

# Summaries

## **Introduction: Contours of a Research Project and Early Findings**

*Peter P. Houtzager and Anuradha Joshi*

This *IDS Bulletin* examines the impact distinct state reforms have on the ability of collective actors representing the poor to hold service providers accountable for the coverage and quality of public services. The articles are based on the first of three years of a multi-country study on state reform and social accountability, which compares reforms in São Paulo, Delhi and Mexico City. This piece introduces the articles and the main themes of the study. It reports initial findings that emphasise that social accountability is enhanced when collective actors participate in negotiating reforms; when collective actors are able to engineer some form of institutional fit to state decision-making centres that ensures medium- to long-term access; and when alliances between public sector reformists and civil society actors are formed. The key question is whether the multiple governance roles of collective actors, particularly policy negotiation and social accountability are exclusive or mutually reinforcing.

## **Producing Social Accountability? The Impact of Service Delivery Reforms**

*Anuradha Joshi*

This article argues that social accountability can be an important mechanism for ensuring that the poor get better services. Earlier service delivery reforms based on new public management (NPM) focused on getting the 'incentives right' within the public sector. More recently there has been a shift to the creation of direct accountability channels that empower citizens. To gauge the potential of social accountability however, we need to understand when collective actors engage in social accountability demands and why. The polity approach, which emphasises the mutually constitutive nature of states and societies over time, is a useful way of tracing the emergence of social accountability and its subsequent impact.

## **Contextual Politics of Service Delivery Reforms: Lessons from Delhi, Mexico City and São Paulo Comparison**

*Adrián Gurza Lavalle*

Little attention has been given to the contextual politics of service delivery reforms. By focusing on cases of reform in the healthcare sector and, to a lesser extent, in the main policies in the social service sector in India, Mexico and Brazil, this article explores two dimensions of analysis which have enormous relevance in understanding the reach and effectiveness of service delivery reforms: (1) the historical timing of reforms and sectorial baselines, and (2) the degree and institutional locus of local discretion in policy. Findings show that depending on both dimensions, there is an extraordinary variation as to the degree, interests involved and meaning of changes which, in theory, correspond to these countries' commitment to the service delivery reforms. However, consideration of the contextual politics is relevant not for the sake of diversity but for the similarities that this diversity reveals, pointing to underlying analytic dimensions that receive attention in this article.

## **Big Governance Research: Institutional Constraints, the Validity Gap and BIM**

*Peter P. Houtzager and Arnab Acharya*

The pressing questions about governance today require research on a scale, and of a complexity, that the existing institutional environment for research has great difficulty supporting. This article identifies some of the current institutional constraints on governance research, and examines a set of institutional innovations that enable a form of 'big governance research' that begins to meet the information and knowledge requirements of contemporary governance questions. It presents the organisation and methodology of the multi-country study 'Modes of Service Delivery, Collective Action and Social Accountability in Brazil, India and Mexico'

(henceforth BIM, for Brazil, India and Mexico). The authors argue that the organisational and funding model that this study has created permits the type of interdisciplinary, process-oriented, and multi-country or multi-region research needed to answer governance questions of international concern.

### **Invisible Agents: Women in Service Delivery Reforms**

*Eleanor MacPherson*

Reforms of public services such as health and education have been premised on the core belief that end-users are important agents of accountability, and incorporating their voice or choice in decision making will improve service delivery. The notion of end-users present in many of the reforms is one derived from New Public Management (NPM) and public choice theory – that is, one of maximising individuals or households as undifferentiated units. Viewing individuals and households in this way makes the key agent of accountability on which the very reforms are betting invisible. It is overwhelmingly women who are responsible for households' access to public services. Women are not generic end-users but are subject to the unequal distribution of power within both the household and the community that constrain their agency, and that shape who is educated or who receives medical attention in the household. This article uses examples from Mexico, India and Brazil to illustrate the importance of considering women's voice and choice in public service reforms. The article then argues that when women form groups to ensure their needs are met more effectively, their voice at the local level can improve the responsiveness and efficiency of service providers, and produce better welfare outcomes.

### **The Right to Information and Societal Accountability: The Case of the Delhi PDS Campaign**

*Suchi Pande*

This article focuses on the campaign of a Delhi-based citizens' group, called Parivartan, to improve access of the poor to the Public Distribution System (PDS). The PDS is India's national food security programme but corruption and mismanagement have limited its benefits for the poor. This article shows how Parivartan, through the use of Right to Information (RTI) and acting with residents of a poor neighbourhood, produced a type of 'societal accountability' to address problems of access. One of the interesting consequences of the campaign is that

Parivartan now enjoys the space to negotiate policy, as far as the implementation of PDS in Delhi goes. It also questions some of the findings of the recent literature on collective action and representation of the poor in Delhi, suggesting that the 'new politics' of 'social movements' is unable to meet and address the needs of urban poor. Through an analysis of the Parivartan case, the article describes how a local group, operating at the local level, with links to the poor, produced a set of consequences (linked to the use of the RTI) to influence policy.

### **The Silent Revolution in Anti-Poverty Programmes: Minimum Income Guarantees in Brazil**

*Peter P. Houtzager*

Municipal and federal governments in Brazil have created substantial minimum income guarantee programmes that aim to tackle intergenerational poverty, within a rights framework. These programmes represent a silent revolution in the form and size of the government's anti-poverty intervention. This article addresses why the numerous organisations and movements representing the poor have remained silent during this revolution, and why they have exercised little or no social control over the new programmes. It also identifies who, if not these organisations and movements, contributed to establishing the minimum income guarantee programmes? The answers to these questions are important in their own right, and critical to understanding the ability of actors representing the poor to negotiate policy and engage in the social accountability of minimum income guarantee programmes over the medium to long term. The article offers preliminary answers based on research conducted on the city of São Paulo's Renda Mínima, the largest of the municipal minimum family income guarantee programmes and the immediate precursor to the federal Bolsa Família. The São Paulo programme, it suggests, is particularly significant because it represents a rights-based strategy to poverty reduction, and is therefore distinct from the more common conditional cash transfers (CCTs).

### **Between Individual and Collective Action: Citizen Participation and Public Oversight in Mexico's Oportunidades Programme**

*Felipe Hevia de la Jara*

The institutional design of citizen participation in the Progres/Oportunidades programme, along with diminished capacities of collective actors to protecting citizen rights, limits the beneficiaries' participation to

receiving information and public oversight to a system of complaints and suggestions. As this design sets priority on a direct family–government relationship and restrains collective actions of public oversight – while the collective actors in this case are not much interested in watching over the programme’s achievements – the result is a narrowed range of possibilities for stopping the practices of authoritarian corporatism and political clientelism that the programme is supposed to change. The lessons learned from this case are that such a programme, in order to be successful in restraining abuses of authority, must include certain conditions, namely: the institutional design must necessarily involve direct participation from the beneficiaries, include the supervision of collective actors, and count on organisations that are capable of and concerned with watching over public policy.

#### **Origins of Successful Health Sector Reform: Public Health Professionals and Institutional Opportunities in Brazil**

*Monika Dowbor*

During the 1990s Brazil saw the creation of a Unified Health System (SUS), based on the principals of universal and free access, fully integrated care, and decentralisation and participation. The reforms leading to SUS run counter to the international macroeconomic prescription of the time, which emphasised a reduction of the state’s role in social policy, but are seen by many experts in the field as a reform success story. What are the origins of this reform? This article argues that the financial crises of the social security and the interaction between the sector’s principal actors (military regime, techno-bureaucracy, private sector and *Sanitarista* movement made up of highly trained public sector health professionals) produced policies capable of introducing important changes of a reformist nature in the early 1980s. This interpretation contrasts to the most recurrent one in the national literature on the Brazilian health sector, which points to the 1988 Constitution as a sectoral turning point.

#### **Participation in Reproductive Health Policies in the Context of Health System Reform in Mexico**

*Jesica Gómez-Jauregui*

One of the core aims of Mexico’s health sector reform in the two last administrations has been the extension of essential health services to the whole population, including sexual and reproductive healthcare. This article presents some relevant examples of reform where citizen participation contributed to improve the

coverage of these services. In cases of support to victims of domestic violence and the inclusion of the method of emergency contraception into the basic set of public medications, the years-long advocacy work by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was able to raise government interest in strategies of assistance not offered previously. Also, the strategy of NGOs’ participation in the design and implementation of public policies has contributed to widening the effects of those policies. We can assume that the incorporation of civil society in decision making is not likely to be reverted. However, the opening of new spaces for collaboration will take place in the long run.

#### **‘Good Effort, But Must Try Harder’: Civil Society Organisations and Education in Delhi**

*Araddhya Mehtta*

This article argues that civil society groups have played an important role in shaping policy reforms aimed at improving access and quality of elementary education in Delhi, India. Their involvement in policymaking has led to an active role in the implementation and monitoring of the reforms. Civil society groups’ (NGOs, activist groups, academics and parents) inputs in policy formulation and implementation have yielded positive outcomes due to their local ‘on-the-ground’ knowledge of problems that plague schools. Although the Indian state has been slow to appreciate the value of state–civil society partnerships, it has recently been more open to cooperating with civil society groups. The outcomes of such collaboration hinge, however, on the government’s receptivity to civil society organisation (CSO) inputs in policies and the extent to which CSOs are effective in their implementation and monitoring activities.

#### **Inclusion or Exclusion? Emerging Effects of Middle-Class Citizen Participation on Delhi’s Urban Poor**

*Poulomi Chakrabarti*

Although there has been much debate about the means of citizen participation, it is generally accepted that participatory democracy improves the quality of public policy. The first initiative towards institutionalising citizen participation in governance in an Indian city was taken by the government of Delhi through the Bhagidari programme in 2000. But unlike more conventional forms of participatory governance, Bhagidari was restricted to the middle-class parts of the city. Evaluations of the programme point towards improvement in urban services in

neighbourhoods where Bhagidari was implemented. Based on the perceived success of Bhagidari, similar programmes have been initiated in other parts of the country. However, most studies so far have focused on the impact of the programme on urban services; the political impacts of the programme have largely remained unexplored. This article explores the ways in which Bhagidari and developments surrounding the programme have and *could* influence public policies intended for the urban poor.

### **New Directions in Theorising Social Accountability?**

*Niraja Gopal Jayal*

This article examines the potential of the research programme on Modes of Service Delivery, Collective Action and Social Accountability to illuminate unexplored but important dimensions of social

accountability. In the literature on accountability, a distinction has already been made between vertical and horizontal forms of accountability. There is also an acknowledgment of the fact that the actors – those seeking accountability as also those from whom accountability is sought – have multiplied. This is especially so in the area of service delivery, where accountability is sought not only from governmental agencies, but also from non-governmental actors, which are involved in representing claims to accountability but are often delivering services themselves. The article examines some of these complexities, and also raises questions about measuring accountability, instruments of accountability, and the adequacy of an accountability outcome that is manifested in a policy shift rather than more effective service delivery.