Dear Readers,

We are extremely pleased to present the first edition of our newsletter – Connecting the Dots. The map of social accountability initiatives in South Asia reflects an enabling profile of numerous expressions of peoples’ voices and state responses on making governance transparent, accountable, responsive and equitable. However, there exist few bridges between these ‘islands of transformation’. Connecting the Dots is an effort to link these individual champions by facilitating a venue for critical thinking, knowledge dissemination and experience sharing. We hope that by connecting these dots, we will be able to forge a Coalition of Influence that will hopefully incubate, capacitate and sustain social accountability practices in the region.

The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability, South Asia Region (ANSA-SAR) will be completing two years shortly. From a leap of faith when the initiative began in July 2009, ANSA-SAR today represents a vibrant community of 22 champions actively promoting social accountability practices in five countries in South Asia. Though 22 may seem too small a group to influence major changes, we believe that our partners will become the harbingers for widening and deepening discourses and praxes in the years to come. Many of them are already connected to wider grassroots networks and we can clearly see the cascading of competencies, skills and experiences. Through the pages of ‘Connecting the Dots’, we hope to share their stories, triumphs and challenges. And as ANSA-SAR prepares for the final phase of this pilot effort, we believe that this is the most appropriate time to launch a forum like Connecting the Dots to inform and influence our understanding of what works and what doesn’t’ at the cutting edges. We hope to widen the discourse from the rhetoric of possibilities to the realm of realities. And, we welcome all of you to join us in this exciting journey, not just as fellow travellers but as co-creators. Connecting the Dots is a collective product and we welcome your critical observations, suggestions and contributions to make this forum lively and participatory.

We have consciously labelled this opening column as ‘Straight Talk’. We want you to appropriate this space and critically evaluate and interrogate received wisdom and conventional thinking. We look forward to seeing this space as the multiverse of social accountability.

Let the conversations begin!

Gopakumar Thampi
In Focus

ANSA-SAR: An Introduction

The Affiliated network for Social accountability-South Asia Region or ANSA-SAR is set against a compelling but interesting context of poor accountability and weak institutional capacities on one hand and on the other a growing body of knowledge and experiences on social accountability and governance. Set against this backdrop the establishment of ANSA-SAR is an effort to “Connect the dots” and respond to the critical need to create linkages between different actors engaged in the work of social accountability in South Asia. ANSA-SAR was initiated in 2009 with a seed grant from the World Bank Institute (WBI) and the secretariat is based at the Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. ANSA has worked in three countries in the first year, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, with the focus widening into the second year to Nepal and Pakistan.

ANSA-SAR is, through its unique projects helping national oversight agencies in Bangladesh and local government bodies in Sri Lanka to explore social accountability tools. In India, Nepal and Pakistan the same tools are being used by Civil Society organizations as well as government agencies, on the demand side, to ensure citizen participation in land and livelihoods rights issues. So ANSA-SAR’s outreach has been to work all over South Asia from national to local government bodies, NGOs and civil society organizations.

ANSA-SAR seeks to:

1. increase the capacity of civil society organizations and public institutions in the South Asia region through training, skills building, grants and other forms of assistance
2. increase knowledge and push the boundaries of social accountability as a knowledge area especially by supporting, conducting and disseminating research
3. build a center of excellence on social accountability in South Asia

In pursuit of these priorities, ANSA-SARs program roll-out falls under:

- **Strategic Support through grant making and capacity building:** this is being provided to 22 CSOs in the region, through small to medium sized grants complemented with customized trainings on social accountability tools and techniques. The thematic focuses in this area include environmental governance, procurement and basic rights and services.

- **Knowledge generation for informed action:** This is done through a number of knowledge products that attempt to define the field of social accountability and attempt to provoke new thinking on the topic.

- **Network building to connect practitioners:** This is to create linkages and synergies between the diverse set of actors in the community as well as bringing together existing champions and new champions in the field of social accountability, especially those that worked in grassroots for long but were never brought into focus before.

### CHRONOLOGY OF ANSA-SAR INCEPTION:

**Nov 2008-Mar 2009:**

**IDEATION:**

This was the preparatory phase to ensure back-end readiness to roll out the program. The activities included setting up the secretariat at the BRAC University’s Institute of Governance Studies (IGS), creating database of institutions and practitioners, developing IEC materials, formulation grant making protocols as well as planning workshops for regional partners

April – Oct 2009

**PROMOTION:**

This was the ‘roll-out’ phase to promote ANSA in the region. The activities included Creation of an identity for ANSA-SAR through logo and various communications materials such as posters, brochures, newsletters etc.

Nov 2009 - present

**MEDIATION:**

This is the continuing phase of designing protocols for grants, fellowships etc. Activities included: call for concept notes and proposal, vetting proposals and commissioning grant.

March 2010

**APPLICATION:**

This is the phase of commissioning grants and monitoring their progress with partners. Activities include a variety of programs identified for funding, reviews and field assessments, experience sharing workshops.

March 2011 to date:

**ASSIMILATION:**

This is the phase of consolidating learning, disseminating lessons & knowledge products such as toolkits and manuals. Activities include the creation of e-solution exchange portal and peer workshops

While there is ample recognition of the problems of weak governance as well as the social accountability agenda amongst the challenging back drop of South Asia, it is to fill this gap that ANSA-SAR has treated Innovation as a conscious and continuous part of its outlook and activities. Innovation can be identified in three clear stages of ANSA-SAR work: **strategy innovation, process innovation and product innovation**- all of which reflect particular efforts to contextualize and create greater opportunities to achieve maximum impact.

It is through both strategy and process innovation methods that ANSA-SAR believe:

“Practitioners forming these communities are the critical mass who avail the holistic package that covers grant making, technical support and knowledge generation. The network creates linkages and synergies amongst practitioners while advancing the social accountability agenda and also forming the champions of social accountability in the region.”

### ANSA-SAR Team:

- Gopakumar K Thampi Chief Operating Officer
- Nuzhat Jabin Coordinator- Resource Mobilization and Operations
- Munyema Hasan Coordinator- Knowledge Management and Learning
- Sarah Iqbal Operations Associate

Sensitization workshop for civil servants on social accountability, Dhaka
Champions of Social Accountability
Project Theme “PROCUREMENT”

ANSAR is providing capacity and resources to organizations seeking to develop new tools and methods for enhancing social accountability practices on the ground. Currently strategic support is being provided to twenty-two CSOs in the SA region through small and medium-sized grants; these are also complemented with customized training on various social accountability tools and techniques. Procurement is one of the ranges of thematic focuses that can be identified across the program and it monitors the decision-making processes in allocation of contracts financed through public funds.

Procurement is the theme that will be focused on in this issue of the newsletter with four projects that are currently underway in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

1) “Promoting Transparent and Accountable Public Procurement Regime in Pakistan” - CPDI, Pakistan

CPDI was established in 2003, with the goal of creating an enabling environment through research-based advocacy and capacity building in order to promote citizenship build peace and achieve inclusive and sustainable development. CPDI-Pakistan has extensive experience of holding capacity building workshops, organizing awareness campaigns, implementing advocacy initiatives, monitoring government performance, and managing networks of civil society activists. This experience relates to almost all the program areas of CPDI-Pakistan including (1) promotion of peace and tolerance; (2) rule of law, especially police reforms; (3) transparency and access to information; (4) budget watch; and (5) legislative watch and democratic development.

The overall goal of the project is ‘To Promote Transparent Public Procurement Regime in Pakistan’, the project activities included:

> Improve awareness regarding social accountability tools (RTI/Procurements Procedures/ Budget Tracking) in selected Tehsils in Rawalpindi and Jhang districts.

> Issues pertaining to procurement process in Public Sector Development Program (PSPD) or Development Budgets will be analyzed and Model for Transparent Public showcased.

> Demand for accountability in public procurement will be strengthened at national level through raising issues related to public procurement and budgets at national print and electronic media, based on empirical evidences and in-depth research studies.

> Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) Ordinance 2002, PPRA rules, Punjab PPRA rules 2009, FOI laws, and Section 137 of the local government ordinance. Partnership will be built with PPRA, which is considered to be crucial for achieving the project objectives.

> CPDI believes that if the PPRA rules are fully acted upon by the public procurement agencies, it could greatly contribute in the transparent public procurement regime. Therefore CPDI’s support to strengthen PPRA for its watchdog role and raising awareness in media and public forums related to deviations of agencies from PPRA rules will serve this end.

2) “Develop an efficient and effective Public Procurement System in Local Authorities to Promote Transparency and Social Accountability.” - FSLGA, SRI LANKA

Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities (FSLGA), established in June 2008 is the Local Government Association in Sri Lanka representing the interests of the Local Government Sector in Sri Lanka. Their main objective is to co-ordinate a unified approach among Local Government Authorities in Sri Lanka to resolve common issues and develop participatory governance for the well being of citizens. FSLGA is also coordinating and liaising activities with Provincial Councils, Central Government Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils and other relevant line Ministries and Authorities of the Government of Sri Lanka. They have made considerable progress in formulating Local Government Policies, Rules, By-Laws, carrying out various policy and advocacy programs in relation to special issues affecting the local government Systems, providing advisory services to the national committees set up by the line ministries and provincial ministries to promote local government reforms.

The main goal of the project is to develop an efficient, effective and uniform procurement system for Local Government Authorities in Sri Lanka to promote transparency, social accountability and minimize wastage of public funds and resources. Proposed project is implemented in 9 provinces of Sri Lanka. The project will focus on citizen’s engagement and participation in council affairs to create formal mechanisms, which will create a platform for citizens to hold the councils responsible for spending public funds. Also a user friendly guide book on new procurement system developed in English/Sinhala/Tamil languages to create awareness among general people on the new procurement system.

Citizen’s engagement and participation in public procurement system will create a sense of ownership for public goods. The user friendly guide book on new procurement system will empower the citizens to demand their basic constitutional rights. Thus the proposed project is expected to minimize corruption, inefficiencies, and delays in delivering public services.

3) “Enabling Community Monitoring of Bidding Process of Rural Road (PMGSY) Projects in Ganjam and Gajapati district of Orissa, India” - YSD, India

Youth for Social Development (YSID) was established in the year 2005 by a group of scholars of Berhampur University as a youth movement for development of poor people in Ganjam district of Orissa. Currently YSD is working as a social research and development organization devoted to protect human rights and promote governance in the district of Orissa. YSD has made considerable success in the areas of public service delivery and governance issues. For example, in many slums water and sanitation facilities were

“We work to ensure social accountability and bring transparency in public expenditure while improving governance in the PMGSY program This is done by over sighting the procurement and road constructions by the rights holders amongst other things”. - Bibhru Prasad Sahu - YSD
The outcomes hoped from the project: transparency, accountability and community participation in monitoring of bidding process of PMGSY roads is expected to improve. As a result, there will be increased demand by the civil society for transparent public procurement system and better quality roads will be ensured.

4) Center for Policy Alternatives, Sri Lanka

The Center for Policy Alternatives was formed in the year 1996 as an independent civil society organization providing innovative policy Alternatives through research, advocacy and capacity building to strengthen and safeguard peace and democratic governance. CPA has made considerable success in the field of peace, human rights and democratic governance. For example, the mandate of CPA consciously focused on Capability Approach (CA) framework which was CPA consciously focused on Capability Approach (CA) framework which was introduced by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen to acknowledge the necessity of democratic rights and freedom for equity, growth and poverty reduction.

Outcomes anticipated: The project will build the capacity of Pradeshiya Sabha’s officials who directly involve in the PS budget formulation. The tax payers and other concerned stakeholders will give their comments in the budget making process. Their compiled action plan with issues and recommendations will be presented to the relevant National Ministry to reflect transparency and accountability in the budget making process.

Voices from the community

Rukhminbai becomes an empowered leader

‘We are now more confident and we know our rights. We can now decide on what we need rather than depending on anyone to guide us’ says Rukhminbai Govindrao Choudhary, an elderly ‘Aradhya’ woman from a self help group organized by the organization SAAD in Maharashtra, India.

Popularly known as Devdasi, the aradhya women are from a section of the Dalit community, who for generations have been attached to the temple of a particular god or goddess. They travel from village to village performing dances and begging for alms in the form of food; this is a profession that is transferred from generation to generation. SAAD ( an NGO based in India) has worked to organize these women into self-help groups (SHGs) since 2005. These women are now finding sources of livelihood such as establishing their own small businesses (tailoring, selling vegetables etc).

Rukhminbai is a former aradhya woman belonging to the oldest SHG organized by SAAD at the Tadkalas village in Purna block. She (because of her leadership qualities and being vocal in expressing the group’s needs) was elected as member of the Panchayat (local village council) and remained so for 5 years till 2011. Under her leadership the group raised Rs 50,000 for elections. Even though there were other groups who campaigned for the elections (even paying bribes), the women’s group campaigned hard and promised greater benefits to the community. Their strategy worked and in a ground breaking achievement, they won, making Rukhminbai an elected member of the council.

Today though a new member has been elected, Rukhminbai still plays an active and lead role in the work of the Panchayat to make sure the voices of the SHGs are heard and their needs expressed and dealt with.
EVENTS

Between August 2009 to December 2010, 6 capacity building exercises for grantees were held, 19 workshops and presentations to donors and non-grantees as well as 8 workshops and presentations for policy makers and bureaucrats.

ANSA SAR Supports The Asia Foundation Sri Lanka to Mainstream Social Accountability

The Chief Operating Officer of ANSA-SAR, Dr. Gopa Kumar K Thampi designed and moderated a session on “Social Accountability and Political Economic Review – The Local Governance Project” at The Asia Foundation- Sri Lanka from 23-30 January, 2011 to assess the nature of challenges and key issues to achieve the social accountability strategic objectives in the context of an overall political and economic analysis. The Asia Foundation (TAF) has been taking a lead role in building capacities within local authorities in Sri Lanka over the last several years. ANSA SAR is currently supporting TAF to design and implement social accountability training modules to local government representatives and functionaries in the North and Eastern provinces. TAF is embarking on a new intervention to promote Local Economic Growth (LEG) in four lagging provinces in Sri Lanka under an Ausaid grant. Recognizing the potential of incorporating social accountability tools and practices in this new intervention, TAF requested ANSA SAR to develop a strategy to position and implement selected social accountability tools in the LEG project. Subsequently, ANSA SAR developed a strategy and roll-out plan which is currently being implemented by TAF.

Training program for Customs and VAT training academy

ANSA SAR conducted training on social accountability with a focus on Citizen Report Card for 28 Assistant Commissioners of Customs and VAT. The training was held in Chittagong on February 13, 2011 at the Customs and VAT training academy.

Workshop Held on Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight: Stronger Links Between Citizens and Parliamentarians

ANSA-SAR & GPF, in partnership with the World Bank Institute and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), hosted a workshop with Bangladeshi parliamentarians on Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight: Stronger Linkages between Citizens and MPs on 13 December, 2010 at the Westin Hotel. The workshop was attended by 80 participants, including nine MPs representing both benches in the National Parliament (Jatiya Sangsad).

ANSA-SAR holds Round table on ‘Use of ICT to enhance information transparency and accountability for the poor: Prospects & Challenges’

ANSA-SAR in partnership with Development Research Network, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the World Bank Development Agency (CIDA), hosted a round table discussion on Use of ICT to enhance information transparency and accountability for the poor: Prospects & Challenges on 31 January, 2011 at the BRAC Centre Inn.

Participants from different civil society organisations, business organisation and media organisations, were present to discuss the current status, challenges and future prospects of using ICT in implementing Right to Information Act in Bangladesh.
Useful Resources


2. **Alternative to Silence**: Whistleblower Protection in 10 European Countries. Whistleblower Protection is now seen as a necessary corollary to Right to information. Most countries who have enacted Right to information/Access to information Acts are drafting the Whistleblower Protection Act to encourage and protect those who report corruption and abuse of power. This report builds on in-depth research carried out in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. To download, please visit: [http://www.Transparency.org/content/download.48412/774622/file/Alternative_to_silence_whistleblower](http://www.Transparency.org/content/download.48412/774622/file/Alternative_to_silence_whistleblower)

3. **fundsforngos.org**: This is an online initiative, working for the sustainability of NGOs by increasing their access to donors, resources and skills. It uses online technologies to spread knowledge about organizational sustainability, promote creative ideas for long-term generation if institutional funds for development interventions, improve professional efforts in resources for building the skills and capacities of NGOs. Log into [http://www.fundsforngos.org/to access new funding opportunities](http://www.fundsforngos.org/to access new funding opportunities).

**Disclaimer**: Any views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of IGS, BRAC University.

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We would love to hear from you! Questions? Comments? Feedback? Please contact: Affiliated Network for Social Accountability, Institute of Governance Studies, 40/6, North Avenue, Gilshan –2, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh, Tel: +88 02 881 0306, 881 0326, Fax: +88 02 8832542, Email: ansa.sar@gmail.com, website: www.ansa-sar.org