and safeguarding a pluralistic society.

**Gramin Yuva Abhikram (GYA),** Raipur, works in the areas of community empowerment, campaign for people's right to water, campaign for accountable governance, media advocacy, women empowerment apart from networking with like-minded agencies and policy research.

**Rajasthan:** Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society (CECOEDECON), Institute of Development Studies, Pratham.

**West Bengal:** Institute for Motivating Self Employment (IMSE) along with Forum of Voluntary Organizations, West Bengal, Kolkata. The Forum is comprised of 98 voluntary organizations representing Christian Missionaries, Leftist Social Action Groups, Human Rights Groups. The Forum apart from supporting the achievement of food sovereignty of the people and their rights over land, water, forest and seed also opposes imperialist globalization.

**Kerala:** Kerala Social Watch.

**Jharkhand:** Currently coordinated by National Social Watch Coalition supported by SPAR, Gene Campaign, Agragati, SPAR, LJK, HOPE, SAFDAR, Adivasi Sanghamam, Swaraj Foundation

**Himachal Pradesh:** RTDC- Voluntary Action Group (RTDC- VAG), People's Campaign for Socio-Economic Equity in Himalayas (PcfSEEiH)

**SANSAD** (South Asian Network for Social and Agricultural Development), aimed at making South Asia free from hunger and poverty and taking global and regional initiative for sustainable agricultural and rural development and human dignity aimed at putting collective pressure on policy making.

**KABIR:** Kabir is a communications organization dedicated to the increased awareness and use of the Right to Information (RTI) Act by all individuals and organizations across all segments of Indian society. It envisions a culture of transparency and accountability in government that allows for meaningful participation of citizens in their own governance.

**PRS Legislative Research:** PRS Legislative Research is an independent research initiative that aims to strengthen the legislative debate by making it better informed, more transparent and participatory. PRS is the first initiative of its kind in India.

**Ekta Parishad:** Ekta Parishad is a Gandhian organization, it works towards community based governance (gram swaraj), local self-reliance (gram swawlamban) and responsible government (Jawabdehi Sarkar). It is a mass movement based on Gandhian principles of non-violence. It mobilizes people (especially the poor and deprived sections) on the issue of proper and just utilization of livelihood resources (i.e. primarily land, but also forest, and water).

**ADR:** Association for Democratic Reforms aims to work towards improving and strengthening democracy and governance in India. The main objectives of ADR are Electoral reforms, Right to information and greater transparency of those in power, Empowerment of the ordinary citizen and Reform of the government and bureaucracy.

**Oxfam Novib:** A member of Oxfam International is fighting for a just world without poverty, together with people, organizations, businesses and governments through projects and lobby both locally and internationally because poverty and injustice are global problems. They are about unjust economic and political relationships.