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**PRIA**

# *Research Report*

December 2021



# Institutionalising Online Citizen Consultations for Public Policymaking in India

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## Introduction

Citizen participation in policymaking is the cornerstone of a mature and consolidated democracy. With growing citizen aspirations, public policymaking that affects millions of citizens cannot rely only on the representative and procedural democratic mechanisms but must embrace participatory and substantive democratic mechanisms and practices. India, despite being the largest democracy in the world, has often relied on procedural democracy and created very little space for direct citizen consultation in the national and sub-national policymaking at a substantive scale. The emergence of local governance institutions in the early 90's created some significant spaces for citizen participation in decision making related to local development. Nevertheless, such spaces proved to be more meaningful in rural areas (through Gram Sabhas) as compared to urban areas. In the last decade, many public programmes have emphasised the importance of citizen participation in the effective implementation and monitoring of these programmes.

In the past few years, with the rise of technology innovations, many governmental initiatives have tried to leverage technology for soliciting citizen consultations in public policymaking. A notable example includes MyGov.in platform created by the Indian government to seek suggestions and feedback on various public policies and programmes. On several occasions, the Ministries and Departments have invited citizens to share their concerns, comments, and suggestions online regarding a specific policy or programme initiative. However, in the absence of a robust mechanism and coherent laws requiring mandatory citizen consultations, often such initiatives have short-lived and dissipated.

The democratic governance in India has been adversely affected by the pandemic. During the pandemic, citizens experienced unidirectional communication from the government without much opportunity for participation in dialogue and deliberation, a fundamental requirement in a functional democracy. The absent legal framework for organising online consultations with citizens and 'affected persons' in making public laws and policies belies the government's efforts of putting citizens at the centre of policymaking. The practice of citizen consultation in making public laws and policies has been sporadic, whimsical, and inadequate. In several cases where suggestions, comments and feedback have been sought from citizens on draft Bills or draft Rules, there was no obligation on part of the government to 'close the feedback loop' by disclosing which of these feedback from the citizens were considered, have or have not been included, and why.

This study, *Institutionalising Online Citizen Consultation for Public Policymaking in India*, undertaken by *Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)* with support from the *International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)*, lays out how citizen participation has historically been practiced in multiple spheres and dives deeper into the question of potentials and barriers of doing citizen consultation online, especially for policymaking. It maps the existing interventions in the field of online citizen engagement and suggests good practices for each phase of citizen consultation. Based on the gaps found in the existing discourse, recommendations are made for doing online citizen consultation most meaningfully and inclusively when making public laws and policies.

# Research Methodology

## *Research Questions*

The research questions of the study were as follows:

- What are the current online mechanisms and practices for consulting citizens in making laws and policies by the governments? What lessons can be drawn from the national and international experiences?
- How have the non-governmental organisations attempted to influence the policymaking using online citizen participation?
- What principles can be suggested in making online citizen consultations reliable, inclusive, and continuous?

## *Data Collection*

The data for this research study was collected over a period of four months from August to November 2021. For data collection, we conducted in-depth individual interviews and online focus group discussions and roundtables with civil society and non-profit leaders and practitioners. The civil society in India has been promoting engagement of citizens by facilitating and acting as intermediaries between the citizens and the government. They have a rich experience of working with the marginalised communities and understanding their lived realities to address power inequalities in the society. In the last few years, multiple initiatives have started that have used or leveraged technology to build an agency of the citizens and promote their engagement. Our discussions with them proved useful as they offered insights from their experience of promoting citizen participation in wide range of initiatives. While selecting the study sample, we came across a few social enterprises which were either working with marginalised communities or influencing the landscape of online participation. Those leaders were also selected in the sample. The interviews and roundtable discussions were also chosen because that helped in building the civil society's ownership on the issue. These interviews and roundtable discussions with the leaders were also important as we see them as our allies for working towards institutionalising online citizen participation.

## *Sample*

The sample included a total of 15 individual interviews and three roundtable/ focus group discussions. To break it down, there were 11 interviews with civil society leaders who have been using technology platforms for citizen engagement, two interviews with civil society leaders working on budget and policy accountability related issues and two interviews with the heads of the research institutes. Additionally, a desk review was also carried out to analyse eleven international case studies and identify good practices.

### Analytical Framework

In order to examine examples of various national and international as well as governmental and non-governmental initiatives that promoted online citizen participation, we used a simple yet meaningful framework: **Inform, Listen and Consult, Consolidate and Prioritise, and Feedback.**

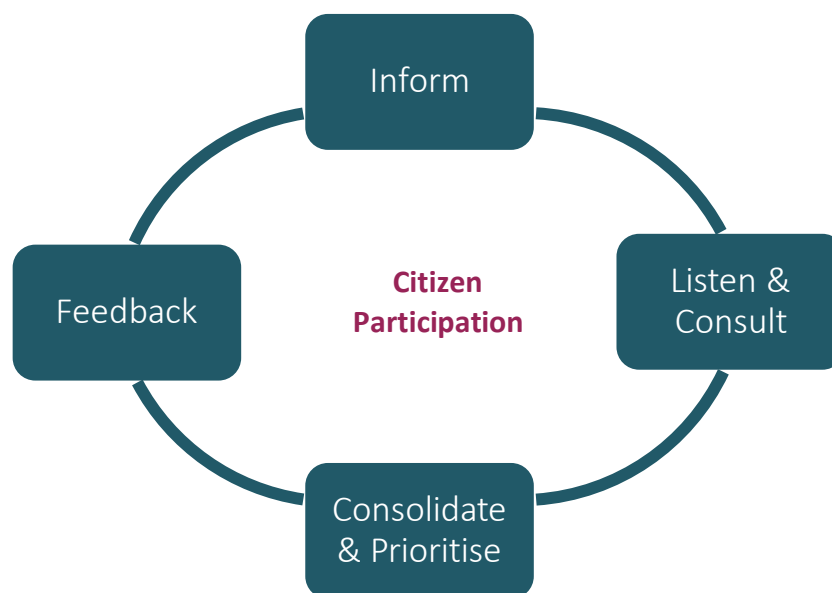


Figure 1 – Analytical Framework for Citizen Participation

The assumption behind this framework is that the institution which seeks citizen participation in developing a programme or policy must design participation in the following manner.

**Inform:** Communicating directly to citizens about the details of the programme or policy under consideration. Make citizen aware and educate them about the initiative. Prepare them to engage by conveying what the institution needs from them in developing a programme or policy and why citizen participation is critical.

**Listen and Consult:** Engage with citizens by asking questions and listening to their responses. Ask specific questions to get quality information on issues and ideas relevant to the programme or policy under consideration.

**Consolidate and Prioritise:** Collect, analyse, and evaluate citizen responses on an ongoing basis. Different methods require the use of different tools, but the analysis will surface important trends about various aspects of the programme or policy.

**Feedback:** Communicate findings back to the citizens to keep them in the loop. This will ensure that citizens are aware of how their participation has influenced the programme or policy.

## Findings of the Study

The findings of the study emanating from the in-depth individual interviews, online focus group discussions, round tables, and literature review are organised in following sub-sections:

- Trajectory of Citizen Participation
- Potential of Information Technology to Accelerate Citizen Participation
- Contextual Barriers to Online Citizen Participation
- Use of Technology in Citizen Engagement – A typology of purposes and mechanisms

### Trajectory of Citizen Participation

The discourse on citizen participation in development, democracy and governance is omnipresent. Over the last half a century, building on the participatory innovations by the civil society and social movements, first the multilateral and bilateral international development agencies and then the national and sub-national governments have been using the phrase participation in almost every new policy document. As Cornwall (2006) noted, “From the 1970s, the decade in which Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1972/1992) was written and in which the ideas that sparked the waves of participatory research and popular education flowed freely, notions of participation shifted in emphasis between ‘beneficiary participation’, ‘community participation’, ‘stakeholder participation’, ‘user/ consumer participation’, and ‘citizen participation’. More recently, new phrases such as citizen engagement and civic engagement have been added to the list. The trajectory of the discourse and practice can be summarised as follows.

***Participation from below*** – Since the 1970s and 80s participation of people has been a way for the excluded to affirm their demands and challenge power through organised groups and social movements. It sees participation as more than consultation with loosely defined communities. In the Indian context, it has focused on the Gandhian philosophies and learning from everyday experiences. The social movements of the excluded and marginalised groups to access and control natural resources be it with the forest dwellers or strengthening women’s movement for literacy and education in rural parts of the country.

***Participation as ‘Beneficiaries’, ‘Users’ and ‘Managers’ of development projects*** – In the 80s and 90s, promoted by international development agencies and national governments (many a times through local NGOs) participation was used in project delivery. This was seen in the sectoral programmes, such as water, health, irrigation, etc., where participation often took the form of users’ committees, which could help target and deliver services to those who most needed them. It opened up space for peoples’ knowledge and involvement in development

planning and implementation, this beneficiary approach still often positioned people more passively as ‘users and choosers’ rather than as ‘makers and shapers’ of their own policies, programmes, or futures. Gaventa and Cornwall (2000) argue for the transformation of the practice of citizen participation such that the status quo is challenged, and citizens are seen as the makers and shapers of social policy.

*Shifting back the focus on ‘primary’ stakeholders’ participation (from stakeholders’ participation)* – The World Bank in 1994 defined participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them. (World Bank 1994; Reitbergen McCrachen and Narayan, 1998). The term ‘stakeholder’ is somewhat ambiguous as it could signify representatives of the civil society, private sector, government, and donors, but not necessarily indicate if the poor were represented or excluded within these sectors. While some argued for modifying this definition to include ‘primary stakeholders’ (Tandon and Cordeiro, 1998), by which it usually meant grassroots level. This version, however, is rarely used in official documents or practices.

*Participation in Democratic Governance for exercising the Rights of Citizenship* – With the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments in the Indian Constitution, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural areas and Municipalities in urban areas were given constitutional status which gave rise to the new concepts and discourses of participatory governance and participatory citizenship. It meant that the citizens are not just the beneficiaries, users, voters, or consumers, but political right-holders and political contestants in the local and decentralised governance. This also enabled confronting the existing hierarchical structures. It changed the relations of power considerably as reservations in local governments made way for women’s representation. For women to perform their duties and responsibilities as elected representatives, many issues, such as patriarchal backlash from the communities, violence against women, etc. came into the mainstream. This also brought forth the voices, experiences, and interests of women into the politics for further strengthening and transforming the capacities of local governments and decision-making of the elected representatives.

*Participation for demanding transparency and accountability* – The Right to Information and the Anti-Corruption Movements in 2011 were two examples of demanding transparency and accountability from the government. A few other examples of social accountability included annual social audits of the government programmes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which gives power to the Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat to undertake the monitoring and social audits of all the projects in the scheme. The framework of social accountability has also been used by the development practitioners in India for community monitoring in the health programmes. These efforts were mostly inclined towards monitoring the implementation of the programmes using tools such as report cards, score cards etc. However, only limited investment into accountability for policymaking has been made.

*Participation as Active Citizenship* – Active Citizenship is a form of participation, the importance of which is recognised in the International Human Rights framework for realisation of the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. “...the exercise of civil and political rights



permits participation in the decision-making processes that may lead to the realisation of economic and social rights” (Logolink, 2013). Active citizenship is also a means to deepen the roots of democracy and ensure inclusive development. In practice, the concept of active citizenship entails conceiving citizens as equal and rightful stakeholders to dialogue and negotiate with the decision-makers to influence decision-making in the formal and informal institutions. These could be in matters related to education, health, livelihoods, development etc.

## Potential of Information Technology to Accelerate Citizen Participation

The foregoing analysis of the trajectory of citizen participation provides a rich, diverse, and mixed history and experience of participation. It underscores the evolving and dynamic nature of the concept, purpose, and practice of citizen participation. In the last decade, with the emergence of digital and information technology in all spheres of human activities, copious efforts are being undertaken to make development, democracy, and governance more inclusive by using digital and information technology. The champions of tech-driven development community often advocate a range of virtues associated with the digital and information technology in promoting citizen participation.

*Ease of participation in connecting remotely* – Digital technology has filled the non-communication gap of long physical distances that was quite a reality till very recently. It has enabled communication and participation between multiple actors, both State and non-State in multiple arenas through most commonly used devices such as mobile phones, computers and laptops and Internet connectivity.

*Scaled-up outreach in limited resources (time and money)* – The constraint of time and money to reach out to the people collectively in masses can be overcome using online platforms. Multiple social networking sites and online meeting platforms that the citizens and other non-State actors use for communication with each other across geographies, as well as in some cases with the State actors allow for higher and scaled-up outreach.

*Access to decision makers* – Multiple experiments and initiatives using the digital technology has enabled citizens to access the decision-makers remotely, without having to encounter the bureaucratic hierarchies physically. The anonymity and shorter time period (without missing one’s work and wages) required in registering the complaints and/or verifying the eligibility in public programmes is an opportunity to accelerate citizen’s engagement for accessing entitlements or registering grievance.

*Integration of information from multiple ministries and/or silos of domains and jurisdictions* – Online portals have enabled putting information from multiple departments and ministries or

the silos of domains and jurisdictions together in an integrated fashion, such that one does not have to spend time in physically going to look for information from the right source or to meet the right government official from one department to another.

### *Artificial Intelligence – AI based labelling and sorting for ease of analysis and decision making –*

The Artificial Intelligence technology, also known as Machine Intelligence, refers to the ability of a computer to perform tasks associated with intelligent human beings. AI has the potential to sort and analyse a vast and diverse quantity of information with predefined labelling which otherwise would have been cumbersome and daunting to handle manually. This might encourage the public agencies to seek suggestions and feedback from citizens in a rather inclusive manner.

## Contextual Barriers to Online Citizen Participation

*Digital divide* – The fundamental challenge in India remains the access to Internet and technology. While the access and inclusivity has enormously improved across India in the previous few years, still there are only pockets of population that have continuous high-speed Internet connectivity. As per the data of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, in cities like Delhi and Bangalore, there are two internet connections for one person. At the same time, many groups continue to face exclusion from high-speed Internet access and from technology, thereby impacting their access to technology-based services. According to the National Family Health Survey-5, disaggregated data shows that only 24.6 percent rural women and 48.7 percent rural men have ever used the Internet. Similar gender inequality is visible in the urban context with the figures showing 51.8 percent urban women having ever used internet as opposed to 72.5 percent urban men. Moreover, there are chronic inequalities based on other intersecting factors such as, income, language, literacy, disability, caste, and religion.

### Infrastructural Challenges to Online Citizen Participation in India

- unstable supply of electricity or power cuts in many parts of the country
- poor signal/ network of the telecom service provider
- higher pricing of the good quality devices with higher storage capacities (pricing depends upon the device manufacturing companies)
- higher pricing of the high-speed internet broadband plans/ mobile data plans (depends on the internet service provider)

The infrastructural challenges at hand include unstable supply of electricity or power cuts in many parts of the country, poor signal/ network of the telecom service provider, higher pricing of the good quality devices with higher storage capacities (pricing depends upon the device manufacturing companies), and higher pricing of the high-speed internet broadband plans/ mobile data plans (depends on the internet service provider), among others.

***Polarisation of information due to predesigned algorithm*** – Information and news that Internet users receive online to read or hear is based on the predesigned algorithm such that the users receive more and more information according to their searches and browsing histories. This creates a cycle of polarised opinions as multiplicity of voices and opinions are often less tolerated or accounted for. Due to this, there is deep-seated polarisation of political views and opinions in the citizens. Thus, there is a growing phenomenon of creating echo-chambers or information cocoon wherein similar views and opinions are recycled and thereby reinforced. It blocks out the diversity of perspectives.

***Majority takes it all*** – In a majoritarian democratic State and culture, there is a risk of important minority voices being overlooked or ignored. These could be the marginalised peoples' voices or unpopular opinion that does not get enough traction and prioritisation. Interaction to influence different interest groups or perspectives, and facilitation to coalesce around a shared agenda is not easy in merely online consultations. Trusting online consultation without offline relationship is obstructed.

***Untrained staff*** – Efforts are underway to enhance individual and organisational capacities for using technology in the functioning of governance institutions. However, these capacities vary across levels of government machinery and are the weakest at the district, city, and block levels, at present. Most staff are not trained to facilitate citizen participation using the technology.

***Sense of a safer space*** – Public policymaking is intrinsically political. Discussions on social media are often loaded with threats, trolling, abuse which may cause a sense of discomfort in engaging online. This poses a huge barrier in building a positive culture of participation and civic discourse. Safe space requires building mutual trust and respect especially for the marginalised people and groups to share and communicate their vulnerabilities and lived experiences. Online modalities may not enable deeply listening to each other's point of view which is an important aspect of creating a safe space.

***Getting relevant responses can be difficult*** – The promoter of citizen participation may face the challenge of receiving mixed responses based on personal experiences, opinions, perceptions, evidence etc. This may make the task of finding relevant responses more difficult. A search for pointed and objective response might also be prone to existing biases of the institution seeking citizen participation. This is particularly relevant for online responses where opportunities for seeking further clarifications and probing are limited.

***Extractive nature of information gathering*** – Information gathering exercise, even in non-digital modalities has largely been an extractive exercise where communities and respondents many a times do not get to know how their data will be used. A similar trend is visible in using the digital modality. A growing awareness over the data privacy is also linked to this concern.

***Limitation of the technology adopted*** – Research has shown that the U.S. government's efforts towards Transparency and Open Government, despite having a more citizen-led vision could

not yield results. The technological management system which had its limitations in terms of content's quality and accuracy became a challenge. Moreover, implementing a more refined idea classification or labelling system to sort several types of ideas would have resulted in more meaningful discussions.

## Use of Technology in Citizen Participation – A typology of purposes and mechanisms

This section lays out the landscape of the civil society initiatives and government programmes in the use of technology for citizen engagement in India. It elaborates on the emerging typology of purposes and mechanisms as evidenced from various Indian and international case studies. These have been organised around five major purposes of citizen engagement – **Inform**, **Access**, **Redressal**, **Petitioning**, and **Consultation and Feedback**.

INFORM	<b>Dissemination of information and online campaigns:</b> Nyaaya, Mobile Vaani, Open Budgets India
ACCESS	<b>Linking citizens to government schemes and programmes:</b> Haqdarshak, Bandhu, Jandarpan, Jan Soochna, Mera App – Sochnaprenuers by DEF
REDRESSAL	<b>Grievance redressal:</b> Paid a Bribe and I Change My City by Janaagraha
PETITIONING	<b>Highlighting policy issues through online petitioning:</b> Jhatkaa and Change.org
CONSULTATION & FEEDBACK	<b>Crowdsourcing ideas and suggestions for policy/law making:</b> Civis, MyGov.in

Figure 2 – Online Citizen Participation: Emerging Typology of Purposes

## Indian Case Studies

### INFORM – Dissemination of information and online IEC campaigns

#### Highlights

- Fully digital channels for information dissemination will not be effective with the rural and other marginalised communities as they do not have adequate access to the Internet and technology. Online channels for information dissemination could be more effective if it collaborates with the organisations which have physical presence in the community.
- It is very important to gather and provide relevant budgetary information to people for transparency in fiscal policies. If the information is relevant, it can further influence budget planning in the future. Participatory budgeting has the potential to bring transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in local development.

#### OPEN BUDGETS INDIA

Open Budgets India (OBI) is an online platform that started in 2017-18 as the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) realised that despite many government efforts being made in the field of Open Data, such as, Mygov.in and Open Government Data India, there are still gaps to inform and have citizen participation in the budgetary transparency. OBI, an initiative of CBGA was conceptualised to bring the budgetary information and analysis into the public discourse for greater transparency related to the budget allocation and utilisation. Their focus is on putting forth locally relevant, usable, accessible, and simplified budgetary information in a timely manner on OBI portal (<https://openbudgetsindia.org>). The OBI online platform has enabled them in following through their vision of making the budgets more transparent and easier to understand for the public and this is complemented with the community engagement efforts with more personalised and face-to-face interactions so that citizens can engage in the public financing discourse (who maybe literate but budgetary knowledge even amongst literate population is still a gap). Many a times when the district-level data is not available in the public forum for CBGA to analyse the trends, they use the Right to Information Act to source the information. They believe that the trends observed, and analysis produced in the process of simplifying the relevant budgetary information should be used for making policy recommendations. Talking about the different ways of developing people's budget using participatory methodologies, one of the CBGA team members, articulates, "the Panchayats preparing and submitting their own budgets to the district authorities can be considered. But since the Panchayats do not have access or do not use the technology for preparing those budgets, the bottom-up process will not have the digital interface". While there maybe a few good examples of this model, however, it is a challenge to scale-up this model or to reverse the existing way because

the high-priority or national flagship programmes get more focus in the budgetary allocation.

### **NYAAYA**

Nyaaya was incubated at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy in late 2016 and launched in 2017. It is a tech-legal start up and has a website digital interface which is a repository of all the laws. The key purpose is to disseminate legal information for increasing knowledge and awareness about legal rights of the public at large. It does not engage at the stage of policymaking per se, but only engage itself after a policy has come into effect. It uses organisational website and social media channels to increase awareness and disseminate information in audio, video, and text formats. The information on the website is organised thematically. The content is available in English, Hindi, and Kannada. The information is simple, actionable, and authoritative because it is vetted by a set of lawyers. To make the platform more accessible, it plans to expand in multiple languages and make the information more relevant for the rural population. On the portal, there is an Ask Nyaaya section where people can ask questions and get answers. Its strength lies in being well-connected to the lawyer community and the model relies on leveraging the technology to expand the legal knowledge of the citizens.

It has explored multiple strategies to diversify its outreach. During the pandemic, it created a WhatsApp group with the lawyers where the lawyers provided legal information to the users. It has also collaborated with other organisation like Gram Vaani in rural Bihar on Violence Against Women. Nyaaya team provided answers to the legal questions that the community in Nalanda had, and this information was further disseminated on Mobile Vaani channel run by Gram Vaani. Mobile Vaani runs in Hindi and a local dialect. In this way, legal information is disseminated to the Mobile Vaani users which is in sync with the local realities and contextually relevant. The other way it has leveraged the technology is through social media platforms with an online community of 90,000 people. It also works with educational institutions, and the student volunteers to help with the dissemination. It plans to start an online campaign with Instagram and We the Young, explaining laws by the young people for the young people. It is creating content on YouTube as it gets more traction for regional audience. It is in Hindi and Kannada. Earlier it used to translate the content from English to Hindi. However, having realised that this resulted in the loss of nuances and contextuality, it plans to partner with local organisations for better dissemination.

### **MOBILE VAANI**

Mobile Vaani is a mobile-based voice media platform of Gram Vaani. It has a unique model wherein it enables people to call up from their basic analog mobile phone to a designated phone number and register their complaints/ grievances in their local dialect. The team which monitors the platform publishes the relevant inputs from the people on the platform. People can also listen to other recording on the channels. In this way, it enables a two-way communication. Hence, the platform

serves the function of information dissemination on multiple issues related to health, education etc., listening to the concerns and issues of the people and through offline mechanism they communicate these concerns with the concerned authorities.

## ACCESS – Linking citizens to government schemes and programmes

### Highlights

- Low digital penetration is one of the biggest challenges that citizens face in accessing services through online systems. Multiple efforts are needed to increase people's digital access, awareness, and literacy in linking them to government schemes and programmes.
- Citizens' application submission still requires offline interface. It is mostly grievances from the citizens that can be resolved through online mediums.
- It is important for the local district officers to be digitally trained to respond to the online queries and grievances from the citizens.

### JAN SOOCHNA PORTAL

The Jan Sookhna Portal was conceptualised by a network of CSOs working in Rajasthan under the Sookhna Evam Rozgar Adhikar Network in 2017 and it was launched by the Government of Rajasthan in 2018. The process started in 2016 when the network submitted a report on the challenges related to timely delivery of ration for the citizens. The government accepted the recommendation to open the information of the Abeyance list that was disclosed until then and was causing non-transparency in the ration data. This resulted in the initiation of the dialogue for providing transparent information and grievance redressal mechanism for citizens for all other schemes under various ministries. The department of Information Technology started the Digital Dialogue with the network to develop the portal, Jan Sookhna. The portal which has a website interface consists of integrated information of all the schemes under various ministries. The portal enables users to get the information related to multiple ministries and file their grievance. It has a helpline number and grievances can also be registered on call. Intermediation is provided through the Information Resource Centre equipped with an e-mitra (a facilitator) and being run at the block level for applying for benefits under a given scheme.

### JANDARPAN

Jandarpan is an initiative of Samarthan – Centre for Development Support working in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh since 1995 on participatory governance. Jandarpan platform was developed during the pandemic to facilitate the migrant workers to access benefits from the public programmes. Jan Darpan supported the migrants stuck during the lockdown without any resources. The migrants who came back faced multiple

challenges in accessing services and entitlements, such as ration, pension, or livelihoods, from the state government. Toll-free helpline numbers dedicated to the migrant workers were not functional all the time. Samarthan decided to develop the interface to streamline the process between the local administration and the citizens. In the beginning, they only had integrated limited schemes for ration (under the Public Distribution System) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) but expanded it over a period of time. They had brought the local administration on board to administer and address the requests that were coming on the portal. The cycle started where people were putting their requests and a local administration was administering it. The idea was that citizens who were excluded from the entitlements and benefits can have a platform to take their issues forward. There were about 12-14 schemes on the portal and as the need arises in future, they would include more schemes into it. The primary function is that of grievance redressal, for a citizen who is entitled to the benefits but is not receiving the same. It does not allow one to register for the scheme, that requires offline interface for them to submit their documentation to the respective Gram Panchayats or concerned authorities. The platform serves as an intermediation between the government and citizens. Samarthan staff enables that by supporting the citizens in filing their complaint online as digital access and literacy is a huge gap. It also allows the administrators to see the emerging trends from the complaints which can influence the policy planning and implementation. The portal requires logging in using a phone number, that can be that of a complainant or the intermediary supporting them.

### HAQDARSHAK

Haqdarshak uses technology solutions to deliver government entitlements and benefits for last-mile service delivery. The Haqdarshak mobile platform hosts information about all welfare schemes and it maps eligibility of various welfare schemes to citizens. The eligibility is based on the identifiers of the particular citizen, which is customised information for them. It is based on the eligibility parameters of the specific programme laid out by the government. In the beginning, they kept a subscription fee for citizens to access this information through the mobile application. As they realised the challenge of getting people to download this app through the Play Store, an offline architecture was introduced. They introduced the concept of Haqdarshak. It means that people who use the app can go door to door and create awareness about the platform. These Haqdarshaks could be paid by CSR projects, or they can earn through this model by charging citizens.

### BANDHU

Bandhu uses technology to streamline the rural to urban migration processes by working with the migrant workers, contractors, and employers in India. Its technology products reduce transaction cost, improve time management, and provide quality assurance. It has developed a digital platform which connects the workers with the contractors and the employers. If a worker wants to get a better paying job quickly without paying too



much or a contractor wants the right number of workers or the right kind of tender at the right price or an employer wants certain number of workers at a certain price and timeframe, the platform solves these problems effectively. However, it also provides in-person intermediation for a lot of workers who do not have a bank account or a pan card. It also facilitates access to workers' entitlements through a digital platform in collaboration with other organisations which work as intermediaries between the workers and the district administrations or Municipal Corporations or Industry Associations. It tracks a migration corridor between East Odisha and Gujarat with an objective to support over one million workers. It also works on the issue of affordable rental housing through digitisation, standardisation, and price rationalisation. It facilitates the interface between the house owners and the workers for mutual benefit.

### MERA APP - SOOCHNAPRENEUR

Mera App is the digital interface in the form of mobile application developed by Digital Empowerment Foundation as part of the Sochnapreneur programme. The project works towards bridging the gap between the citizens and government by creating more awareness and linking citizens to their right to entitlement and benefits. It developed an offline infrastructure in which the ground team conducted campaigns to generate awareness on the schemes through door-to-door visits, formal and informal meetings, and organising camps for information dissemination; conducting surveys to link the citizens to their entitlements; creating a database of the existing schemes in each district and continuing the monitoring of the same. In this design, the app provides a catalogue of welfare schemes in the areas of Health, Education, Social security, Finance and Livelihoods. It is a multilingual app that runs in the offline and online mode that citizens can use to do a follow up of their applications for entitlements.

## REDRESSAL – Grievance redressals

### Highlights

- An effective grievance redressal mechanism is a good source of citizen feedback about government programmes and policies.
- The people who will be directly impacted by a programme or policy must be consulted.

### JANAAGRAHA

Janaagraha initiated two platforms for engaging citizens in grievance redressals. **I Paid a Bribe** is a crowdsourcing platform with a desktop interface that enables citizens to report their complaint related to bribery. The platform is used to generate city level reports by Janaagraha in the fight against corruption in India. **I Change My City** is another initiative that works towards developing participatory ward budgets and crowdsourcing citizens' complaints related to civic amenities for grievance redressal by the municipalities. I Change My City also has a desktop interface for the citizens to report their complaint. I

Change My City has an offline interface for participatory budgetary processes that has been carried out in Bangalore, Mangalore, and Vishakhapatnam. From their experience of doing participatory budgeting, they think that citizens are able to meaningfully engage and connect more locally in the neighbourhood. They are more interested in getting the problem fixed related to infrastructure like roads, footpaths, parks, streetlights, solid waste management system, etc. Decentralisation works in this case because it brings back the response system closer home. There is heightened level engagement through ward committees, associations etc. that are scalable through technology. This allows larger access of information even for other people. They have engaged closely with platforms such as Swacchta, developed as part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which started off as a way for citizens to connect with cities on put their grievance. In that process, they observed that the ministry is open to gathering feedback from the citizens to verify what cities are claiming in terms of solid waste management systems, garbage free cities or even the qualities of infrastructure that cities have etc. Within this citizen engagement process, they are also looking to galvanise citizens to participate for budgets at scale. Technology allows one to do this at scale. Otherwise, one is not able reach the adequate number of citizens. At the same time, what is more effective is more regular meetings through the ward committees and complementary online and offline models etc. Technology allows participating in the ward meetings when one is traveling etc. so that one has the voice and agency to impact the outcome even if they are not physically present.

The nature of consultation according to Janaagraha is related to who is being consulted and for what. Even in policymaking, not everybody needs to be consulted because not everybody understands policymaking, but people whose lives are impacted by the policy, need to be consulted.

## PETITIONING - Highlighting policy issues through petitioning

### Highlights

- Petition platforms for important models for civic education and citizen-led campaigning.
- Petition pathways directed towards the key decision-makers can be strengthened for direct citizen participation.

### CHANGE.ORG

Change.org is an international organisation that has been working in India since their inception. Their website interface allows civil society groups and individuals to initiate petition campaigns for social change issues. The Change.org model is based on the premise that certain social issues do not get enough attention from the mainstream media, but these concern the citizens and civil society groups considerably. The platform provides a space to the citizens to start their own petitions such that the issue comes

into the limelight, more people talk about it, and it gets attention from the media as well as the policymakers and decision-makers are informed about the demand of certain group of citizens. Change.org has a network of decision-makers. As the first step, they train the petitioner in drafting a petition and once it receives the signatures of thousands of others online, they facilitate the process of the decision-makers receiving the demands stated in the petition for their action. They have a tool that allows the decision-makers to receive the alerts as the issue is receiving more and more signatures. That is how the public pressure works. The petitions are addressed to the specific individual decision-maker or the concerned authority with a specific ask or demand. There is also a decision-maker sign-up option on the portal for the decision-makers to see the petitions and act. A model such as this one has the potential to provide civic education through training as well as bridging the gap between the citizens and the decision-makers for reversing actions that are against the human rights principles.

### JHATKAA.ORG

Jhatkaa.org is an organisation that uses digital media for collective action to promote citizen participation. They have an issue focus on Air Quality and Climate and Gender and Sexuality. When they start a Campaign, they start with mapping out the decision-makers for a particular issue to who need to be influenced, what their positions are on the issue and what are the tactics that could be used to influence them. One avenue is when the government opens up for public consultation, they respond to those consultations. However, a lot of times, those processes are tokenistic and not meaningful enough, but where they see value is informing citizens of these processes.

They use petitions as an opinion gathering tool that can be circulated to people for getting more signatures. Once they have gotten citizens signing up to a key demand, they work with the partners who bring in research and policy analysis expertise. They turn the issue that is understandable by an average citizen, get them to sign up and take them to relevant decision-makers. They submit the petition to the decision-makers and then with each petition, it takes a different turn because it depends on how they will engage. However, their tactic also is to influence the media, especially the media channel that will work for that particular decision-maker. Now that decision-makers also have social media presence, they leverage that as well. Sometimes they do a call-in campaign, where after they have submitted a few representations and they are yet to get a response, they get representatives to call-in in that decision-makers office. This can be a very useful pressure building technique because getting a hundred calls is not something most of the government offices in the administration is used to. This idea of collective action helps in the voices of citizens being heard.

## IDEATION – crowdsourcing ideas and suggestions for programme planning

### Highlights

- Digital methods, such as SMS text, social media, and government discussion forums (MyGov.in) to reach out to citizens for crowdsourcing ideas can be leveraged to scale up citizen participation.
- Well-equipped systems and multi-sectoral partnerships between civil society groups, national, state, and local governments, and private sector may be needed to scale up crowdsourcing ideas and suggestions for programme planning.

### SMART CITY MISSION

Citizen participation emerged as an important arena for the municipalities while undertaking the planning and development of their Smart City Plan. An emphasis in the Smart Cities Mission Guidelines (Ministry of Urban Development, 2015) was given to an engagement strategy that involves better communication by government, soliciting feedback for problem identification, co-creating solutions and involving local citizen champions, while ensuring the active participation of various groups of people, such as youth and students associations, welfare associations, tax-payers associations, senior citizens, special interest groups, slum dwellers and others.

The citizen engagement processes were undertaken by the cities selected by the Smart City Mission. In a research conducted by PRIA in collaboration with Bloomberg Philanthropies, it was identified that the citizen engagement fell broadly under four stages, (i) generating awareness about the concept of a smart city, (ii) mobilising citizens for gathering opinion and suggestions on vision, goals, and developmental priorities for both city-wide solutions and choice for area based development; (iii) assimilating citizens' opinion and suggestions in prioritising the contours of smart city plan; and (iv) feeding back to the citizens about the final choices made under the smart city plan.

A combination of face to face and ICT based on-line methods and tools to reach out citizens were used. A few cities, however, relied more on offline, in-person, face-to-face and personal contact modes towards engagement with the citizens, while other cities leveraged the ICT tools. The kind of methods and tools used were dependent on the stage of engagement, the population profile, access to various mediums in the community itself and the familiarity of the city managers or the consulting agencies in leveraging these tools.

The online methods included: sending SMS text messages and telephonic voice messages; advertising on radio and local TV channels; telecasting recorded expert talks and messages from the Mayor through YouTube; disseminating periodic information through website of the Municipal Corporation (either existing website or developed

exclusively for smart city proposal) along with hosting online discussion forums on MyGov.in portal where citizens shared their opinions and priorities in large numbers and also participated in online surveys, polling and voting; using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp for both sharing information and receiving suggestions. Some other methods used to collect data include, surveys, competitions, advertisements, hackathon, exhibitions etc. These helped in reaching out to the citizens in hundreds and thousands in most cities and a little less in a few others. Multiple parties such as partner agencies, youth volunteers, NSS etc. were involved in the data synthesis phase.

## CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK – crowdsourcing ideas and suggestions for policymaking

### Highlights

- It is important to consider who is being consulted and for what. Such consultations also need to remember the spirit of collective participation.
- Citizen-led initiatives for direct participation in policymaking are absent today.

### CIVIS

Civis, which is an online platform with a website interface for public consultation, is an initiative of the Civic Innovation Foundation. Civis platform provides legal knowledge to the citizens in the form of legal text summaries for them to understand the laws in simple, non-jargonistic language in Hindi and English. A key purpose of Civis is to solicit feedback from the individuals or groups on the laws on which the government seeks feedback from the citizens. They aggregate all the draft laws that require citizen participation as these are often scattered over different platforms. They have a team of legal volunteers who summarise those laws to ensure that information goes out to the citizens without any bias etc. Once all the feedbacks are received, they consolidate the data and compile a report to submit to the concerned authority. Once there are updates made to the law, they calculate in percentage to see how much of the feedback was taken in, and then share it back with their community of citizens. This is how the feedback loop of participation continues.

In many cases, the multiplicity of the voices is an aspect that can make the consolidation difficult for them while compiling the report. However, commenting on the relevance of the suggestions received, one of the founders thinks that there are hardly any times when the suggestions are not relevant. In fact, they think that the onus is upon them to make the law simpler so that more citizens can actively participate in the processes.

Civis has facilitated citizen consultation in offline spaces as well for communities that do not have digital access. They consciously ensure that they identify and reach out to the impacted groups for consultation for certain policies. For example, when the

Government of Maharashtra intended to construct a flyover in Mumbai, Civis organised an online consultation. A lot of responses were received online from the middle-class citizens who were not directly impacted by the decision with regard to the construction of the flyover. Directly impacted communities were the slum-dwellers around the flyover, who needed to be consulted primarily for the policy-planning.

While with constituency-based laws, they reach out to the impacted communities to gather their feedback as the basis of consultation is lived experiences of the individuals of that community, with more generic laws, they expect only general suggestions to come in from the citizens. The citizens' suggestions can be anonymous as well, as impacted communities might fear a repercussion if the identity is revealed. In their facilitation of the consultations, they also think it is important to frame the questions carefully, so that the responses are more relevant, and the overall process is meaningful.

### MYGOV.IN

Mygov.in is a multi-purpose platform of the Government of India for direct citizen engagement in governance. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India. The platform has integrated information related to the regulations, laws and policies of multiple ministries and departments. Citizens' suggestions are solicited on draft of policies and regulations in the form of comments through the Discussion Forum or using Poll and Survey. Ideas and suggestions for the topic on Prime Minister's *Mann Ki Baat* are also sought. Participation requires a person to register on the portal using their email or mobile number. Given the multi-purpose nature of the platform, it consists of other information as well, for example, calls for the individuals to submit for poster competition, photography, or film-making competition etc. There is a Blog section which consists of blog posts written by Union Ministers and a Talk section which consists of *Mann Ki Baat* recordings. The MyGov.in platform is being used by ministries and departments to initiate a public discourse around various issues as well as to seek citizen feedback on proposed policies and laws.

While the platform is multi-purpose, there are quite a few gaps in it. There is no feature for citizens to initiate a discussion. It lacks the close the feedback loop with the citizens after the closure of citizen consultation process. For example, reports of citizen consultations are not shared or feedback to the citizens is not provided. It is difficult to understand if the concerned authorities receive relevant suggestions. Since there are individual responses received from citizens registered on the platform, it is also difficult to understand through the user interface if collective suggestions from a group of citizens are received. Moreover, there seems to be a unidirectional flow of information with functions such as Blog and Talk. It is also difficult to understand if the portal is the one stop shop for all the policy drafts (from various ministries and departments, seeking citizen consultation. In other words, it cannot be said that it does its job fully, comprehensively, and efficiently of bringing the laws for citizen consultation in one place.

## International Case Studies

There are a few examples of governments in other countries using online citizen consultations in policymaking. Table 1 and Table 2 elaborate on the objectives with which online citizen consultations were carried out and the policy issues that were covered in it, respectively.

**Table 1: Objectives of Online Citizen Consultation in Policymaking**

Objectives	Governments
Improving citizen participation in democratic processes as well as providing legitimacy to the legislative processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hamburg City Government</li> <li>• Government of Canada</li> <li>• Government of the United States of America</li> <li>• European Union</li> <li>• Government of Australia</li> <li>• Government of China</li> <li>• Government of Estonia</li> <li>• Government of Taiwan</li> </ul>
Maximising the knowledge of multiple stakeholders including civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melbourne City Council</li> <li>• European Union</li> <li>• Government of Brazil</li> </ul>
Increasing transparency and information disclosure in law-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of China</li> </ul>
Increasing effectiveness in the governance processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of Nigeria</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Policy Issues Discussed in the Online Citizen Consultation**

Policy Issues	Governments
Urban City Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hamburg City Government</li> <li>• Melbourne City Council</li> </ul>
Environmental Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of Australia</li> <li>• European Union (on Chemical Policy)</li> </ul>
Digital Rights and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of Nigeria</li> <li>• Government of Brazil</li> </ul>
Access to Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of China (on Healthcare System Reform)</li> </ul>
Economic Growth and Social Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of China</li> </ul>
Cultural, Social, and Economic Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European Union</li> </ul>
Issue- agnostic as the focus was on listening to the citizens and identifying relevant policy issues for the government to be more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government of the United States of America</li> <li>• Government of Taiwan</li> <li>• Government of Estonia</li> </ul>

"transparent," "participatory," and "collaborative".	
Foreign Policy	Government of Canada

From the above-mentioned examples, it may be noteworthy to mention that four governments have attempted to build their models and institutionalise online citizen consultation across departments. These include, the United States (US) government, the Taiwanese government and Estonian government and the European Union.

### THE US GOVERNMENT'S OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

The US Government under the Presidentship of Barack Obama encouraged citizens' e-participation. The government released a Memorandum of Transparency and Open Government in 2009. Based on the Directive initiative, the National Academy of Public Administration organised the brainstorming session in order to get public feedback on ways to make government processes and information more open. It was accessible to the public for a week in which people could submit ideas, make remarks, and vote on the published ideas with respect to three policy goals: making the government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative. The most essential themes, concepts and ideas that emerged from the initial brainstorming session served as the foundation for the Open Government Dialogue's two subsequent rounds. This project was unique in practicing democratic process, in that it reversed the standard consultation procedure, soliciting public input before finalising the policy.

A website of the US Open Government that enabled a moderated discussion and had the ranking system feature. A participant's real name was required to register as a member of the Open Government Dialogue page, but members could choose whether or not to reveal their true identity to the public. All members had member profiles, which included badges that indicated their status as well as activity streams that detailed their activities. Ideas were open to all registered members to vote on, post, and comment on. The purpose of the ranking system was to find the most useful ideas. The totals for thumbs-up (+1) and thumbs-down (-1) were added to give each entry a score. The highest-scoring entries were placed at the front of the webpage, making it easy for officials to keep track of the suggestions.

Research has shown that the US government's efforts towards Transparency and Open Government, despite having a more democratic vision could not yield results. The technological management system which had its limitations in terms of content's quality and accuracy became a challenge. Moreover, implementing a more refined idea classification or labelling system to sort several types of ideas would have resulted in more meaningful discussions. The ranking system and the platform were not successful because the tracking mechanism did not assess the relevance of the topics being discussed. Therefore, the implementation challenges which were probably not foreseen were identified as barriers to success.

Source: Ginsberg, 2011; FCW, 2009



## THE EUROPEAN UNION EXPERIMENTATION

On the other end of the spectrum is the European Union (EU) model with the similar objective of consulting the citizens for strengthening the democratic character and credibility of the legislative process in relation to social demands. However, the uniqueness of the EU model was the use of social media in policy formulation. The rise of new Web 2.0 social media allowed for the gradual creation of a second generation of e-participation, which takes place in popular social media where citizens choose to discuss and generate content and is marked by less government control and more citizen control. Government agencies, in this new e-participation paradigm, post content (e.g., short, or longer text, images, video) on their policies under formulation or implementation to various social media, and then collect and analyse citizens' interactions with it (e.g., views, comments, likes/dislikes, retransmissions, etc). As a result, governments in this second generation of e-participation continue to define and control conversation subjects to some extent, but not the norms of discussion (which are determined by social media).

The European Commission funded research project, "NOMAD" involved policy formulation and validation through non-moderated crowdsourcing on social media. The NOMAD project Policy Modelling Tool, Data Acquisition Module, Linguistic Processing Pipeline, Opinion Mining & Argument Extraction, Argument Summarization, and Social Reaction Visualization. Non-moderated crowdsourcing on social media methodology is used through an ICT platform that involves four steps, listening, analysing, receiving, and acting. Listening and monitoring involves using a crawler, that is, a program which browses the Web in an automated fashion. The user-generated content is analysed in the second stage. Analysing comprises of several key components, including Language Detection, Opinion and Argument Extraction, Sentiment Analysis and Argument Summarisation. In the third step, that is, receiving, the results are presented to the end-user, that is the policy maker. In the fourth stage, ACT, the policy maker uses the collected cluster of problems, needs and proposals to formulate a draft-policy agenda, which can be tested out against social opinion. This is achieved by 'active crowdsourcing' where policy text is posted to various social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.), soliciting citizens' remarks, opinions, positions, and proposals on it.

Charalabidis and Loukis (2012) claim that while the policy enables bottom-up approach, non-moderated crowdsourcing on social media methodology does not actively encourage citizen participation with an identified set of impacted citizens. This is a favourable methodology for the policy makers to gauge the opinions, responses, and feedback of the internet users on the policies, but it involves active crowdsourcing only in the last phase. The first three phases only involve their passive participation. Therefore, it is important to study the efficacy of the methodology in terms of its actual impact on consultative and participatory policymaking. The methodology may pose an ethical challenge with the data. As it is not difficult for the social media companies to extract the identifiable personal information of the users and commodify the data, an

ethics-check by civil society organisations working towards internet freedom is important for the ensuring the privacy and liberty of internet users.

Source: Charalabidis and Loukis (2012)

## THE TAIWANESE EXPERIMENTATION

vTaiwan is an offline-online interface for the citizens to participate in the law-making process in Taiwan. The platform has its roots in the Sunflower Movement. It is a platform that enables dialogue between multiple stakeholders and gives importance to consensus building in policymaking. The web platforms are Free and Open Source softwares which means that there is greater transparency and freedom in using those softwares in other contexts. This model has also used machine learning to highlight main points of opinion, consensus, and non-mainstream opinions, hence it is developed using advanced technologies. People are expected to register on the mailing list of the vTaiwan platform to receive updates and information from the organisers for participation in the policymaking processes.

The process involves the following four stages:

The Proposal stage is mostly attended by programmers, developers, public servants, journalists, scholars, legal specialists, and students. It is held weekly both virtually and in-person in the form of mini-Hackathons. The purpose of the stage is to submit an issue for discussion to the relevant government body. The vTaiwan facilitators and government bodies decide whether to “adopt” the issue or not. Support from these two groups is non-negotiable to adopt an issue. If the process does go forward, participants discuss these issues and jot down notes on HackPad (a real-time collaborative tool), research information and present on SlideShare, and identify stakeholders to invite to future meetings. In the next stage, relevant documents, research, and presentations are published by the organisers on the vTaiwan website. “Rolling questionnaires” are used by the organisers to ask stakeholders about experiences and knowledge of the topic. An online forum equips the organisers to receive questions from the government. Pol.is, the other software used at this stage, tries to build consensus by visually mapping these opinions. This map, called an opinion landscape, uses machine learning to highlight main camps of opinion, points of consensus, and non-mainstream opinions. Statements around which there is a rough consensus and polarising statements are highlighted in the reports (shared publicly by the organisers) and go on to shape discussion topics in the following stages. The next stage is the Reflection stage. This stage invites key active stakeholders and experts to an in-person consultation, which is also streamed online on Livehouse.in and YouTube where participants can ask questions using a chat feature. The consultation is carefully planned with specific attention paid to finding a facilitator, defining the issue and its scope, holding a pre-meeting between the facilitator and the government body, and creating a specific meeting agenda. At the meeting, the facilitator first summarises the progress made so far, and then allows stakeholders to present and field questions. To help the public, the facilitator takes notes and projects them live and

posts the livestream on Facebook where public discussion continues. In the last stage, the Legislative Stage, participants, and government representatives discuss the results of the previous stages and where a “rough consensus” may lie. Organisers take this rough consensus and turn it into a policy which then is presented as a guideline or policy for a government agency or legislation in Parliament. These two options force the government to either accept the results of the process or to explain why it is not accepting the suggestions.

Since the internet penetration is 85 percent in the country and 90 percent are on Facebook, the model would work better in the Taiwan context as opposed to a country where internet penetration is only limited. Moreover, the niche of this model is using the tech platforms for continuous cycle of participation of multiple stakeholders and building consensus between them in policymaking.

**Source:** Participedia (undated)

## THE ESTONIAN EXPERIMENTATION

The Estonian experiment is based on enabling online citizen participation in policymaking in the following three aspects.

Citizens have the platform to initiate the new legislative proposals, present ideas and critique to government and submit petitions. The platform allows other users to vote for the proposal. The proposal is forwarded to the relevant government department, who are required to respond officially explaining what action was taken or not and the reasons for it.

All government agencies have been advised how to publish their draft policy papers, development plans, laws, or provisions on the consultation website. Submission is however voluntary and is not regulated by administrative procedures. Citizens and civil society groups can publicly give their opinion about draft legislation prepared by government agencies.

Government agencies publish information about forthcoming policy decisions and relevant public consultations. There is also a search function for legal acts according to their stage of preparation (from policy proposal to adoption in the parliament).

This model seems to rely only upon digital platform, without having an offline interface for consultation.

**Source:** Participedia (undated)

# Recommendations

## A Framework for Effective Online Citizen Consultation

The focus of the Framework for Effective Citizen Consultation is on making the citizens more aware about the purpose of the citizen participation so that the process is a meaningful engagement for all the stakeholders involved. The framework consists of four key phases. Based on the interviews and roundtable discussions, following are the key best practices identified for each of the phases:

### Inform the Citizens

Information is the most critical, as information is power. The purpose of this step is to raise awareness about the governance systems, laws, policies, entitlements that are important to the citizens. Unlike traditional ways where information sharing and mobilisation of citizens happens face-to-face, digital platforms are being explored for this today. Technology is being used to simplify the knowledge, raise awareness, and create a mass base of informed citizens. Multiple types of platforms are being used for information giving, which includes participatory mobile platform, mobile phone applications and organisational websites. The focus is on simplifying and making the information accessible and contextual for a wider audience, in some cases in multiple languages or in local dialects as well. The following points is a set of best practices identified for ensuring citizens are informed meaningfully.

**Contextualised information:** Contextualising the information according to the demographics is the most important aspect for citizen participation. We need to ensure that the modalities of engagement, online or offline or both is used to leverage the process of contextualising the information.

**Homogeneity in mobilisation:** The homogeneity in mobilisation of the excluded groups is important to be considered. Again, the modality of engagement needs to be designed in a way that it reaches out to the homogenous communities, and they are using it for what it was developed.

**Training the communities in citizen participation:** Investing in building the capacities of the homogenous community for citizen participation is important, such that they are considered equal and primary stakeholders for the consultation phase.

**Maintaining neutrality:** The other critical point in this phase for intermediaries is to ensure that neutrality is maintained in summarising the legal texts while adopting tech-based solutions.

## Listen to and Consult with the Citizens

The purpose of this phase is to listen to and consult with the citizens for using diverse perspectives in decision-making during policy-planning. There are very limited initiatives on this in the Indian context today. The following points is a set of best practices identified for ensuring citizens are consulted meaningfully.

***Who, what, why and how of the consultation:*** Consultation with the citizens have important considerations such as who is consulted, why are they consulted, what are they consulted for (evidence, lived experiences, opinions, ideas, perceptions etc.) and how they are consulted (digitally, online, face-to-face). In this process, primary stakeholders are important to be considered, but who else for laws that are generic and not constituency-based?

***Reaching out to the excluded groups:*** It is important to identify a pathway for intentionally reaching out to the caste, gender, religion, location, literacy, language, disability- based minority groups such that we do not disfavour them, but actually have technology that enables their participation.

***Meaningful citizen participation happens incrementally:*** In the study, a few examples that were seen where citizens were consulted for policymaking, both by the CSOs and the governments. There are different degrees of citizens participation along the scale of tokenistic participation to meaningful participation. This change needs to be seen in a more incremental fashion. It is not a leap jump as participation is a learning process even for those being consulted.

***Setting the norms for online platform:*** In an online space, consultation process needs to set the norms and ground rules to encourage engaging respectfully, acknowledge feedback received (administrator can do this) and encourage respondents to keep the conversation relevant.

## Consolidate and Prioritise the Responses

It is easier to collect data and hold consultations, but it is not so easy to consolidate that data. The steps in the process are, making sense, finding out the trends and patterns in the data using some labels, consolidating it, and prioritising the key ideas emerging out of the consultation. The following points is a set of best practices identified for ensuring consolidation of data is done meaningfully.

***Disaggregated data:*** Consider the heterogeneity of the group to get disaggregated data. Gender, age, caste, religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic disaggregation of data is important to hear what different constituencies are saying. Technology must be designed so as to provide solutions to understand the data in a disaggregated manner.

***Consider the minority views:*** In the labelling system, technology must be able to consider the minority or less popular opinions and views. There are chances breakthrough suggestions and recommendations could be found in the minority views.

**Transparency:** The data consolidation process and results need to be transparent for the citizens who provide the feedback. Citizens must be made aware about the process of consolidation and prioritisation to enhance trust in the process.

**Confidentiality of the sensitive data:** Sensitive data cannot be given out to any institution whether it is the government or private companies or civil society groups. The growing awareness and concerns about the data privacy must be respected and citizens should not be discouraged to participate by asking unnecessary identifications.

**Social accountability approach:** Consider a social accountability approach when submitting the report. The governments make various commitments nationally and internationally. There are national and international frameworks that obligate the government to encourage citizen participation. This makes the government accountable to the citizens for including their voices meaningfully.

## Closing the Feedback Loop

This is an important phase where the government or the citizen participation promoter shows that it cares and is invested in the process. An exchange between the citizens and governments is important for a meaningful dialogue.

**Communication exchange:** Feedback to the citizens is important to provide the rationale for decision taken, explain how the inputs were used and to close the feedback loop. The communication exchange between the government and citizens is important to incrementally increase mutual trust and understanding.

**Long-term vision:** Feedback needs to showcase a long-term vision with the inputs received. Participation does not stop here. It is the cycle of participation that will improve the quality of inputs from the citizens and make the government more responsive.

## Institutionalising Online Citizen Participation

### Effective hybrid models for collective citizen participation

While the push towards innovative technology and improving digital connectivity offers new ways of organising citizen consultation, civil society groups and experts in the field are wary that fully digital model is not sufficient. One of the biggest limitations of using only digital technology, that the pandemic has also shown is that marginalised people may not feel safe enough to share their experiences and vulnerabilities, and to affirm their demands, especially with people in authority because of existing power asymmetries. The risk with only digital

modalities is also that the voices and experiences of marginalised communities may not be heard (which is an important aspect of meaningful inclusive participation) in the process of citizen consultation. Therefore, citizen consultation requires the government to adopt an effective hybrid model (a combination of online and offline modes). Parallel efforts need to be made for mobilising marginalised communities and using traditional and pre-existing ways of organising face-to-face, collective consultations. Physical and collective consultations when conducted with empathy and care, offer strength to marginalised communities to engage with the decision-makers with trust. While a systemised way can be adopted to put the offline discussions into the online sphere for public knowledge but adopting effective hybrid model of consultations for enabling empathy, care and trust is critical.

## **Bridge the digital gap – Affordable, accessible, and inclusive reach to the internet and technology for all**

Concerted efforts need to be made to bridge the digital gap in the country for meaningful participation from all spheres. This would include making the internet and technology more affordable, accessible, and inclusive, especially for the gender, location, literacy, caste, religion, class, income, age, language, sexual orientation, disability – based marginalised groups. Following are the suggestions to make this happen.

***Affordable devices and internet packages:*** To make the Internet and technology affordable, it is important to not see it as a luxury but a necessity in today's context. Government programmes that offer mobile phone or laptop devices, and data packages as entitlements need strengthening. It also needs to ensure the quality of these products. At the same time, easy availability of Wi-Fi spot services in the public spaces will help in deeper penetration. These can be steps in the direction of bridging the digital gap.

***Accessible Internet and technology:*** To make the Internet and technology accessible, working with the marginalised communities is important. This will include making efforts in the direction of challenging oppressive social norms that act as barriers for girls, women, and transgender persons to claim their access. Additionally, improving digital literacy is critical so that communities can leverage technology in voicing their opinions and experiences. Similar efforts to close the urban-rural divide is also important.

***Inclusive social designs:*** To make and design the technology architectures of the online portal inclusive for all, it is important for the tech developers to consult the neo-literate groups and consider their usage patterns, lived realities etc., especially those who have traditionally not had access to the Internet and technology.

## Creating a positive culture and reimagining online platforms for direct citizen participation

There is a need to bring about a cultural change for direct citizen participation. Since India has seen very little space for direct citizen consultation, a change needs to be seen such that there is a positive attitude and cultural shift amongst people and the government. Such a change can happen in incremental fashion by promoting citizens to provide relevant, mature, and informed responses. Moreover, direct citizen participation can be strengthened by ensuring the following.

***Civic education:*** Providing civic education to the people, elected representatives and other actors with the aim of creating more informed and aware mass base so that everyone is equally invested in citizen participation, not just for grievance redressal and access to services but also in policymaking.

***Closing the feedback loop:*** For a meaningful participation, it is very important for the governmental bodies to process the inputs of the citizens and go back to the citizens for a dialogue on how the inputs were used and what the rationale for the decision-taken was. At the same time, informing the long-term vision for using the inputs received and then closing the consultation process will add additional value.

Reimagining online platforms for adopting an effective model that enable citizen-initiated discussions in policymaking

The existing online platforms for citizen consultations in policymaking have multiple limitations. They do not enable citizen-led or citizen-initiated discussions, but only offers a way for citizens to make comments on the selected policy drafts. Moreover, not all the policies of multiple ministries are uploaded on the portal for consultation. Therefore, reimagining the portal to build and sustain it such that all the departments intentionally reach out to the citizens, that there is transparency, and that citizens have more voice and control in the pre-legislative stages, continuing till the last stage of a policy getting enacted is important.

The documented international examples will be useful to learn more about the successful and not-so-successful online models. For example, the concerted efforts made by the Taiwanese government using the combination of online and offline model to engage multiple stakeholders for consensus building is noteworthy. It has leveraged the advanced technological solutions and open-source software for transparency purposes. On the other hand, the European Union model not only focussed on citizen participation but also used the Web 2.0 technologies for gauging citizens' response to the selected policies on social media. Similarly, example from Estonia also has its own niche. These examples are important to learn from for developing a platform suitable in the Indian context that meaningfully enables citizen-initiated discussions between the government and citizens for policymaking.



## Legislative change for mandating citizen consultation in pre-legislative stages

For the citizen consultations to happen for policymaking at a substantive scale nationally and sub-nationally, it is important to introduce legislatures mandating consulting citizens in the pre-legislative stages. This will help in involving the ministries and departments of the union and state government for standard-setting and for promoting good practices. They are the most powerful and have the greatest degree of influence. The same practices also need to be followed at the municipal and ground levels.

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## Annex. 1 : Report of the Conversation on Trajectories of Participation – From Development to Governance

### **The historical moment and the mission.**

The impulse for popular participation – to have a voice in shaping our lives and futures – is age-old. But to understand how this unfolded in PRIA's work, we must remember the historical moment in which PRIA was founded forty years ago. In the late 1970s and early 1980's the emerging demand for popular participation in the development field was a strong one, fuelled by statements from the FAO, WHO and other UN agencies, building on an agenda of the right to development, and coming on the heels of national liberation movements in many countries.

We can already see how that moment is so different from the one in which we find ourselves today. Proponents of participation at the time built on the work of Paulo Freire and others, calling for the strengthening of popular knowledge as well as for popular participation. This dual agenda – of strengthening and recovering people's knowledge to strengthen people's voices and power in decisions affecting their lives – has been at the core of PRIA's mission now for over four decades.

### **Shifting meanings and changing terrain**

While this has been its mission, over the years, the meanings of participation and the focus on where and how to make it happen have constantly shifted in both development and democratic discourse. PRIA's work has often shifted with these changes as well, and indeed sometimes contributing ahead of the curve to make the change happen. We will look quickly at five different meanings.

Participation from below: as the demands of the excluded – In its early days, popular participation was often seen as a process through which those who had been excluded from key decisions affecting their lives asserted their demands for inclusion. In this view, participation is about challenging power (e.g., increasing control). It sees participation as more than a consultation with random individuals or loosely defined communities. Rather it sees the participation of the excluded as realising power through organised groups and social movements, which have the awareness and capacity therefore to articulate and negotiate their demands. PRIA's early work with forest dwellers in the early 80's to help them gain their control over their resources or its efforts at the social mobilisation of rural women, utilising both Gandhian and Freirean principles of learning from everyday life, to build confidence in their knowledge and agency, perhaps reflected this meaning.

Participation as involvement of 'beneficiaries' and 'users' of development projects – During the 1980s and 1990s, we saw participation rapidly become an ingredient of more formalised development projects, rather than part of grassroots mobilisation. We also saw the rapid growth of both national and international NGOs as development actors, who adopted

participation as a principle to be used in project delivery, supported by a raft of new participatory methods and approaches. This was sectoral programmes, such as water, health, irrigation, etc., where participation often took the form of users' committees, which could help target and deliver services to those who needed them the most. While opening up space for peoples' knowledge and involvement in development planning and implementation, this beneficiary approach still often positioned people more passively as 'users and choosers' in externally defined and led initiatives rather than as 'makers and shapers' of their policies, programmes, or futures. Again, PRIA responded, throughout the 90's holding schools for participation, helping NGOs and other actors understand its more radical historical roots, the tools and approaches which could be used, and trying to hold on to concepts of participation as a tool for transforming power, not only for implementing development projects. I remember well-being part of many of these schools with Namrata Jaitli and others.

Participation as 'stakeholder' involvement – During the 1990s, with the mainstreaming of participation in large-scale development programmes terms like the 'excluded' or 'beneficiary' began to give way in mainstream development discourse to more neutral terms such as 'stakeholder'. In 1994 World Bank Participation Learning Group after considerable discussion arrived at the following definition: .... Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them. (World Bank 1994). While this created space and support for participatory processes at very high levels, the term stakeholder was ambiguous - no longer meaning the excluded, but also meaning private sector, government, large NGOs, or other powerful actors. As a member and leader of the Civil Society Working Group on the World Bank, PRIA fought to create these spaces, but also to modify this language to include 'primary stakeholders', to privilege the knowledge and participation of the poor or those at the grassroots levels in these processes. I have vivid memories of a large civil society gathering in the World Bank in Washington where Rajesh delivered an impassioned call for more robust meanings of participation to James Wolfensohn, World Bank President at the time, and other Bank officials. Working with NGOs around the world, PRIA was a leader in these global debates about scaling up participation, while also holding on to its more progressive meanings.

Participation as Exercising the Rights of Citizenship – While much of this work on participation was in the development arena, we also must remember that participation is also a democratic right, linked to concepts of citizenship and deepening forms of democratic governance. In the 1990s in many countries, including India, democratic decentralisation opened new spaces for citizen participation. In this context it was perhaps natural that the demand for participation in development processes should also lead to the demand for participation in governance processes, giving rise to new concepts and discourses of participatory governance and participatory citizenship. Again, PRIA played a key role through its work on deepening participation, especially of women and Dalits in the Panchayati raj institutions, where a key constitutional amendment created new spaces for their voice and presence. PRIA was part of Logolink, a global network to develop learning on participatory governance. At that time, we also worked together for a decade on a programme focusing on Citizenship and Participation, where PRIA's work on the rights of migrant workers within India, or the struggles around natural resources in Jharkhand provided critical inputs to our global debates.

Participation, Transparency and Accountability – By the early 2000’s much of the attention for how citizens could engage in policies that affected their lives shifted to a focus on how to hold institutions to account for the implementations of such policies. In other words, the emphasis shifted downstream, moving away from participatory ways of agenda-setting, to focusing on accountability of leaders and institutions to meet development and democratic goals. Aided by demands for transparency of information, the accountability agenda once again fuelled new participatory innovations in what became known as social accountability. And here again, PRIA played a key role, with new programmes for social accountability in Cambodia and Bangladesh, as well as in its work on democratic engagement in urban governance, now a key issue in India’s growing cities.

### Lessons and principles

This is just a very high-level gallop across what is in practice a very rich and nuanced history – and a lot of PRIA’s work has not been fully covered. But across these changing meanings and programmes over the last four decades, much has been learned. In particular, we have learned that while participation can be used as an approach for exercising voice and accountability, protecting, and demanding rights, and deepening democratic institutions, it is not a panacea. It is also easily subject to misuse and co-optation. It can be used as a tool for placation, be reduced to a checkbox of tools, or endless forms of consultation that lead to little change, what one writer has called ‘participatory disempowerment’. Understandably a certain weariness or scepticism about the term has set in many quarters.

And yet, PRIA’s goal and focus has always been to achieve meaningful participation, and to realise this we have learned at least four key lessons:

First, participation is about inclusion – especially of marginalised voices. PRIA’s commitment to strengthening women’s voices, whether in the panchayats or over issues of sexual harassment in the workplace, as well its work over the last 10 years on listening to and supporting youth voices such as in its Youth and Democracy programme are part of this theme.

Secondly, participation is about power – for participation to be transformative in people’s lives, it must also involve participation in decisions that shift power and control over resources.

Third, participation occurs in many spaces – through people’s popular struggles as well as invited spaces of consultation and deliberation. It is about organised and collective efforts, not only about listening to individual voices, or the rapidly emerging trend to clicktivism through online polling and the like.

Finally, participation is about learning, building awareness, what Freire would call ‘conscientisation’ – in most situations of high inequality and exclusion we cannot take for granted that participation of active aware citizens is a starting point – rather participation, especially of the powerless, is a way to build that consciousness, to discover a sense of rights

and agency, and to strengthen the skills and networks which help people learn to become more active, aware and empowered.

With these principles in mind, huge gains have been made in deepening the quality, scope, and depth of participation in multiple spaces and issues around the world. In addition to PRIA, I am very pleased, for instance, to be sharing the panel with PRAXIS, which has pioneered the uses and applications of meaningful tools for participation and trained thousands of activists in their use. And with Participedia, which has documented and catalogued several thousands of innovations in participatory governance that have emerged in recent decades.

### **The current moment**

While we want to celebrate this work and accomplishment, we also need to recognise that the historical moment in which we now live is very different from when PRIA was founded. And when we do so, the picture for participation is very sobering. Unlike 40 years ago, when the world was at the beginning of several decades of democratic spread and deepening, we are now in a period of democratic recession, growing authoritarianism, and with-it closing space for civic engagement. Recent research by Civicus shows that now 87% of the world's population lives in countries where civic space rated as closed, repressed, or obstructed, and slightly less than 4% in so-called 'open societies' where we might expect participation to be the greatest.

Despite decades of work for gender equity and inclusion, we also see around the world backlash against women's rights, both in the public sphere, as well as in the household. Such ongoing or increasing violence against women and sexual harassment serves to limit our hopes of inclusion.

Despite decades of work on participation, the world is more and more unequal. The huge rise in economic inequality, within and across countries, means that economic power can often 'trump' political or societal power.

After decades of work on strengthening people's knowledge, we now live in a world where misinformation seems as much as a basis of action as truth, spread all the more rapidly through online sources, and manipulated by powerful to their interests. This fundamentally challenges our core ideas about what authentic popular knowledge is and whose knowledge is used as a basis for action towards deepening development and democracy.

And finally, with growing inequality, our societies are also deeply polarised, divided more and more by old divides of race, caste, religion, ethnicity, and class, as well as new ones, such as the 'masked' and the 'unmasked'. We face challenges not only of strengthening the participation of the excluded against the powerful but also of how to use participation to challenge the polarisation within and across the vast members of the excluded themselves. Each of these challenges gives rise to a new agenda for participation:

- Of not only how to develop new democratic innovations, but how to protect those that we have and fight back against democratic recession and backlash.

- Of how to gain more democratic control over economic as well as social and political institutions and resources.
- Of how-to re-assert what we mean by popular knowledge, based on reflection and deep systemisation of experience, as opposed to opinions and misinformation fanned by powerful interests.
- And of how to use participation to work across polarised groups and against increased polarisation.
- In dealing with these challenges, we are buoyed as ever by the fact that in all of these areas, there are already strong popular struggles, initiatives, alliances, and coalitions committed to a more just and participatory world. And in working with them, the core principles and lessons that launched PRIA's work on participation remain true:
- That it is about full inclusion and about transforming power at every level, from the household to the global,
- And that it is achieved through collective action and coalition, built on mutual respect and interest.
- And that it is built not through recipes from above, but a process of social learning and reflection, deeply grounded in people's experience and knowledge.
- As the issues, moments, and meanings of participation continue to evolve in this new era, PRIA's work will also continue to change. But with these core principles in mind, we have a strong compass to navigate the turbulent waters ahead.

*"Participation is a way to bring 'power' into the word 'empowerment'"*

The conversation (samvad) began with a short presentation by Ms. Samiksha Jha (Program Officer, Martha Farrell Foundation) on PRIA's journey of 40 years – a journey about sustaining an independent, forward-looking, and energetic civil society organisation. PRIA's role has been that of an educator and facilitator. PRIA has supported individuals, organisations, and grassroots initiatives to learn, change, grow and sustain themselves. Next, Dr. Rajesh Tandon (Founder- President, PRIA) spoke about PRIA's work on the theme of Citizen Participation. PRIA began with the social mobilisation of rural women anchored in the education programme because we realised that collectivisation and learning were required for empowerment. If sustainable development has to happen then the relations of power need to be confronted and changed. In order to improve planning and monitoring, we focussed on promoting accountability. To know more about PRIA's work on the theme of citizen participation, [click here](#).

After his presentation, Dr. Tandon invited the panellists to share their reflections on the questions mentioned above.

Mr. Tom Thomas (CEO, PRAXIS) began the discussion by highlighting the metamorphosis of political voluntary sector into a sanitised and depoliticised NGO. He said that the 'development sector' has been dependent not so much on people's power but on donor power over the years. Consequently, the voluntary sector will soon be available on Social Stock Exchange, to be bought as a commodity. We need to look at participatory development from three perspectives: from the perspective of rights, sustainability, and knowledge creation. The

creation of knowledge should be around the idea that the marginalised communities know their realities better than many others and therefore their active participation is crucial. These perspectives are important in imagining a holistic development. While we have made significant strides in knowledge creation, we have not been able to do much in promoting participation as a right. The failure in ensuring participation as a fundamental right of people

and for deepening democracy lies both in the external and internal fault lines. Even as we have progressed, on some of the development indicators, we continue to be a patriarchal society that neither values nor encourages participation. We are a country of logical decision-making and not dialogical decision-making.

In the 1990s, we approached participatory development as a panacea to depoliticise our work which had begun to be tied up to budget lines of donors and governments. Referring to Evgeny Morozov's book *To Save Everything, Click Here*, he stated that participation and participatory tools were used as a 'To Save Everything, Click Here' approach. We are still in the stage of exploration which continues to be elusive, given our internal fault lines. We must acknowledge and look at that fault lines to make the corrections that are possible.

However, we have managed to make significant strides, particularly in knowledge creation, which is not any less important. Through the use of participatory development methodologies and models, we have made irrefutable contributions to how development is viewed, discussed, and planned today. It's also true that most marginalised groups have been made visible through these efforts be it women, children, elderly, differently abled and so on; their desegregation and their different needs/ aspirations are here to stay in the knowledge pool of development discourse and policy making. We have also made reasonable strides in instilling the idea that there is a need for participation of communities for the sustainability of programmes, where the interest of the powerful is not too overpowering. Moreover, the pandemic has also shown us that we have multiple roles to play. It would be imprudent to stay put in our comfort zone. He concluded, 'We are at a junction where we need to do a critical evaluation in terms of our roles, boundaries, and choices'.

*"knowledge creation around the reality of the excluded is important for participation"*

Reiterating Prof. Gaventa's comment on looking at participation as inclusion; as human rights; as a transformation of power and as transparency and accountability, Prof. Bonny Ibhawoh (Director, Participedia) said, 'In Participedia, we aim to incorporate all these four dimensions of participation'. It's a crowd-sourced platform of researchers, activists and practitioners who are interested in democratic participation. Participedia is about seven years old and currently, it's in the second phase of its operation. It gives a platform to the practitioners to capture the development of participatory processes in real-time.

He emphasised the important role those local organisations play in generating the data for those who research participation. In the absence of such data, it would be very difficult to map the trends in participatory democracy. Transparency and accountability are the biggest challenge in the context of participatory development. Lately, Participedia has been facing



certain challenges by virtue of being a crowd-sourced platform. It has been accused of furthering the state's propaganda. So, it is imperative to find a regulatory mechanism to make the process balanced to make sure that the available information meets some basic standards, especially in today's context of fake news and toxic digital communication. Today, participation has become a digital process. Therefore, the question is how do people, with no access to these digital technologies, participate? What do we mean by participation? How can one ensure authentic participation? These concerns are important because, at the end of the day, these platforms where we seek to document global democratic innovation, must be representative of all parts of the world.

*“with participation becoming a digital process, how can those, without access to digital technology, participate?”*

Moving on to the next segment of the deep dive conversation, Dr. Tandon requested Mr. Apoorva Ozha (Chief Executive, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India) to share his experience and reflection.

Mr. Ozha began by sharing that his work has largely been in rural India and that is where he learnt the participatory approaches. In this context, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was one of the tools of promoting participatory planning. Initially, there was a lot of excitement and a lot of people participated. But when the states came into the picture and Government of India's National Watershed Programme was launched, it led to changes in the PRA approach. Eventually, a lot of training of the practitioners of PRA started happening but once the scale-up happened, these trainings stopped. One needs to question if it was a success that any of these participatory tools even became a part of the state. In a way, it became a failure because it was tokenism. The first failure was the inability to assess how we could do participatory processes on a scale, which was both scalar but contextualised.

The second challenge was that development activities, in India, were increasingly becoming project defined. As a result, the funding became project defined. A lot of time was wasted in planning the logistics and there was a lot of communication gap which then resulted in poor infrastructure. That has been failure of scaling up the participatory approaches in large-scale government development programmes. He also spoke of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) as one of the success stories of participatory development and described how it was a journey of learning to promote participation, inclusion, and rights. He also spoke about his involvement in the Jal Jeevan Mission of the Government of India. He mentioned that when the guidelines of the programme were being prepared, it was prepared with a lot of consultations thereby it focused on participation. But there was a lot of resistance from the state government. While highlighting the use of digital technology, he said, 'the dashboard has become the new mantra of governance'. The use of technology for providing services to citizens has become an efficient way of delivering services and has greater influence these days. But in due process, citizens have been reduced to mere beneficiaries.

*“success of participation is that it became a part of development programmes, but it also became tokenism”*

Dr. Thamy Pogrebinschi (LATINNO – Innovations for Democracy in Latin America, Germany) talked about LATINNO – a 5.5-year-old database built on democratic innovations. She said that there are similarities and differences when one talks of the evolution of citizen participation, in several countries, over the last 30 years. In the Latin American context, due to the process of decentralisation and institutionalisation, more autonomy and power were given to several local-level institutions and communities. Citizen participation began to develop, gradually since the late 1980s, and especially early 1990s. It was evident initially at the local level and then slowly moved to the national level. Latin America is not homogenous – there is a difference among countries, especially among the sub-regions like South America and Central America. Most democracies have problems of grassroots representations and accountability of the governance and their responsiveness.

The main challenge that Latin America faces is that there is immense social inequality and political exclusion. The idea is that citizen participation would be a means to address political exclusion. The death of democracies could not be solved only by having more citizen participation but by directing that participation to address the real exclusion and the several layers of inequality that most countries face. Over the past 30 years, citizen participation has been more of a state-driven initiative than a civil society initiative, in most countries of Latin America.

Mostly when it was a civil society-driven initiative, the state had a role to play. If not, co-governance roles like participating with civil society in the implementation of the initiative, then state-sponsored it somehow as an entity that made participation possible. But recently the trend has been changing because, on the one hand, citizen participation has been evolving over the last two and a half decades in Latin America through the state initiative in a very highly institutionalised way. So, there is a mechanism of citizen participation and there are laws in place that made citizen participation mandatory, in many countries, at a local level. One of the outcomes of institutionalisation is that it makes democratic innovation less effective. Latin America is witnessing a moment of democratic decline. It had a wave of left-leaning governments which was very important for ensuring citizen participation, especially at the national level. She concluded, 'Now we are witnessing more and more of civil society-based initiative here in Latin America'.

*“too much institutionalisation of participation can make democratic innovations ineffective”*

Reflecting on his experience, Mr. Ashok Singh (Executive Director, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, India) said that during the 1980s and 1990s Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) were promoted and the focus was on mainstreaming the marginalised and excluded communities. We worked on building the capacities of these institutions. There were many CSOs that continued to look at the citizens as 'beneficiaries' as a result there was a dearth of their participation in the process of sustainable development programmes. At this crucial juncture, came the 73rd and 74th CAA which decentralised the governance system. A legal space was created for ensuring the participation of those who were not included in the process till now. This gave the power in the hands of the local institutions and ensure the participation of the

marginalised and the excluded in the governance process. To build the capacities of panchayat leaders, SSK along with PRIA and the like-minded organisation started a campaign called Panchayati Raj Jagrukta Abhiyan – PRJA (Panchayat Raj Awareness Campaign) in a phased manner, i.e., pre- and post-election.

Pre-election was crucial for ensuring free and fair elections and that a suitable candidate was elected which would, in turn, ensure participation of the people. For this campaign, we mobilised a lot of CSOs, disseminated Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were prepared, frontline facilitators were trained and so on. We also launched a campaign called Pre- Election Voter Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) in 17-18 states – it was a big public education programme to generate awareness among the people not only about the free and fair process of an election but also about the importance of selecting the right kind of candidate. The process must be inclusive and must ensure the participation of people. In the second phase, we focused on building the capacities of the candidates, especially women and the schedule castes (SCs) /Schedule Tribes (STs) so that their participation is taken care of and how effectively they can play their roles and responsibilities. There was a need for building the leadership of these elected representatives. We also initiated a well- planned capacity-building programme for the elected representatives. We did this in many parts of Uttar Pradesh, as result governance continues to be an important development agenda. It is important to enable these local self-governance institutions right from planning to implementation so that people’s participation can be promoted. There are many CSOs who continue to work on these initiatives.

*“an inclusive process ensures participation of the people”*

Ms. Rebecca L. Malay (Trustee, Philippines Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), Philippines) began by giving a historical account of PRRM. PRRM is 70 years old and is one of the oldest NGOs in the Philippines. In 1986, PRRM was very dormant it was important to revive it as an organisation that would focus on democratising the spaces, especially in the rural areas where empowerment was much needed. The idea was to define empowerment strategy as shifting the traditional centres of social, political, and economic power and giving it to the people. PRRM’s approach is integrated in a way that it doesn’t only have the ecosystems and physical approaches, but it also addresses the exclusion of the poorest of the poor in the Philippines.

PRRM organised the indigenous people and looked at the sectoral issues of these specific actors. We had organised the communities and penetrated actual political centres of power. Philippines is not only experiencing economic and gender inequality but also spatial inequality – rural and urban. These inequalities have surfaced even more so with the pandemic. Therefore, self-assessment and self-reflection are important to find a way forward. We need to dismantle the political and economic power that has gripped our social lives and push for a more progressive policy. We need to infiltrate the policy spaces successfully. She cited the example of PRRM and how every year since 2006, it has been a part of the government budgeting process, in a sense shadowed the government, in terms of putting budgets in specific areas which seemed important for sustainable development. The result was that PRRM was successful in shifting budgets.

Policy advocacy and strengthening the base organisations are the pillars of participation. The political reality of having an autocratic government in place, largely attributed to the digital influences and misinformation has dragged us back. We are often looked at as databases and generators of data. The concern is: how to engage digitalisation and participation at the digital level? We need to rethink the ways of preserving our desire to democratise our spaces and frame our interventions and approaches in the human rights framework. The human rights-based approach to sustainable development would be a better way of looking at safeguarding our rights and our community rights. She concluded, 'it was not by accident that we thought of empowerment in 1986 as the transfer of power and as long as sustainability and equity are not achieved, we will persevere'.

*"coalitions with other organisations can push for changes in development programming"*

Moving on towards the closing session of the discussion, Dr. Tandon requested Prof. Gaventa to share some thoughts on the way forward.

Prof. Gaventa said, 'Participatory struggle has been a global one'. He endorsed Ms. Malay's comment that in the time of democratic repression and recession, it's more important than ever to not just think about participation as a right, but also to link the struggle for participation to the struggle for human rights. Participation is the way that we achieve and protect human rights and in a period of deepening harassment, violence, disappearances, closing down of the media, and so on it is imperative that we reframe our work within the framework of human rights. The other significant concern is that of transparency and accountability. If we cannot protect the rights of those who speak truth to power, then participation will not be meaningful and real. It's important to realise that even under authoritarianism, participation doesn't go away. It may close some of the formalised spaces, yet people have historically always found a way to participate. It may be indirectly – through music, culture, protest and so on. But participation will be there. The challenge is to think where the impulse for voice should be happening. It's to listen and closely watch the community struggles and see where they are creating their own spaces for change. Finding those spaces and strengthening them will be the most important thing to do, rather than simply trying to fill institutional spaces.

Concluding the samvad, Dr. Tandon invited Dr. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay (Director, PRIA) to share the key take-aways from the discussion.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Bandyopadhyay said that we are indeed facing a deep democratic recession, shrinking civic space, manipulation of participation through submissive information, a deep polarisation on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, etc., both in the real life and also in the digital life. The practice of participation started as popular political mobilisation and demand for being part of the decision-making process, access to natural resources and other kinds of resources. Those mobilising were based on the understanding of popular knowledge and gradually it moved to a projectized understanding of participation. Reiterating, Mr. Thomas's comment, Dr. Bandyopadhyay said that many of our institutionalised civil society organisations and the promoter of participation got depoliticised. One organisation

alone cannot address the democratic recession, closing civic space, and other issues. But certainly, a network coalescing all the ideas together and making a stronger connection between the movements and projects and institutionalised organisation can make a difference. So perhaps, the time has come to think about building and stitching together a larger coalition with multiple thoughts where all kinds of practices can be appreciated and taken forward. One needs to consider how much institutionalisation is good for promoting participation? How can institutionalisation of participatory spaces work in an effective manner? And therefore, we need to seek the balance and create an interface between the universalised form of participation and particularised form of participation.

*“triad of learning, knowledge and participation can transform power relations in a much more meaningful way”*

The conversation (samvad) ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. Bandyopadhyay.

**Full report is available [here](#).**

## Annex. 2: Report of the Roundtable on Online Citizen Participation in Policymaking in India

The roundtable began with a short presentation by Dr. Bandyopadhyay about PRIA's 40-year journey. The journey has been about providing support in the form of sharing information and ideas; generating new knowledge, building linkages and relationships; providing intermediation expertise, and at times emotional support. Efforts to mobilise individuals, especially the poor and marginalised sections, but increasingly also the middle class, make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. Thus, fuelling their sense of agency to demand services, inclusion, participation, and knowledge.

Next Dr. Bandyopadhyay invited Ms. Shruti Arora (Senior Programme Officer (Research), PRIA) to share the preliminary findings from the study that PRIA is doing on Institutionalising Online Citizen Consultations in Public Policymaking in India.

Ms. Arora presented some of the trajectories of online citizen participation and its evolution over time. While speaking of the different approaches, she said, looking at participation from below is a way for the excluded to affirm their demands and challenge power through organised groups and social movements. It sees participation as more than a consultation with loosely defined communities. In the 1980s-90s, promoted by international development agencies and national governments (many a time through local NGOs), participation took the form of 'users' committees, which could help target and deliver services to those who most needed them. It opened up space for peoples' knowledge and involvement in development planning and implementation. This beneficiary approach still often positioned people more passively as 'users and choosers' rather than as 'makers and shapers' of their policies, programmes or futures.

In 1994, the World Bank defined participation 'as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them'. The narrative of multiple stakeholder participation came into existence which included the private sector as well. PRIA, through its various initiatives, shifted the focus on primary stakeholder's participation. With the 73rd CAA, Panchayati Raj Institutions were given a constitutional status which gave rise to new concepts and discourses of participatory governance and citizenship. It meant that the citizens were not just the beneficiaries, users, voters, or consumers but political right-holders in the local and decentralised governance. We need to promote participation to seek transparency and accountability.

The study revealed the potential of digital and information technology to accelerate citizen participation. This is because there is the ease of remote participation as number of people can access information and can participate in the process. As a result, the outreach is scaled up. Artificial intelligence-based labelling and sorting can be used for analysis and decision making. However, there are contextual barriers to online citizen participation. There is a huge digital

divide because of the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of people. In addition, there are infrastructural challenges that the study revealed such as internet bandwidth, storage on the phone, etc. In order to make technology work for all, it is important that we discuss the digital divide in much greater detail and not just do lip service to this.

The other challenge was that the government staff was not trained, especially at the district and block level, to use the technology. The programmes get developed by the people who are at the higher ranking in the government system and people in the lower ranking do not know how to use the technology. Due to the majoritarian democracy that we live in mostly the views of the majority matters. Hence, the minority gets left out. Polarisation of views is yet another challenge in this context. Internet as a space for citizen participation is not safe because there is a lot of trolling especially when it comes to political discussions.

Multiple collaborations are happening between organisations and there is an offline interface to it, not everything is online. There are face to face meetings sometimes that are equally important strategies for organisations. While the primary purpose of any organisation's digital platform is grievance redressal or informing the citizens for petitioning, it is to recognise that other strategies have also been used to expand outreach and impact of citizen engagement. Information is power and the purpose is to raise awareness about the laws, policies, entitlements and governance systems that are important for the development of the citizens. Unlike traditional ways where information sharing and mobilisation of citizens would happen face to face, digital platforms are being used to simplify the knowledge, raise awareness and create mass space of informed citizens. Multiple types of platforms are being used for disseminating information, which includes participatory mobile platforms, mobile phone applications and organisational websites. The focus is on simplifying the information, making information accessible and contextual for a wider audience and in multiple languages/ local dialects.

Discussing the recommendations to promote online citizens participation, Ms. Arora emphasised on the importance of contextualising the information according to the demography. We need to ensure that technology is used to leverage the process of contextualising the information. Similarly, homogeneity in mobilisation of the excluded groups is important to be considered. Technological platforms need to reach out in a way that marginalised communities use it. Investing in building the capacities of the homogeneous community for citizen participation is important such that they are considered equal and primary stakeholders. There is a need to create a space for intermediaries to ensure that neutrality is maintained in summarising the legal texts while adopting technology-based solutions. There are privacy concerns with technology. Citizens need to be informed on how their data is being used. Giving out sensitive information of technology users to powerful institutions was an ethical concern that the study revealed. The purpose of this space is to consult the citizens for decision-making during the process of policy planning. It is important to understand who, what, why and how are we consulting?

It is crucial that we reach out to the excluded groups and identify a pathway for the caste, gender, religion, location, literacy, language ability or disability-based minority groups, to

ensure that we do not do a disservice to these communities. In turn, enable them to participate equally. Meaningful citizen participation happens incrementally. There are different degrees of citizen participation along the scale of tokenistic participation to meaningful participation. This change needs to be seen more incrementally. It is not a leap jump as participation is a learning process.

The consultation process needs to set the norms or ground rules on the platform to encourage participation acknowledge feedback received, encourage respondents to keep the conversation relevant and provide the option of making the submissions anonymously. It is easier to collect data and hold consultations but difficult to analyse and consolidate the collected data. Technology needs to provide solutions to understand the data in a disaggregated manner. Technology must ensure transparency, especially to the citizens who are part of the consultation process. They need to know what technology was used to consolidate their feedback and what results have emerged from it. However, maintaining the confidentiality of data is also important. The social accountability approach must be used especially while submitting the report to the government. Social accountability is national framework that obligates the state to encourage meaningful citizen participation.

Yet another important phase is where the government shows that it cares and is invested in the process of citizen participation. An exchange between the citizens and governments is important for a meaningful dialogue. A feedback loop is an important aspect of this dialogue. This would mean having a communication exchange, giving feedback to the citizens to see what was important, what decision was taken, what was the rationale for the decision taken and explaining how the inputs were used to close the feedback loop. This communication exchange thus becomes very important. The government officials need to be trained to do this too. We often see that government official higher up in the ranking who envisioned the digital programmes, know about the programmes but in the lower rankings they are not trained in using the technology and hence there are implementation gaps. The government needs to communicate to citizens how their inputs will be used in policymaking. The cycle of participation is a learning process for everybody.

Next, Dr. Bandyopadhyay invited Mr. Apar Gupta (Executive Director, Internet Freedom Foundation, India) and Dr. Rajesh Tandon (Founder- President, PRIA) to set the stage for the discussion.

In his introductory remarks, Mr. Gupta echoed Ms. Arora's comment that the fundamental challenge in online citizen participation is access and inclusivity. Even though access and inclusivity have been an issue that has been worked upon in India, it continues to remain a challenge in many parts of the country thereby preventing citizen participation through digital modes. Quite often the beneficiaries of government schemes and programmes are the ones that are economically and socially privileged. Therefore, we need to design the participation tools using a combination of online as well as offline modes.

As per the data of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, in cities like Delhi and Bangalore, there are 2 internet connections for one person because that's the level of density of these



cities. However, some reports also state that for all the remote learning objectives which were intended over the last two years, close to 25% of children in India didn't have internet access during the pandemic. We must account for this in the larger policy prescriptions beyond participation itself. Having said that, it is important to note that there are limits to online participation.

There are communities that do not have traditions of individual participation. The sense of community quite often comes through collective in-person participation. There are innovative ways of using technology to ensure that people located in different cities or villages can communicate with each other without necessarily having to do away with in-person meetings. Public consultation needs to be done at the municipal and ground levels. But the standard-setting and good practices need to involve the federal level and the central level ministries because they are the most powerful and have the greatest degree of influence. He concluded, 'things are good, but things are also bad in certain respects and things can always be better when I say this'.

'Participation is a natural human tendency, it's like the water you remove the obstacles, it will find its path', said Dr. Tandon. The most difficult part in promoting participation for the subaltern/ excluded/ vulnerable groups, which Dr. Gupta also hinted at, is that it is not just individual participation but collective participation. The purpose of developing a collective agency is to create the capacity to influence relations of power. Unfortunately, modern technology in its current manifestation is reinforcing greater authoritarian and top-down tendencies as opposed to liberating the potential of technology to empower people with not only access to authentic information but the capacity to collectivise to make that contribution towards the policy framework.

In the past, civil society realised that things could be done through representatives, after all, democracy works through representatives. But representative participation per se has its limits as it does not necessarily voice the needs of the most marginal and excluded. How do we ensure that they participate? Exclusion happens in representative participation as well. If technology can be used to create collective consultative processes in a hybrid mode – offline and online, to discuss the preferences and options, it would enable direct participation.

To take the discussion forward, the participants were divided into 3 breakout groups. In the breakout sessions, the participants deliberated on the following questions:

- What are the current online mechanisms and practices for consulting citizens in making laws and policies by the governments? What lessons can be drawn from the national and international experiences?
- How have the non-governmental organisations attempted to influence the policymaking using online citizen participation?
- What principles can be suggested in making online citizen consultations reliable, inclusive, and continuous?

Here is a brief account of the discussions from the breakout groups.

### Breakout Group 1

Ms. Nikita Rakhyani (Youth Trainer, PRIA) presented the key discussion points from breakout group 1:

- (i) Conventional form of participation is where the government is at the top and the citizens are at the bottom. Usually, these consultations do not take place online; as a result, citizen participation is difficult.
- (ii) There is a subconscious use of technology because a lot of data is being consumed by the citizen. We need to be aware of how technology is being used.
- (iii) We need to understand the responsiveness of the government not just on policy but also on the culture of participation.
- (iv) We need to enable representation in a way that it is easy to reach out to diverse stakeholders thereby ensuring inclusivity. There must be a collective understanding and collective ownership of the issue to enable greater participation.
- (v) In the context of online engagement, we need to be mindful of the issue of misinformation which leads to the polarisation of views. We need to explore if there can be a technological platform where both representative participation and direct participation can complement each other.
- (vi) There is very limited scope for citizens representatives to have conversations with each other because the government is doing a lot of consultations, but they are not transparent. There is no formal platform or mechanism for citizen representatives to have a say in the policies that are being framed and implemented.
- (vii) Civic education is significant to make people realize that the consultative processes will have an impact on their lives. We need to invest in civic education.
- (viii) We need to create multiple approaches for reaching out to diverse people, given that India is a diverse country, not just in terms of language but also cultural backgrounds. We also need to think and reflect on leveraging the local strength of multiple intermediaries – elected representatives, caste base organisation, and others.
- (ix) We need to create sustainable and continuous platforms or infrastructure and not occasional platforms. We need to use multiple channel strategies that can blend virtual, and in-person use of technology i.e., a hybrid mode of participation.

### Breakout Group 2

Ms. Shruti Arora (Senior Program Officer, PRIA) presented the key discussion points from breakout group 2:

- (i) Mr. Robert Bjarnason spoke about how in his country (Iceland) they encourage citizens to put down their ideas and have mediated discussion. They also encourage participatory budgets, and they work towards it with the government.
- (ii) On social media platforms, information is very fragmented whereas the information about participation needs to be systematised. There are different ways of doing that such as WhatsApp groups – a WhatsApp group makes people feel a personalised connection with others. Groups could be a strategy that might work for citizen participation.

- (iii) In terms of the digital infrastructure, Ms. Charu Chadha said that a lot of times we choose English as our language because it is easier and convenient. We must challenge these default settings to be inclusive. We must encourage participation in local dialects and multiple languages.
- (iv) There is the issue of accessibility of websites because in India a lot of people use mobile phones and not all websites are accessible on phones.
- (v) We also need to create a safe space and ensure anonymity because people may not want to share their vulnerability on an online platform.
- (vi) We need to make the digital platform more reliable in terms of authentic information.

### **Breakout Group 3**

Ms. Niharika Kaul (Research Associate, PRIA) presented the key discussion points from breakout group 3:

- (i) A hybrid mode might be a plausible way of going about citizen participation. Technology can be leveraged to see the impact of the responses that people give in these consultations. The question at hand is whether the government is committed to incorporating the opinions. The intention of hosting a consultation is very important.
- (ii) Often the process of citizen participation is tokenistic as a result these consultations are tokenistic. A lot of countries are still dependent on physical hearings. But many a time, the physical hearings have their problems such as the cost of travel, stay, etc. This in turn reduces participation.
- (iii) There is a need to lay down a framework to consult people while making these decisions instead of having a post-facto discussion after the policies are framed.
- (iv) Secondary participation was another way of promoting citizen participation where the physical consultation is recorded and then these recordings were played for people to hear the consultations. We, as civil society, need to become active in taking steps to become middlemen to get through that level of participation for policies.
- (v) Young people today are well versed with technologies so their potential and capacities should be harnessed in the process of promoting participation.
- (vi) There needs to be adequate access to infrastructure and the ability to use that infrastructure. Citizen participation is at a nascent stage but there needs to be more activism around it. Even though there are numbers it doesn't guarantee meaningful participation.

After the presentation of the rapporteurs from the breakout sessions, Dr. Bandyopadhyay invited Mr. David Moore (Vice President, Legal Affairs, ICNL, USA) to share his closing reflections from the discussion.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Moore emphasised on the importance of law. In 2018, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued guidelines on the effective implementation of Article 25 on the effect of the implementation of the Right to Participate. These guidelines flowed from global consultations, and they addressed participation both in the electoral and non-electoral context at the national and international level. The state is obligated to maintain

an enabling environment for association, expression, assembly, equality and non-discrimination- all of which are imperative for participation.

Online participation should be approached as part of a broader framework of public participation. As a result of the digital divide, online participation has become a double-edged sword. While on the one hand, it can lead to much greater inclusivity for those who have reliable internet connections. On the other hand, it can also lead to greater exclusion of those without the internet. In this context, the reliability on electricity is significant. He also emphasised on digital literacy and civic education as a tool for promoting online citizen participation.

In the context of online consultation, the inputs and feedbacks provided by the citizens must be processed by the government to ensure meaningful impact. It is important to monitor the performance of the government and even when the political will may be weak, there must be some means of redressal. This will ensure accountability of not only the citizen but also the public officials.

Summing up the discussion, Dr. Bandyopadhyay emphasised on the diversity of the channels of participation. The common perception is that technology itself could intermediate participation of citizens in policy making. But this technological intermediation would require some amount of human intermediation as well. They have to go hand in hand. The quality of information and civic education will determine the quality of input in the policy-making process. Lastly, he emphasised on the importance of accountability. Accountability must be demonstrated not only through citizens' behaviour but also through the public officials' behaviour.

The roundtable discussion ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay (Director, PRIA).

Full report is available [here](#)

## Annex. 3: List of the Individual Interviewees

Name of the Participant	Organisation
1. Aaditeshwar Seth	Gram Vaani
2. Anisha Gopi	Nyaaya
3. Antaraa Vasudev	Civis Innovative
4. Asadullah	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)
5. Avijit Michael	Jhatkaa.org
6. Avni Kapoor	Centre for Policy Research
7. Devidas	Samarthan
8. Durga Nandini	Change.org
9. Priyanka Vaze	Haqdarshak
10. Rushil Pallavjhalla	Bandhu
11. Sarayu Natarajan	Aapti Institute
12. Swapni Shah	Unnati
13. Syed S. Kazi	Digital Empowerment Foundation
14. Urvashi Aneja	Digital Futures Lab
15. Vachana V.R.	Janaagraha

## Annex. 4: List of Participants – Online Focus Group Discussions

Name of the Participant	Organisation
<b>First Online FGD</b>	
1. Avijit Michael	Jhatkaa.org
2. Devidas	Samarthan
3. Divya Pinge	Civis
4. Rajika Seth	Centre for Policy Research
5. Swapni Shah	Unnati
6. Sapna Karim	Janaagraha
7. Siddharth	Centre for Policy Research
8. Syed S. Kazi	Digital Empowerment Foundation
<b>Second FGD</b>	
9. Devidas	Samarthan
10. Durga Nandini	Change.org
11. Kanimozhi Udayakumar	Aapti Institute
12. Nilachala Acharya	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA)
13. Rushil Pallavjhalla	Bandhu

## Annex. 5: List of Participants – Virtual Conversation on Trajectory of Participation: From Development to Governance

Name of the participant	Organisation
1. Anima Sharma	
2. Anis Bhai	Gramin Yuva Evam Bal Vikas Parisad
3. Anita Dighe	University of Delhi
4. Anu Sha	Praxis
5. Anup Kumar	Brooke Hospital for Animals India
6. Apoorva Oza	AKRSP
7. Arvind Kumar	Badlao Foundation
8. Ashok Kumar Singh	Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra
9. Athena Joseph	Praxis
10. Ayshi Banerjee	International Center for Research on Women
11. Barnabas Usman	Institute of Development Studies
12. Beckie Malay	PRRM
13. Bindu Baby	Participatory Research in Asia
14. Bonny Ibhawoh	Participedia
15. Chandra Shekhar Joshi	Participatory Research in Asia
16. Chris Millora	University of East Anglia
17. Darvi Joneja	Martha Farrell Foundation
18. Dave Brown	CoveyBrown Consulting
19. Dev Kumar Kandpal	Brooke India
20. Dheeraj	Praxis
21. Edith Read	Aga Khan Foundation
22. Gopal Santana	Centre for Environment Concerns
23. Jatin Kumar	Participatory Research in Asia
24. Jennifer Wallace	Participedia
25. John Gaventa	Institute of Development Studies
26. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay	Participatory Research in Asia
27. Linu Chacko	Participatory Research in Asia
28. Madhu Khetan	PRADAN
29. Martand Singh	Brooke Hospital for Animals
30. Mary Brydon-Miller	University of Louisville
31. Matthew Moors	Institute of Development Studies
32. Maya Cordeiro	
33. Moulasha Kader	Praxis
34. Nandita Bhatt	Martha Farrell Foundation

35. Nasim Ansari	Tarun Chetna
36. Neha S Chaudhry	Participatory Research in Asia
37. Nikita Rakhyani	Participatory Research in Asia
38. Nitya Sriram	Martha Farrell Foundation
39. Paul Emiljanowicz	Participedia
40. Phool Singh Kushwaha	Lok Vikas Sansthan
41. Pragya	Partners in Change
42. Praveen PV	Participatory Research in Asia
43. Prerna Barua	Martha Farrell Foundation
44. Rahul Kushwaha	Paryavaran Evam Prodyogiki Utthan Samiti
45. Rajesh Tandon	Participatory Research in Asia
46. Ratnesh Rao	Brooke India
47. Ridhima Rathi	Martha Farrell Foundation
48. Rumbi Mabambe	Chain Reaction Foundation
49. Sameer Pandey	CRY
50. Samiksha Jha	Participatory Research in Asia
51. Saurabh Singh	Brooke India
52. Simon Forrester	Eurasia Social Change
53. Soja Saramma Mathew	Participatory Research in Asia
54. Sornalingam Arumugam	NGO Management Development Centre
55. Souvidhya Khadka	ANU
56. Sowmyaa B	Praxis
57. Sumitra Srinivasan	Participatory Research in Asia
58. Suresh Kumar Shakti	Banwasi Vikas Ashram
59. Surjeet Singh	Participatory Research in Asia
60. Tarini S	Praxis
61. Thamy Pogrebinschi	WZB Berlin Social Science Centre
62. Tom Thomas	Praxis
63. Vijay Prakash	Praxis
64. William Gois	Migrant Forum in Asia
65. Yashvi Sharma	Participatory Research in Asia
66. Yogita Hiranandani	Martha Farrell Foundation



## Annex. 6: List of Participants - Roundtable on Online Citizen Participation in Policymaking in India

Name of the participant	Organisation
1. Anshuman Karol	Participatory Research in Asia
2. Antaraa Vasudev	Civis
3. Apar Gupta	Internet Freedom Foundation
4. Arvind	Socratus Foundation
5. Charu Chadha	Omidyar Network India
6. David Moore	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), USA
7. Devjit Mittra	Socratus Foundation
8. Divya Pinge	Civis
9. Gautham Ravichander	eGov Foundation
10. Gbenga Sesan	Paradigm Initiative, Nigeria
11. Kathyayini Chamaraj	Civic Bangalore
12. Kaustuv K Bandyopadhyay	Participatory Research in Asia
13. Kuldeep Dantewadia	Reap Benefit India
14. Linu Rachel Chacko	Participatory Research in Asia
15. Matt Leighninger	National Conference on Citizenship, USA
16. Mayank Manish	Civis
17. Meera K	Citizen Matters
18. Neha S Chaudhry	Participatory Research in Asia
19. Niharika Kaul	Participatory Research in Asia
20. Nikita Rakhiani	Participatory Research in Asia
21. Nilachala Acharya	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability
22. Niranjana Sahoo	Observer Research Foundation
23. Rajesh Tandon	Participatory Research in Asia
24. Rajika Seth	Centre for Policy Research
25. Róbert Bjarnason	Citizens Foundation
26. Sachin Malhan	Agami
27. Shruti Arora	Participatory Research in Asia
28. Sumitra Srinivasan	Participatory Research in Asia
29. Vachana V. R.	Janaagraha
30. Venkatesh Nayar	Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
31. Yashvi Sharma	Participatory Research in Asia
32. Zeenat Niazi	Development Alternatives