

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY, A CONCERN FOR THE SMOOTH IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH (AS STUDY OF CHAYANGTAJO CD BLOCK).

Sinku Wada Bagang

Assistant Director/Core Faculty
SIRD&PR

ABSTRACT: The study through light on the practical and current status of the prevailing mechanism of transparency and accountability in the implementation of various poverty alleviation programs launched by the Center and the State Government and availed by the community. Unlike, the time of the 70s and 80s when there was mutual respect and belief between the Government Functionaries responsible for implementing the government programs and policy in the interior areas and the beneficiaries' blindly faith and belief in them. Although detailed information about the programs was not at all reaching the community, owing to non-provisions in the program guidelines to check office records as practices these days, however, the benefits were truly reaching the intended people.

The transparency and accountability per se in the implementation of various poverty alleviation programs under the Chayangtajo Community Development Block are not at all used as a means for smooth and successful implementation of the programs on account of lack of awareness amongst the beneficiaries in particular and the government functionaries who intentionally taking the advantage of people's ignorance. The study discussed the absence of a proper mechanism to aware the community of their rights and entitlements enshrined in the program guideline, especially under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Act), Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana {PMAY (G)}, National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), etc.

Some of the basic mechanisms for acquiring transparency and accountability such as participation of the community in Social Audit as and when conducted by the Agency, spreading of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities about all pro-poor programs reaching the grass root levels, the proper and right use of RTI Act by the community, Active participation of Panchayati Raj Members, Adoption of proper guidelines for imposing penalties, etc are discussed. Lastly, few measures for attaining transparency and accountability in the area have been put forth as an educational implication of the study.

Introduction:

The launching of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNRRREGS) (Act) by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India in the year 2005 proved to be a boon to many poor and destitute populations in India. Millions of unemployed population wandering for daily wage and bread to run the family got respite out of the noble scheme. The success of the scheme is due to its provision in the purview of law through an Act in Parliament in the year 2005. Its clearly defined guidelines and amendment of it through the circulation of the Annual Master Circular have set a workable roadmap for the beneficiaries and the functionaries who are responsible for the implementation of the scheme annually. From the Scheme many lives have been saved from starvation, durable assets have been created, living standards and level of income of many households had improved and life has been secured, ecosystems replenished throughout the states of the country. The popularity of the program increases with the passing years and enrolment of the employment reached 15.43* Crores active JC as on Sept 2022.

The noble program MGNREGA has the least impact on the life and living status of the people under the Study Area i.e., Chayangtajo CD Block, under East Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh State due to a host of reasons. The reasons visible and experienced by many common laypersons and registrants is due to meager wage rates and irregular employment and wage payment. Many think that the maximum resident of the reported area no longer is living below the poverty line to seek such low-wage rate employment paid under MGNREGA. Most of the currently registered workers under MGREGA reside in nearby towns and cities where they earn more money and run their own families by doing other business and under Government jobs. People consider the MGNREGA works as a time pass job taken up as their leisure time work. Hence, the creation of permanent durable assets in the area is very less in comparison to other areas of the State and other mainland workers. However, the reason for the non-creation of visible assets of prescribed quality and durability is also stated to be the high cost of materials and transportation costs due to scattered settlements and the non-connectivity of the villages by a motorable road.

Maintenance of records about the schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Act) MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) of Ministry of Rural Development Programme (MoRD), GoI, Fifteen Finance Commission Grants (FFC), RGSA Strengthening and Capacity Building Funding of Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) GOI and funding from other Ministries like Jaal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) implementing through Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) in the State at the Gram

Panchayat Level and under Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the referred area is very poor in particular and the state as a whole, which has been reflected in the Social Audit Report conducted by the State Social Audit Unit during the 2017-2018 (Unpublished report).

Further, maintenance of documents related to important decisions like Gram Sabha Agenda, Gram Sabha Minutes signed by Gram Panchayat Chairperson (GPC), Attendance of the Sabha Members with their signature, Job Cards related records like updation, possession, designed, pasting of photographs, etc., Master Roll updation, Master Roll closure date, etc. at the GP level is almost nil as per the Social Audit Report of 2017-18. However, no such Social Audit and other transparency and accountable means prevailed in the study area excepting the Chartered Accountant (CA) audit empaneled by the state Govt. to audit particular department reports which are not at all accessed by the community as normal practices encourage the influential functionaries and a certain section of leaders mislead the system in the area in particular and the state as a whole.

However, the recent introduction of the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), to some extent helped the community get their benefits as per the provision, however, the public awareness about their rights and entitlement is still very less on account of hosts of reasons. Thereby performance of many noble poverty alleviation programs of the Ministry is not up to the mark as designed and sanctioned by the Government for the common masses in the study area in particular and the state as a whole.

2. ABSENCE OF PROPER MECHANISMS TO ACQUIRE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

The mechanism for attaining transparency and accountability for smooth planning and implementation of various poverty alleviation programs in the state such as Social Audit, Information Education and Communication, Right to Information, MIS-related reports, PFMS, Good Governance, etc. in principle is not at all properly disseminated to the targeted people as summarized below:

i) SETTING UP OF SOCIAL AUDIT UNIT (SAU) IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH:

Attainment of transparency the accountability through the means of Social Audit has created lots of expectations for the people particularly the PRIs in the area during its establishment in the year 2016-17, however, the Social Audit Unit (SAU) itself is yet to function as a dedicated institution for facilitating transparency and accountability in the State. Hence, the expectation of the community to audit the public fund meant for the poor remains a distant dream in true spirit to date.

However, in the recent past, the State Social Audit Unit (SAU) has initiated to recruit 12 (Twelve) dedicated District Resource Persons (DRPs) who will replace the earlier DRPs with additional charges as District Research Officers (DRROs).

The current status of SAU of the state as of the reporting period (2022) is having a Director, who is also the Director of Audit and Pension under State Government as an additional charge. It has 1 (one) Social Development Specialist (SDS), 3 (Three) Social Audit Experts at the State Level, 2 (Two) MIS Experts, 12 (Twelve) District Resource Persons (DRPs), 1 (One) Office Assistant, 1 (One) Computer Operator. However, recruitment of Block Resources Persons and Village Resource persons is yet to be done. Hence, conducting Social Audits of all Gram Panchayats in the State without Block Resource Persons and Village Resource persons (VRPs) will take another year in the state.

To strengthen the Social Audit Unit (SAU) to spearhead the transparency and accountability for the successful implementation of various poverty alleviation programs of the Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj in the State, both the human and financial resources of the Unit need to strengthen first with initial support from the Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj such as, for recruitment/engagement of Regular Director, audit experts at all four levels i.e., at State Level, District Level, Block and GP Levels, and their training expenses besides, other administrative expenses to run the Unit considering the poor financial health status of the State Government.

Further, audit expenses for auditing the schemes may be earmarked specifically for Social Audit while sanctioning the grants to the State under various poverty alleviation programs, especially under MGNREGA, PMAY(G), NSAP, PMGSY, SAGY, JJM, SBM(G) of Ministry of Rural Development and Fifteen Finance Commission (FFC) grants and Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) of Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GoI, so that no other special grants are required from the Ministry to run the SAU in the State.

ii) INFORMATION EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION (IEC)

The popularity and success of any program are based on how the effective dissemination of Information Education and Communication is spread in the locality. The lack of proper and timely dissemination of information through Information Education and Communication (IEC) in the area is considered to be the reason for failure and poor awareness about the development programs, especially among the villagers in the area. People are reluctant to bother to inquire about their benefits from the implementing agency/implementing department except for a few RTI activists in the recent past.

As per the guidelines of every development program sponsored by different ministries, a certain percentage of funds are earmarked for IEC activities, however, as reported through interaction with the public during the course of this study, many departments never utilized such funds for the purposes. Hence, information never reaches the targeted people.

The level of information and knowledge of the public in the study area collected through sample questionnaires of 100 respondents are given in the table below:

Categories of Respondants	Name of Popular Programmes known to them			
	MGNREGA	PMAY(G)	NSAP	PMGSY
Common Public	80%	60%	40%	55%
PR Members	100%	90%	60%	90%
Educated Youths	90%	70%	50%	100%
SHG Members	85%	65%	56%	80%
	355.00%	285.00%	206.00%	325.00%

The total average percentage of respondents.	88.75%	71.25%	51.5%	81.25%
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Table 1. Showing the knowledge of respondents about popular MoRD GoI sponsored programs implemented in the locality.

The above table shows the average knowledge of respondents about the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Act) MGNREGA accounted for 88.75 percent, however, the same respondents were further asked about their rights and entitlements as enshrined under the act. Their response was dismal which may be seen in the table below:

Categories of Respondants	Rights and Entitlement under MGNREGA					
	Job related information	Cards	Work Site Facilities	Other Allowances/Compensations	Citizen Information Board (CIB)	Non-wage components
Common Public	40%		20%	5%	20%	10%
PR Members	60%		30%	10%	30%	50%
Educated Youths	50%		10%	6%	25%	36%
SHG Members	45%		23%	5%	1%	2%
The total average percentage of respondents.	48.75%		20.75%	6.5%	19%	24.5%

Table 2. Showing the knowledge of respondents about popular MoRD GoI sponsored programs implemented in the locality.

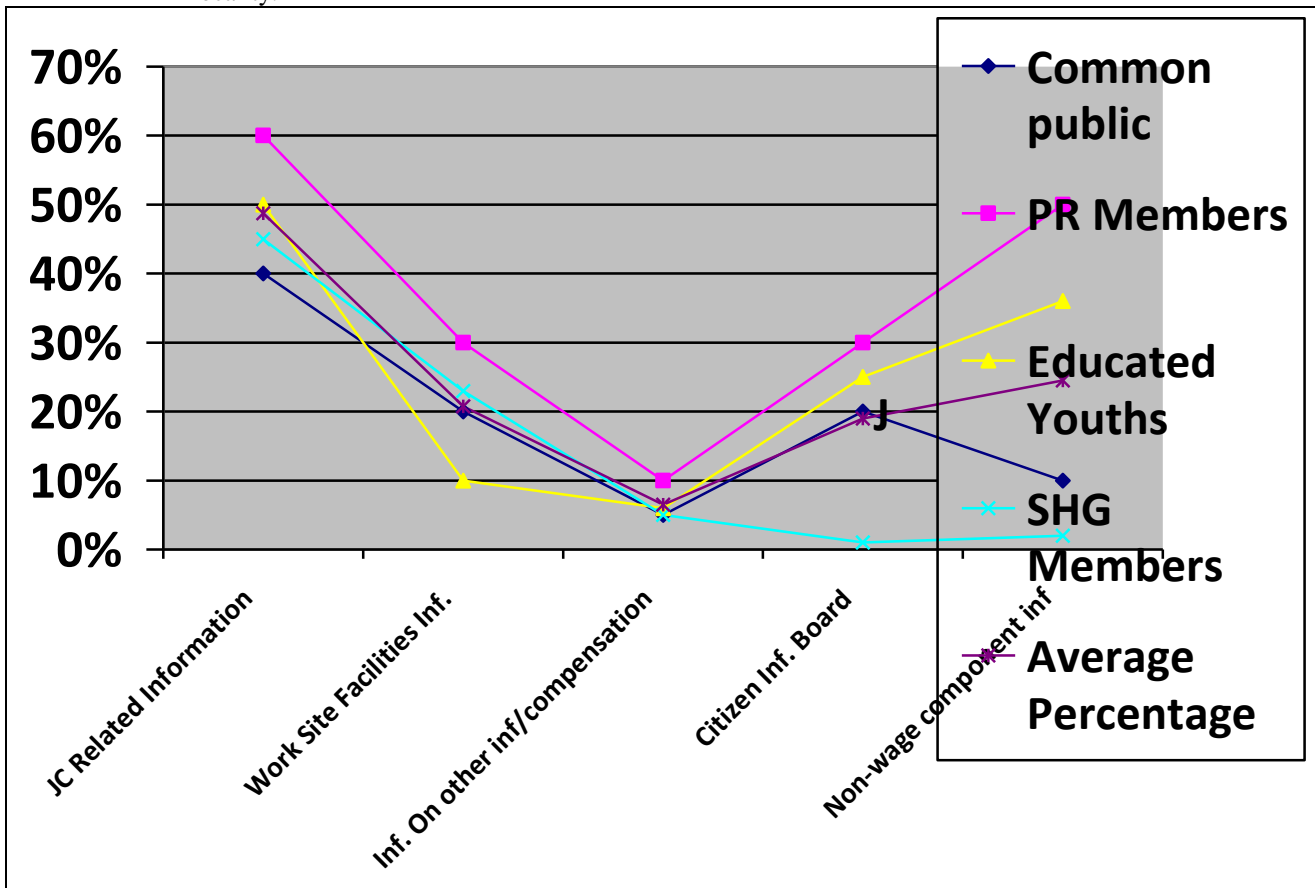


Figure 1. Showing the percentage of respondents' knowledge about the MRNREGA and its rights and entitlements.

Although, the general information/knowledge of the respondents about the MGNREGA as per table 1 above is 88.75%, however, while inquiring about the core benefits, rights, and entitlements under MGNREGA such as Job Card, its contents, updation, and importance, the average percentage of the respondents knowing the scheme is only 48.75%, Concerning the work site facilities such as Shade, first aid box, drinking water provision, caretakers, etc. the average respondents come to 20.75% only. Regarding, Other allowance/compensation to the MGNREGA workers, the knowledge about such facilities is only 5.6%. For Citizen Information Board (CIB) which is an important framework for attaining transparency and accountability, the average knowledge of community respondents is only 19%. And about non-wage components, the knowledge of the respondents is 24.5% which is not at all good for the successful implementation of any program where the role of the user group is vital.

The data as stated is of all average while taking the common publics reports who are the sole beneficiaries of MGNREGA schemes, the percentage shows as 40% knew about JC and its importance, 20% knew worksite facilities, 5% knew about other facilities like free medical treatment, unemployment allowance, delay compensation, etc., 20% knew about Citizen Information Board (CIB) and only 10% knew about the non-wage components.

Since this is the case of MGNREGA which is one of the most popular schemes for employment generation and asset creation reaching out to the common public in the world launch by any country, how can we expect in the case of other programs implemented parallelly in the area? can imagine.

III) RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI).

The enactment of the Right to Information in the year 2005 happened to be one of the best means to acquire information about the programs meant for the poor by the common man. However, in many parts of the state including the study area. RTI has been misused by a certain section of literate and semi-literate youths in many ways for harassing the officers, bargaining for appeasement if correct and authentic information is not furnished by the dealing officers, tactic for delaying the working process, and unnecessary filing of public interest litigations to halt the smooth implementation of projects.

Further, in many cases, people are not availing of the provisions under RTI as their legal right to know the detailed information about the schemes and the process of planning and implementation of the schemes meant for them due to lack of knowledge about the provisions under RTI Act. Hence, many programs implemented in the block are not accounted and known to the public for whom the project is meant for. Hence, proper information and awareness about the Right to Information need to be spread in the area in particular and the state as a whole. Current status of the Act in the State.

- a) Non-disclosure/partial disclosure of information to the Public:
- b) Miss-use of the Act.

The report of non-disclosure/partial disclosure of information to the public despite seeking has been reported from the area and widely circulated on social media platforms as well. Further, the imposition of penalties on the PIO of various work departments by the Information Commissioner is published every now and then in the local newspaper of the state. The reason always is the negligence of the government functionaries to serve the people or to hide their misdeeds intentionally from going public.

The RTI Act in the state is broadly misused and underused by both government functionaries and the public in many ways. Govt. officers/officials intentionally not furnishing information to the public despite the submission of application, lack of stringent punishment and penalty (Rs. 25000/-) only encourage such people committing the mistakes. On the other hand, sometimes the applicants intentionally seek information to disturb the functionaries and sometimes didn't take the information prepared by the department.

Based on the above two facts in the delivery of information, the reports of cases disposed of and the ground of judgment as per the disposed of order uploaded on the commission's website for the year 2021 and penalties imposed against the PIO are given in the following table and the diagram.

Sl. No	Cases disposed of by the Information Commission during 2021 and the indicated reasons for disposal judgment orders.			
	Cases disposed off in absence of the appellant without intimation to Com.	Cases dispose off in absence of both parties	Cases dispose off in presence of both parties	Cases rejected for seeking ir-relevant information
1	17	16	60	7

Table 3. Shows the cases disposed off by the information commission during 2021.

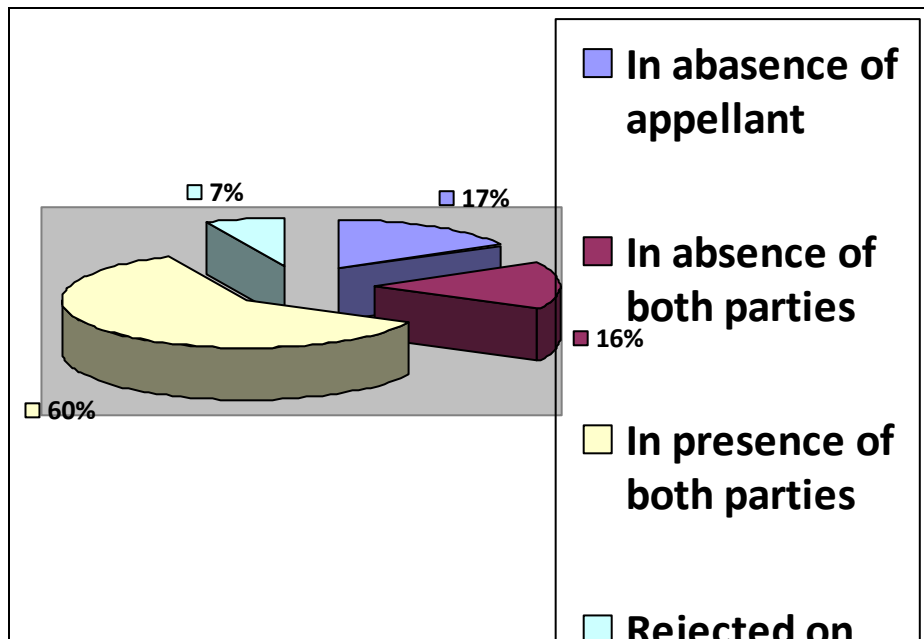


Figure 2. Shows the percentage of cases disposed off by the information commission during 2021.

Out of 296 cases disposed off by the State Information Commission (2021), 100 samples were checked to find the ground of judgment for the disposal of cases and the ground of cases disposed is categorized as Cases disposed off in absence of the appellant by the Commission, In absence of both respondents and the appellant, In presence of both parties and rejected based on the ir-relevant ground made by the appellant.

1. As revealed in the table above, the cases disposed of in presence of both parties is 60% which shows that the majority of information is furnished only after the intervention of the Commission. Many cases are disposed of only after 3 to 4 times hearings.
2. 17% of cases are disposed off ex-parte by the commission in absence of the appellant. The cases of the appellant not being present during the scheduled hearing and not responding to the commission lead the commission to dispose of the cases ex-parte. Such an incident can also be assumed to a foul play between the parties.
3. 16% of the cases were disposed off in absence of both parties viz. the respondents and the appellant. This shows that RTI is not been taken seriously by the information seekers and the PIO in the state. Further, such negligence may be assumed as a mutual arrangement and setting to hide the information between the parties or otherwise.
4. 7% or 7 cases were disposed off for not seeking relevant information and non-received information by applicants without citing any reasons. This again shows that people are taken lightly to RTI Act and it has not been properly utilized by the information seekers and the PIO.

Further, the order of 7 cases of penalties pronounced and imposed by the Information Commissioner to the PIO is found on the Commission's site for the 2020 and 2021 years.

Based on field interaction, more than 80% of respondents don't aware RTI Act, a mere 2% genuinely used it to know things, and the remaining 18% are misusing RTI Act, for personal monetary gain and disturbed the Officers. Thus, proper Information Education and Communication (IEC) to the general public and the PRI members till gram Panchayat/Village is the need of hours for proper use of RTI

iv) **LACK OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION/PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THE OFFICERS INVOLVED IN MIS-MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC FUNDS**

Ineffective initiation of disciplinary proceedings/actions against the person involved in the mismanagement and misutilization of funds as per CCS conduct rules in the state has encouraged many officers and officials involved in malpractices to become corrupted. The accounts of departments are audited through Chartered Accountants empaneled for auditing the accounts and through Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on an annual and intermittent basis. Sometimes, many audit observations are reflected in the departmental audit reports, however, such remarks are somehow met up without rectification of the accounts of expenditures and remedial measures, etc. thereby the leakages in the implementation of schemes are reported now and then in most of the departments in the State. which hampers the developmental process in the area in particular and the State as a whole, which needs to be addressed by the government to streamline the system by punishing those involved in such ill-practices not less than the seizure of pension benefits, termination from services, recovery of the embezzled amount, etc. to set the trend and uprooted the corruption from the system. Mere suspension and service break will just encourage the culprits for doing more corrupt practices in society. Even murderers, rapists, and the officers and officials involved in multi-crore scams are freely roaming and looting the public money meant for the poor and the needy people.

v) **NON-PERFORMANCE OF THE ELECTED PRI MEMBERS.**

The Elected PR Members are supposed to lead the community on the path of development from the grassroots level, however, in the study area, the elected leaders especially women representatives are not at all active to mobilize the community. As revealed through focus group discussion and personal observation around 20 percent of the present PR members at Gram Panchayat Level are literate and the remaining 80% are illiterate which may be the reason for their non-performance. Many members never bother about the developmental activities that are taking place in their village, thereby majority public is not aware of their rights and entitlements under various poverty alleviation programs. Such, an attitude not only deprived their rights but also encourages the functionaries who serve in the locality independently without fear of interference from the public and legal actions, etc. Another reason for the poor performance of development schemes is the non-station of elected members in their respective villages/GPs and nearby circle headquarters who should lead the proper planning, Implementation, and monitoring of the schemes implemented in their locality.

vi) **IR-RESPONSIBILITY ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF THE BENEFICIARIES:**

The irresponsive nature of the beneficiaries availing the benefits under various programs like MGNREGA, PMAY, and NSAP in the state, especially of the referred block is not so appreciable because almost in all cases the mindset of the public is just to avail the benefits, they hardly think of the creation of durable and sustainable assets having the possibilities of livelihood oriented. Many villagers never try to know the actual quantum of amount under MGNREGA wages, sanctioned under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY), NSAP. They are happy with whatsoever, is given by the government agent to them. Prior to the launching of the digital India program by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India in the year 2015. Such innocent beneficiaries were amply looted by many of the govt. functionaries and PR members of their rights and entitlements. However, with compulsory DBT through PFMS to the accounts of the beneficiaries, the beneficiaries are getting their wages and entitlements. Despite having several scopes for getting information about the schemes from which they are availing the benefits, many of them are still not interested to know their entitlements and the provisions.

It is, therefore, the duty of every genuine individual who is directly or indirectly getting the benefits from government schemes to take ownership of the assets created under various schemes and at least know their rights and entitlements from the government and the agencies implementing the scheme and they should be the part of the scheme planning, implementation, and monitoring in the area.

3. **ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SMOOTH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES IN THE AREA:**

Good governance has proved to be the best and most important tool for the effective planning and implementation of various development schemes by any department. In the process, transparency and accountability are priority areas of the government

where the community gets the basic information like rights and entitlement provisions about the programs meant for them in the area. Therefore, ensuring transparency and accountability are maintained while implementing various rural development vis-à-vis poverty alleviation programs launched by the center and the state governments through the different departments.

Ensuring transparency and accountability, particularly in the referred areas needs the following initiatives for the community:

1. Provide basic orientation and awareness about the appropriate use of the Right to Information.
2. Permanent station of elected PR members in their respective GPs/Villages.
3. Third-party monitoring and evaluation of various poverty alleviation programs of the locality.
4. Pro-active participation of educated youths from the locality in the planning and implementation of the development programs.
5. Encourage the community/user groups of various development programs to raise their voice against any sort of disparity to the public.
6. Mandatory conduct of Social Audit of the development schemes especially MGNREGA, PMAY (G), NSAP, and Fifteen Finance Commission (FFC) Grants.
7. Involvement of SHGs in planning and implementation of development programs. And
8. Encourage maximum participation of the community and vulnerable section in the Gram Sabha.
9. Display the Public Information Board (PIB) of each work in important locations.
10. Mandatory Capacity Building and other awareness generation training to GP and Block level government functionaries.
11. Prompt and quick grievance redressal mechanism at Gram Panchayat, Block, and District levels.

Once, the suggested mechanisms are made available in the locality, no such outside forces shall be able to interfere in the development process and the equitable sharing of the benefits to the community shall be inevitable in the area. However, the role of Local Self-governments (PRIs) and the State Government shall be crucial for ensuring transparency and accountability in the implementation of various poverty alleviation programs implemented under the Chayangtajo Community Development Block in particular and the state as a whole through proper dissemination of IEC in the area.

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1. Social Audit Report (unpublished), SAU, Arunachal Pradesh (2017-18).
2. MoRD, GoI website (www.mgnrega.nic.in)
3. State Information Commission website (https://arnsic.nic.in/contact_us.html)
4. Personal Interaction with the community.
5. Questionnaires/schedule for collection of opinions.
6. Focus Group Discussion.