



DOES SIZE MATTER: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN DELHI AND TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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Abstract

Based on a sample survey of 194 organizations in Delhi and 46 in Trinidad and Tobago it is demonstrated that size of the organization has an impact on social accountability or level of participation by the citizens. The community in the smaller country perceived that the local government involved them in decision making and took action on their recommendations as compared to the larger country. However size does not have an impact on the attitude or awareness of the community towards participation. The perception of the organizations in the larger country was more positive towards the impact of participation.

INTRODUCTION

An active citizenry forms the foundation of a vibrant functional democracy. Starting from the days of Aristotle, who spoke of the city state where the citizens were directly involved in the process of governance, to the present times of indirect participation of citizens in governance, engagement of citizens is fundamental to any democratic form of government whether direct or participatory.

In its present form, participation in governance can take multiple forms: citizen participation, public participation, political participation, or a civic engagement. Public participation is the broadest concept and covers all activities by citizens, non-governmental community or by social groups. Participation can be in the form of citizen action such as lobbying and protest, citizen involvement such as public hearings and citizen surveys, electoral participation such as voting and campaigning for political candidates, and obligatory participation such as paying taxes and performing jury duty.¹

In the context of public administration or government, public participation is a term that is generally used to reflect the role of the public in decision making, especially with regard to issues that affect them directly.

In recent times 'interest in public participation in administrative decision making has increased as a result of a number of factors, not the least of which is that a citizenry with diminished trust in government is demanding more accountability from public officials. There is also a growing recognition on the part of administrators that decision making without public participation is ineffective'². This process is often referred to as social accountability. Social accountability can be defined as "an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is the ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability."³ However participation alone cannot ensure accountability and is not an answer to all problems associated with it. The success of any process depends on the way it is implemented and the role that all the stakeholders, i.e the politicians, the government functionaries and the citizens play in making it a success. In any federal system, the central government tends to be removed/ from the needs and expectations of the local community. Thus, it is generally felt that decentralized governance (local government is the best way to encourage participation A decentralized, participatory model of local governance fosters

¹ Langton, S. What is citizen participation? In S. Langton (Ed.), Citizen participation in America (pp. 13-24). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978

² King, C.S., Feltey, K.M., & Susel, B. 'The question of participation: Toward authentic public participation in public administration'. Public Administration Review,(1978) 58(4),317-326

³ Malena, C, Forster, R. and Singh, J. 2004. Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice. Washington: The World Bank, Social Development Paper No. 76.

accountability, transparency and openness, and creates pressure for the adoption of high ethical standards in the conduct of public affairs.’⁴ Some steps that can be taken in this direction could be with the citizens and civil society appraising the performance of the local government; local governments encouraging civil society participation by promoting accountability and transparency and co-opting civil society representatives in various bodies and committees; the process of planning being made a local responsibility with full participation of the civil society which is well informed; representatives of civil society carry out oversight functions on behalf of citizens⁵. The size of the decentralized unit also has an impact on the ‘participation and accountability on one hand and the economies of scale and policy co-ordination on the other.’ Studies have shown that citizen participation and delivery of services increases in smaller units while in the bigger units decision making still remains remote from citizens and delivery of services slow.⁶

This paper presents the findings of a study that attempts a comparative analysis of the local governments in two democratic countries in order to understand whether the size of their local governments influence the effective promotion of accountability, especially participation or social accountability.

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) and India are the two countries that have been taken into consideration for the purpose of this study. Both the countries have a similar past, having been the colonies of Great Britain which has had a significant influence in shaping their political institutions. Both countries have similar government structures, regulations, policies and processes that have been adopted from their former administrator- Great Britain. Both countries follow the parliamentary form of government, at the central and local level. In addition, both countries have plural societies with their own pulls and pressures which effect governance substantially. Due to the variations in the size of both countries, it was necessary to limit the areas under study for an in depth. Therefore, in the case of India Delhi was selected for the study which reflects the systems and procedures followed in the country and which would have similarities with Trinidad and Tobago. To ensure a more focused analysis, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), in Delhi were selected from India and three bodies from Trinidad and Tobago, namely Port of Spain Corporation, Chaguanas Borough Corporation and Tobago.

METHODOLOGY

Participation in this study is measured in terms of the perception of individuals across various criteria related to the level of participation by the community in local governance, which have been detailed in the table below. A sample of 56 community organizations was selected in Trinidad and Tobago and 194 in Delhi on the basis of the electoral districts in each area. All organizations were asked to provide responses on the criteria as detailed below. All the responses have been recorded on scale of 0 to 4 where 0 implies absolute Yes, 1 to a large extent, 2 moderate, 3 to a small extent and 4 an absolute No

	Criteria	Sub criteria
1	Consultations with the Community at planning stage	By the official functionaries
		By Councilors
2	Consultations at the Implementation stage	Monitoring by Community
		Participation in review meetings etc
3	Action on the recommendations of the community	
4	Positive impact of participation	On efficiency

⁴ Miller, Keith ‘Advantages and disadvantages of local government decentralisation’ A presentation to the Caribbean Conference on Local Government and Decentralisation, Guyana, June 2002

⁵ Miller, Keith ‘Advantages and disadvantages of local government decentralisation’ A presentation to the Caribbean Conference on Local Government and Decentralisation, Guyana, June 2002

⁶ The Challenges of Democratic Decentralisation’ in ‘Managing Change in Local Government’ (ed) Munawwar Alam and Andrew Nickson , (Managing the Public Service Strategies for Improvement Series No 15 Commonwealth Secretariat, 2006) pp 36

		On the group dynamics
		Benefits reach intended beneficiary
5	Attitude of the Community	Actively participate
		Awareness of the community of their role
		Increase the awareness
		Increase Participation
		Participation beneficial

T- tests were run for the scores of the community response on the above five criteria to assess whether the difference in the average scores for both the locations is significant or not. Composite scores were computed both at the community and the official level since both the sides have an equally important role to play in the process of ensuring accountability and their perceptions could vary on the same issue. Taking a 360 approach is critical because unless the administration is receptive towards the involvement of the community in their decision making process and undertakes consultations with them for the same; the idea of social accountability will just remain an idea and not move to the realm of reality.

FINDINGS

The Acts governing the local governments in Delhi and Trinidad and Tobago do not specifically provide for any direct mechanism or system for involvement of the local community in planning, execution and monitoring of its activities. However, some form of participation and consultations exist in both the countries. The Government of Delhi has a scheme for community participation called the 'Bhagidari' scheme or Citizen's Partnership in Governance of which both NDMC and MCD are partners. The scheme utilizes processes and principles of multi-stakeholders collaboration.⁷ Wherein several activities have been identified for implementation in cooperation and consultation with local community groups, i.e. the Resident Welfare Associations (RWA's) of the various residential areas, the Market Traders Associations (MTA's). In Trinidad and Tobago there is no such institutionalized participatory mechanism. Community consultations are left to the discretion of councilors who are expected to hold meetings with the community and consult with them on important issues. When these meetings are held, representatives of various departments are also invited to participate and community members are expected to attend and voice their grievances and concerns.

The overall average score on the 5 criteria (13 sub-criteria) of participation for the community organizations in Delhi and T&T were as follows:

Table 1: Overall Average Score on the basis of Community Response

	Trinidad and Tobago	Delhi
Score	1.66	1.65

In an ideal situation the score should have been 0 implying that the community is actively involved at all stages of the governance cycle. However, the scores reveal that the involvement of the community is slightly above average in both locations. A detailed analysis of the responses to the 5 criteria provides a better insight into the reasons behind an average level of community involvement.

(i) Consultations at the Planning Stage

The planning stage is the first stage of citizen involvement and takes place before the conception of any activity or programme affecting the local populace. A majority of the community organizations who were administered the questionnaires, in both the countries were of the view that they were in a better position to understand the needs

⁷ Bhagirdari at <http://delhigovt.nic.in/bhagi.asp#1>

and requirements of their communities as opposed to the officials of local bodies who were not necessarily from the area. In such a situation, they were of the opinion that their inputs would be important to make the activity/programme more contexts relevant. The average score obtained on the basis of the responses of the organizations (Table 2) is only 2.8 and 2.3 for Delhi and Trinidad and Tobago. This indicates that the perception of the organizations was that in actual practice, the involvement of the community at the planning stage of any activity was low.

Table 2: Average Score for Consultations at Planning Stage

Bodies	Delhi	T&T
Score for planning	2.80	2.28

The t-test results on this criteria showed that the mean of 'consultations at the planning stage' scores in Delhi is higher than that in Trinidad and Tobago and this difference in means is statistically significant, thus implying consultations in T&T were higher than Delhi.

(ii) Consultations at the Implementation Stage

Consultations at the implementation stage are related to the monitoring of programmes and projects by the community and their participation in review meetings. The average scores for implementation stage are also quite low indicating that the respondents perceive their involvement at this stage also to be very limited.

Table 3: Average score for consultations at the Implementation stage

Bodies	Delhi	T&T
Score for implementation	2.76	2.16

The t-test results of this criteria showed that the mean of 'consultations at the implementation stage' scores in Delhi is higher than that in Trinidad and Tobago and this difference in means is statistically significant, thus implying again that consultations were higher in T&T.

When the score is further disaggregated, it emerges that the participation of the community in meetings to review activities/performance, is higher than actual monitoring of the activities. From the responses it is also observed that in Delhi 50% of the respondents feel that the meetings have become routine and nothing substantial emerges from the 'bhagidari' meetings. In Trinidad, the attendance in meetings is average. This is despite the fact that the respondents from Trinidad and Tobago feel that the meetings that are now being held more frequently since the change in the elected members after the last election. This implies that the level of consultations taking place with the community is also contingent upon on the persons who are tasked with the job.

(iii) Action on the Recommendations of the Community

Respondents were also asked whether they feel that recommendations from the community are enacted and to what extent. The average score (Table 4) for this criterion follows a similar pattern as observed in the earlier two criteria. The score implies that larger numbers of the community organizations in Trinidad and Tobago perceive that the representatives of their local bodies take actions on their recommendations as compared to Delhi. Nevertheless, the performance of Trinidad and Tobago is still average implying substantial room for improvement.

Table 4: Average Score for Actions on the Recommendations

Bodies	Delhi	T&T
Score	2.44	1.95

The t-test results on this criteria were similar to the previous two with the mean of 'action on the recommendations' scores in Delhi is higher than that in Trinidad and Tobago and this difference in means is statistically significant.

(iv) Positive Impact of Participation

The positive impact of participation on efficiency, delivery and group dynamics may not be directly linked to the level of participation but it does affect the scope and attitude of the community towards participation. The average score given below reflects the perception of the organizations that participation has a positive impact on efficiency, delivery of services and group dynamic. It also shows that the larger administrative unit of Delhi has a more positive attitude toward the positive impact of participation than the smaller unit of Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 5: Average score of impact of participation

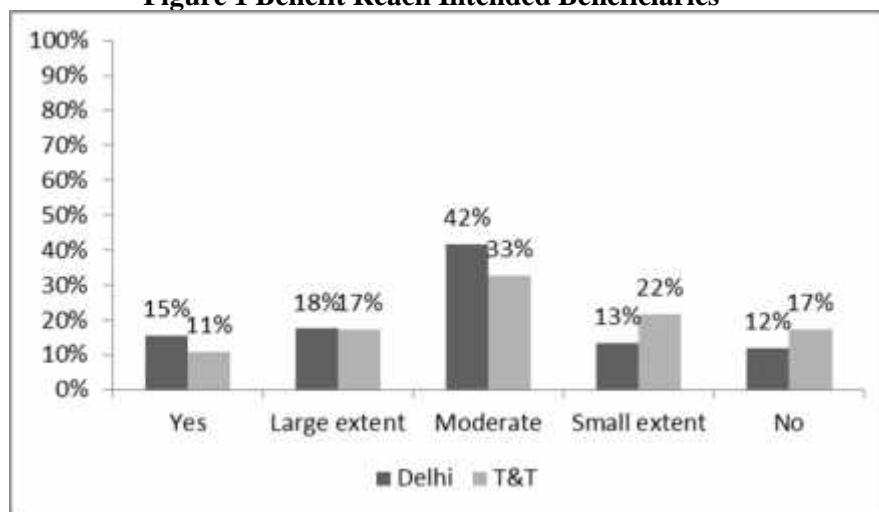
Bodies	DELHI	T&T
Impact of participation	1.37	1.84

The t-test result on this criteria were, however different from the previous three with the mean of 'positive impact of participation' scores in Delhi lower than that in Trinidad and Tobago and this difference in means is statistically significant. Which reflects the fact that the community in the bigger organization has a more positive attitude towards the impact of participation?

A study of the scores for the three sub-criteria⁸ shows that a larger number of the organization perceives that community participation does not affect efficiency negatively. However, some organizations in both the countries were of the opinion that their community groups have been hijacked by groups of elites. Some organizations in both the countries also responded that when community groups get politically aligned, then those groups tend to dominate community activities and decisions. Another view, especially in Delhi was that the 'elite group' does not have a major impact as they are small in numbers and their votes do not affect the outcomes.

When questioned on whether the benefits of government's activities have reached the intended beneficiaries, there appears to be consensus across all the organizations in Delhi. i.e. the benefits have reached the intended beneficiaries partially. Out of the 194 organizations only 64(32.99%) stated in) that the benefits did reach the beneficiaries to a large extent, while another 49 (25.26%) stated that the benefits reached the intended beneficiaries from small extent to no, with the balance giving a moderate score. In Trinidad and Tobago, a similar trend was observed with 13(28.26%) organizations out of the total of 46 stating that the benefits reached the intended persons to a large extent, and 18 (39.13%) stating from a small extent to a no.

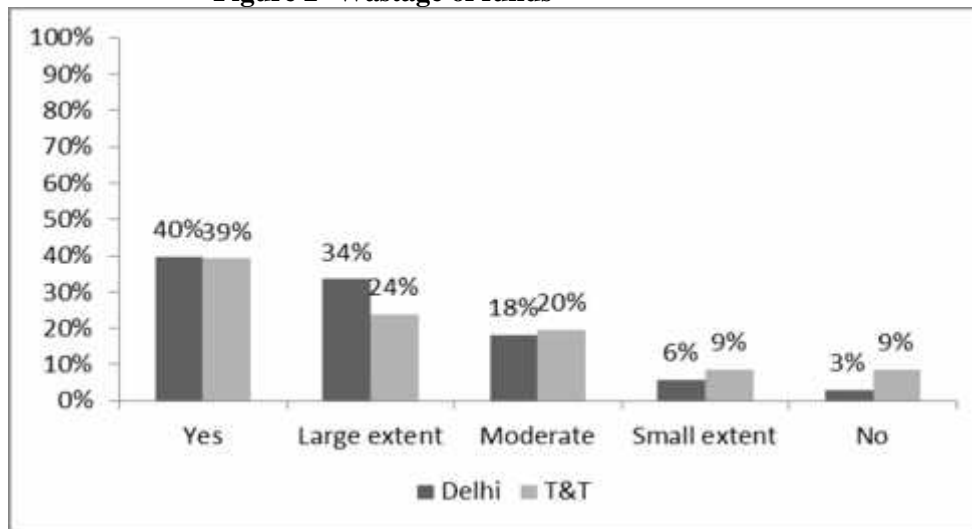
Figure 1 Benefit Reach Intended Beneficiaries



⁸ Ref Appendix 1

Another issue related to the process of benefits reaching the intended beneficiary and improved efficiency is that of wastage. Out of the sample size of 46 organizations in Trinidad and Tobago, 29 (63.04%) stated that wastage of funds takes place to a large extent, while only 8 (19.39%) stated that there was a small to no wastage and the balance reporting that there moderate wastage. Hence, one can assume that the level of wastage is substantially high in T&T. A similar trend can be observed for Delhi, where out of the sample size of 194 organizations, 142(73.20%) said that there is wastage to a large extent, while only 17 (8.67%) were of the view that there was small to no wastage and the balance gave a reporting moderate wastage.

Figure 2 -Wastage of funds



(v) Attitude of the Community towards Participation

The success or failure of the process of participation depends on the attitude of the community on one side and the response of the officials to that at the other end. In the case of the attitude of the community⁹ towards participation, the low on each aspect of this criteria indicate that the community is positive inclined towards participation. This is also reflected in the overall low score for this criterion as can be seen in the table below.

Table 6: Average score for Attitude of the community on participation

Bodies	Delhi	T&T
Community perception	0.89	1.04

Results indicate that the community at large in both the countries feels that participation should be increased. This is further substantiated with the result of the t-test which showed that the mean of the ‘attitude of the community’ scores in Delhi is equal to that in Trinidad and Tobago and is statistically significant. This indicates that irrespective of size of the body, the community has a positive attitude towards participation.

Response of Officials

As mentioned earlier, perception of the officials about the participatory process is as important as that of the community. Thus, a questionnaire was administered to some officers from the local government in each location, who have dealings with the community as part of their official duties. While the responses of the community were obtained across 13 sub- criteria which were aggregated into 5 criteria, the response of the officials has been

⁹ Details in Appendix 1 which gives the areas on which response was obtained.

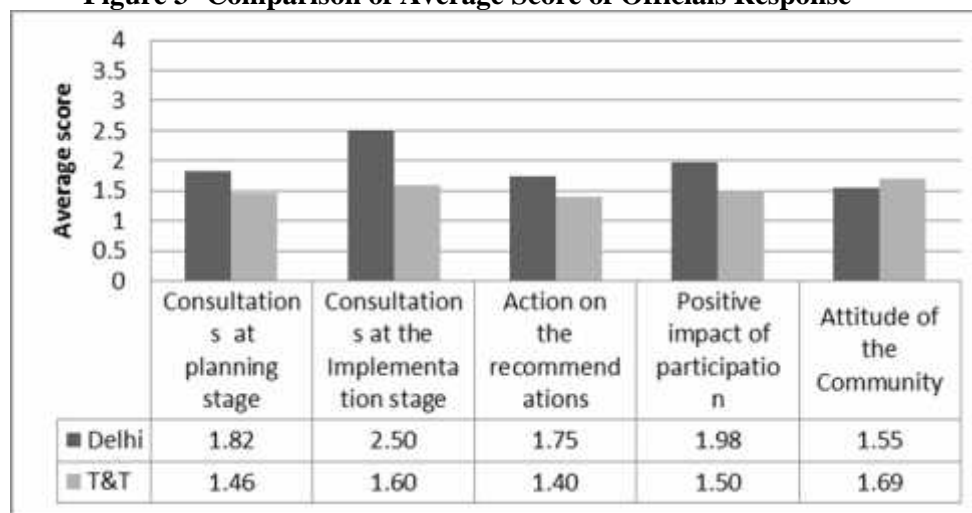
obtained on 10 sub-criteria¹⁰. These were also aggregated into similar 5 criteria. The comparative position of the average score obtained on the 10 common criteria is as per the table 1.07 below:

Table 7 Average score comparison between community and official perception

Bodies	DELHI	T&T
Score- Community	1.75	1.75
Score- Official	1.90	1.56

The perception of the community with respect to participation is more positive in Delhi than that of the officials while in Trinidad and Tobago it is the opposite. On this criteria, i.e. the perception of the officials on the participation of community in the process of governance also the smaller unit had a more positive response. The comparative position of the score of the official response in Delhi and Trinidad and Tobago on the 5 criteria is as below:

Figure 3- Comparison of Average Score of Officials Response



CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset of the paper, participation and accountability have a direct relationship. Therefore, lower is the level of participation, lower is the level of accountability to the citizens. It has been hypothesized that Delhi being bigger, will have a lower level of accountability as compared to Trinidad and Tobago. Under this assumption, Trinidad and Tobago should have a higher level of participation as well. However, some studies have also demonstrated that Governments in large communities are found to be more likely to promote citizen involvement activities than are governments in smaller communities.¹¹

The findings of the study corroborate the hypothesis wherein the perception of the community and the officials indicate that participation in the governance process (in this case of planning, implementation and action on the recommendations) is higher in Trinidad and Tobago when compared to Delhi. Even though participation levels are lower in Delhi, the perception of the community that participation has had a positive impact on efficiency, delivery of services and group dynamics is higher in Delhi as compared to Trinidad and Tobago.

However, attitude of the community towards participation which was more positive as compared to other criteria was similar in both the countries. This implies that the awareness of the community about the benefits of

¹⁰ Refer Appendix 2

¹¹ Yang, Kaifeng and Callahan Kathe; 'Assessing Citizen Involvement Efforts by Local Governments' Public Performance & Management Review, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Dec., 2005), pp. 191-216

participation and their role in governance was high in Delhi even though the actual participation levels were low. On the basis of the response of some community organizations the low participation in Delhi could be attributed partly to the fact that the community had become disillusioned with the response of the officials to their ideas and suggestions and the programmes as planned had not taken off.

Increased level of awareness and the positive perceptions about the local government, particularly participation are considered as being essential for the attainment of better accountability. This study reveals that the relationship between awareness and participation is weak. While the level of awareness of community organizations about their role was found to be high their participation levels were quite low. An important way of ensuring participation is to ensure attendance at meetings of the Council or community as in the case of Trinidad and Tobago or the 'bhagidari' meetings in Delhi. However, during the study it was observed that such meetings are not organized regularly and of the few that are held, many are not attended by the representatives of the community. It is critical to ensure the participation of the citizenry in the planning and implementation processes to maintain accountability in the governance process and one way is to adopt and formalize the consultations process. In the rural local bodies in India, under the Panchayati Raj, the concept of 'gramsabha' or village council is in place which has proved to be effective in ensuring accountability as demonstrated in some studies. Hence, Ward Committees or similar bodies as the gram sabhas in rural areas can also be established/activated in the Urban Local bodies. This will provide an effective mechanism of participation and ensuring accountability of the elected representatives to the people.

Appendix 1

S.No	Response of Community		
	Criteria	Delhi	T&T
1	Consultations with the Community at planning stage	2.79	2.29
i	By the official functionaries	2.71	2.51
ii	By Councillors	2.75	2.06
2	Consultations at the Implementation stage	2.76	2.16
i	Monitoring by Community	2.96	2.66
ii	Participation in review meetings etc	2.56	1.66
3	Action on the recommendations	2.49	1.96
4	Positive impact of participation	1.36	1.84
i	On efficiency	0.97	1.13
ii	On the group dynamics	1.22	2.23
iii	Benefits reach intended beneficiary	1.90	2.18
5	Attitude of the Community	0.89	1.04
i	Actively participate	1.41	1.42
ii	Awareness of the community of their role	1.18	1.93
iii	Increase the awareness	0.40	0.35
iv	Increase Participation	0.47	0.35
v	Participation beneficial	1.01	1.15
	Total average	1.65	1.66

Appendix 2

S.No	Official Response		
	Criteria	Delhi	T&T
1	Consultations with the Community at planning stage	1.82	1.46
i	Mechanisms in place	1.74	1.55
ii	Consultations with the Community	1.89	1.38
2	Implementation stage	2.5	1.6
i	Monitoring by Community	2.65	2.07
ii	Participation in review meetings etc	2.35	1.13
3	Action on the recommendations	1.75	1.40
4	Positive impact of participation	1.98	1.50
i	On efficiency	2.23	1.99
ii	Benefits reach intended beneficiary	1.73	1.00
5	Attitude of the Community	1.55	1.69
i	Actively participate	1.78	1.53
ii	Increase Participation	1.11	1.56
iii	Participation beneficial	1.75	1.99
	Overall average	1.90	1.56