Assessing the Effectiveness of MGNREGA's Social Audits and Training in Madhya Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Social audits are distinct forms of collaborative governance that not only serve as exercises for evaluating participation programmes but also help the poor gain more power. They provide the most vulnerable groups with a forum to express their "voice" claim their "rights" hold the government responsible, and take on a sense of collective responsibility, potentially turning social protection into social justice. An important development in Madhya Pradesh is the state's government's engagement with a state-supported civil society organisation on a project to increase accountability in MGNREGA decision-making. The objective of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of MGNREGA in social audit and training programmes related to tribes in Madhya Pradesh. The author makes a conclusive circumstance that demand-side strategies have severe limits when it comes to improving governance by incorporating the ideas of citizen voices. To conclude that participation in a training and social audit programme, had a favourable significant association with both overall awareness and overall satisfaction. In line with expectations, overall satisfaction was significantly positively correlated with both overall awareness and overall performance after the effects of training and audit were muted.

Keywords: MGNREGA, social audits, training, performance, and overall satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

MGNREGA is regarded as the greatest social security project in the developing world. For additional social protection measures, such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), the Public Distribution System (PDS), and MidDay Meals, social audits have been suggested as a potent instrument to improve implementation (Vij, 2011; Padhi & Panigrahi, 2011). India into a society that is more vibrant, equitable, and connected. The best job-guarantee programme in the nation, it is also the most significant rural development act in Indian history. Rural residents are also granted the ability to work. The Act aims to give any rural household in India that is willing to engage in unskilled manual labour under the scheme at least 100 days of legal employment stability. The act was introduced to help and empower rural residents, mainly those with limited or untrained resources, regardless of whether they are poor or not. The objective of the programmes is to enhance the natural resource base used for survival by the rural poor (http://www.mgnrega.co.in). The international community is very interested in promoting this rights-based strategy in other countries, such as southern Africa and Latin America (Devereux, White, and Kindornay, 2010; Ron, & Carpenter, 2012). From this perspective, social audits are assessed in this area. An extensive monitoring and assessment mechanism is described in the MGNREGA statute. To monitor implementation, the Act requires the creation of three statutory bodies: a Central Employment Guarantee Committee (CEGC) at the central level, a State Employment Guarantee Committee (SEGC) at the state level, and village-level

Village Monitoring Committees (VMC). Social audits were incorporated into NREGA since the Indian government anticipated that decentralised and collaborative networks would be required for monitoring such a broad scheme. Perhaps the Act's legislative requirements serve as a drive for its execution. A post-implementation process is required, the social audit intends to monitor all MGNREGA projects at least once every six months. However, it can also be seen in a broader context as an ongoing public vigilance process to ensure responsibility in the execution of initiatives, laws, and policies by the community at large. A public assembly where all the specifics of a project are read out is one straightforward type of social audit. However, a more thorough social audit might involve a thorough examination of the status and quality of all works, a close examination of all documents and payments made, an investigation of any inconsistencies or complaints made by the workers, the passing of resolutions or instructions to investigate or fix the problem, and a discussion of the results in a specially called Gramme Sabha (Vij, 2011).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study conducted in Karnataka by Rajasekhar, Lakha, & Manjula (2013) notes that although documentary evidence indicates that social audits were conducted, they do not achieve the primary goal of involving the program's participants and enhancing the program's effectiveness. Due to the involvement of village leaders, the social audit process was dirty, which led to the exclusion of low-wage workers. The effectiveness of NREGA social audits was evaluated by Aiyar & Samji (2009) in three states: Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. The procedure, especially in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, was a self-auditing exercise rather than an external one because the auditors comprised elected and appointed officials who were also in charge of executing the NREGA. Additionally, the auditors neglected the social component in favor of concentrating on the books and accounts of village functionaries. In comparison to Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh had lower levels of leakage, at least in the pay component, while in all three states, the pilferage was higher in the materials component. Sumarbin (2014) examined the results of social audits conducted in Meghalayan villages. He revealed that social audits were frequently carried out purely for compliance reasons. Saha & Debnath (2015) compared how MGNREGA performed in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Using the assistance of civil society organisations, he found that social audits have been institutionalised in Andhra Pradesh, giving beneficiaries a forum to express their complaints and discuss their entitlements with the government. However, in a politically active state like Uttar Pradesh where local leadership is not answerable to either residents or elected officials, misusing money from development funds and fostering factional politics, implementation has been delayed. This has led to low participation in rural institutions and citizens losing faith in government. According to a field study, simply doing social audits can enhance peoples' awareness by more than 90% and facilitate implementation (Yahaya *et al.* 2018). They have successfully combated corruption by taking disciplinary measures against dishonest officials, and they have recovered embezzled funds (Dutta, 2015; Rajasekhar, 2013). Social audits are also a transformational strategy since they provide the underprivileged with more negotiating power so they can interact directly with service providers and assert their rights. They provide a forum for commenting on and influencing the execution of policies, help those looking for accountability, and improve communication between participants and public servants (Sabates-Wheeler, 2020). Members of the poorest communities have started taking on leadership roles within their communities in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (Priyadarshee and Hossain, 2013). As there is a natural power struggle when villagers question implementing agencies about any discrepancies, there may be initial conflicts; however, once the advantages of social audits are realized, villagers, administration, and local CSOs typically cooperate to plan and carry out social audits. However, effective design may not always translate into action (Shah, 2007). Nationally, 13 percent of districts (including those in Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Jammu & Kashmir) did not conduct any social audits, (Ministry of Rural Development, 2010–2011). Even in regions where social audits have been recorded, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that they were carried out unfairly or solely to keep records. Studies on the state of Uttar Pradesh have identified the issue of elite capture and control of the project, where the gram pradhan (village head)

and local government officials control the flow of information to the potential beneficiaries of the social protection programmes (Corbridge, 2005). In their study on organisational commitment in the training and visit system for agricultural assistants, Halakatti & Sundaraswamy (2003) revealed that the respondents' educational backgrounds did not show any strong correlation with organisational commitment. In their study, Rezvanfar & Vaisy (2006) exposed a positive and substantial link between educational attainment and job satisfaction. According to Singh & Mishra (2006), NREGA is implemented in a region where the majority of the population lacks formal education. In their study, Basu *et al.* (2020) found that the MGNREGA workers had a comparatively low level of education. Only 21% of the workers had completed 10 classes, and nearly half (45%) were illiterate. Dalapati (2010) showed that the majority (60%) of respondents who participated in the MGNREGS were illiterate, while only 4% had completed high school and only 2.5% had completed class 10 or higher. While the MGNREGA design's rights-based structure and thorough social audit system is a step in the right direction, its ideology needs to be completely accepted by the implementing agencies to deliver social justice. Government, non-governmental groups, and the general public can work together through social audit mechanisms to guarantee successful policy implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. To institutionalise social audits, India's traditional bureaucracy must adjust its attitude towards CSOs and increase its capacity.

Objectives Of the Study

1. To assess the performance of MGNREGA in Madhya Pradesh particularly about the Anuppur and Dindori districts.
2. To assess the level of involvement in MGNREGA-related training and social audit programmes among tribes.
3. To test the contextual mediated model predicting overall awareness.

Hypotheses Of the Study

The following hypotheses are put out in line with the anticipated goals of the study:

$H_0$1: The level of performance does not differ significantly across tribes and also between the Anuppur and Dindori districts.

$H_0$2: The distal variables, namely attending training and social audit after mediating the effect of the proximal variable, namely overall awareness and overall performance will significantly predict an outcome of overall satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Government of Madhya Pradesh's Rural Development & Panchayati Raj Department's ethics approval was requested before starting data collection. Given that it examines a topic on which few studies have been conducted, the current study adopted a descriptive research design. To evaluate the effectiveness and degree of participation in social audit and training programmes related to MGNREGA among the study's target population of tribes. 640 tribal job card holders were included in the study, and a purposive sample was used. Under the CAG report, which explicitly stated that SCs/STs are the poorest of the poor, similar research (Esteves *et al.,* 2013, Ramya, 2018; Singh *et al.,* 2022) identified SCs/STs as the most vulnerable segment of the rural poor. Other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, women in unique situations, and seniors over 75 are taken into consideration as particularly excluded categories for this study in addition to the special category groups that have been identified. As a result, the total population was determined to be the number of job cards issued. The authors used a face-to-face approach to personally administer each questionnaire to each responder. However, local facilitators/interpreters were mostly requested when there were problems with communication. So, the answer rate was 100% accurate. Each

questionnaire took roughly 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Additionally, we showed focus groups with elders, authorities, members, etc. in each of the sample villages and pradhans. Additionally, pools of criticisms, ideas, and comments were gathered. Between December and March 2023, 10 vulnerable adult members of the category of specifically excluded groups (as per the MGNREG Act) whose names or households have work cards were randomly selected from each of the sample villages/pradhans to take part in the study. IBM SPSS 23.0 was used to input and process the acquired data after they had been coded. Data on the responses of the sample respondents are provided by descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, and standard deviation). Relevant statistical tools, including descriptive statistics, T-tests, factor analyses, and structural equation models, were used in the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile: A total of 640 workers from the selected 2 districts of Madhya Pradesh participated in the study. Of these 320 respondents were collected from the Anuppur and Dindori districts. The participants were comprised of vulnerable persons falling under backward groups, such as tribal groups, senior citizens, and women in special circumstances, Majority of the tribes' participants belonged to the Gond, Pradhan, Panika and Baiga. Persons as young as 18 years of age to 75 years old professing diverse occupations including students who were usually engaged in MGNREGA work participated in the study. Most of the workers were illiterate or rather lacked proper education. Only about one out of seven acquired education up to graduation. Also, their occupational statuses revealed that two-thirds of the beneficiaries were either wage earners or agricultural workers. More than half of the total workers were female indicating that the requirement of one-third women workforce as mandated in the Act was fulfilled for the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Performance of MGNREGA: The overall likelihood of executing the ten activities under study was neutral to unlikely, revealing that the performances of MGNREGA in the study area were not satisfactory. The activities were very likely to be executed per the mandate of the Act. However, those activities of which the ratings were graded as moderate or high on the positive side were 'Payment of equal wages', 'Obtaining job card', 'Application for registration' and 'Getting work site facilities'. On the flip side 'Getting unemployment allowance', 'Payment of compensation', 'Amount and timely payment of wage', 'Getting medical treatment', 'Conduct of social audit' and 'Allotment of work and working days' were graded as low. As for comparing the performances across the tribal-dominated districts located in the Anuppur and Dindori areas, the execution of all the activities in the performance scale differed across tribes, as well as between the Anuppur and Dindori districts.

Attending MGNREGA Training and Audit Programmes: More than four-fifths of the beneficiaries never or rarely attended MGNREGA-related training or social audit programme. In other words, it simply meant that just about one-fifth of the beneficiaries attended occasionally or sometimes, or frequently. Further, the percentages of beneficiaries attending both training and social audit programmes usually or every time were negligible, just about one to two percent. The Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) post hoc tests (Post Hoc Test results not given in the report for the sake of precision) were done to compare the frequency of attending training and social audit programmes across tribes, educational levels, and occupations. Regarding attending training programmes across districts, the post hoc test result showed that the Anuppur district had the highest mean and significantly differed from the Dindori district. As with the case of attending the audit programme across tribes, Pradhan had the highest mean and significantly differed from all the other tribes Panika, Gond, and Baiga. Regarding attending training programmes across educational levels, those in the Class VIII level attended the least and significantly differed from those in the Class XII level; alternately, those at the Class XII level attended the most and significantly differed from those in Class VIII. However, for attending the audit programme, the rate of attendance increases as the level of education increases. Thus the illiterates attended the least audit programme but did not significantly differ from those in the other higher educational hierarchy, likewise, the other way around; the graduates attended

the most but also did not differ significantly from those in the lower educational hierarchy. Concerning special category groups, senior citizens attended the least and the internally displaced persons attended the most training but no significant differences were witnessed between any of the groups. But with attending social audit those HIV positive persons attended the least and the internally displaced persons attended the most. Relating to attending both training and audit programmes across occupational groups, the salaried people attended the most and students attended the least. Yet, the post hoc test result showed that there were no significant differences in the frequency of attending training across the profession, whereas wage earners' attendance was significantly different from those of agricultural workers and salaried people.

Looking at the mean of attending training as well as audit, those participants from the Anuppur districts were more active than those from the Dindori districts. However, statistically, the frequency of attending training did not differ significantly between the participants of the two selected districts. So, the rate of attending the audit programme differed significantly between the two. Further, comparing male and female, male did better in attending both training and audit programme than their counterpart but significantly differed only in the attendance rate of attending audit.

Performance between Anuppur and Dindori Districts: An evaluation was made to compare the performance of MGNREGA between Anuppur and Dindori districts taking the number of working days as the basis of assessment. Differences in the number of working days given for MGNREGA work were evident between selected districts. Taking the number of working days as the parameter for comparison, the average scores of the Dindori districts were higher than that of the Anuppur districts by about 10 working days, that is, about 45 working days in the Dindori as compared to 35 working days in the Anuppur.

The extent of Improvement of Living Standard: As to the extent of improvement to which MGNREGA wages had on the Job Card holders or beneficiaries, about half of the workers opined that MGNREGA wage had a minor effect on their livelihood. To just about one-tenth of the beneficiaries, it had a major impact and to another 15 percent, it seemed it had no effect or very negligible effect. Across districts, the impact of MGNREGA wages was unequally felt, beneficiaries of the Anuppur district felt they were benefited the most whereas those of the Dindori district felt they were benefited the least. Beneficiaries of both districts were better benefitted significantly.

Satisfaction across Tribes: Satisfaction levels with the functioning of the MGNREGA program across the four tribes were measured by taking the number of working days given in a year, payment schedule and wage rate as the parameters for comparing the beneficiaries' satisfaction levels. None of the parameters for comparing the satisfaction level were found be to equal across tribes. The Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) post hoc tests (Post Hoc Test results not given in the report for the sake of precision) were further performed to compare the satisfaction level about the number of working days given in a year, payment schedule and wage rate across each tribe. Regarding satisfaction level with the number of working days, beneficiaries of the Baiga tribe followed by the Gond tribe were the least satisfied, whereas on the brighter side beneficiaries of the Panika tribe trailed by the Pradhan tribe were the most satisfied. As with the payment schedule, the Gond tribe followed by Pradhan performed the worst and the best-performing tribes were the Panika tribe and the Baiga tribe. About wage rate, workers of the Baiga tribe and Pradhan tribe were the most satisfied and on the flip side, workers of the Gond tribe and Panika tribe were the most dissatisfied.

Testing of the Proposed Overall Satisfaction Model

As another important purpose of this research, it was again tested whether overall awareness and overall performance can predict an outcome of overall satisfaction after mediating the effects of training and social audit. It was further witnessed that all the predictors, whether acting as distal predictors or proximal predictors significantly predicted each outcome. Both training and social audit significantly predicted an

outcome of both overall awareness and overall performance. This meant that attending training and social audits were positively related to awareness and performance. In another sense, attending more training and more social audits will create more awareness and better performance. Also, both the proximal predictors, that is, overall awareness and overall performance after mediating the effects of both the distal predictors strongly predicted an outcome of overall satisfaction. This explained that awareness and performance were good predictors of satisfaction. In a simpler sense, the satisfaction level of the beneficiaries increases as the level of awareness and performance increases.

$H_0 1$: The level of performance does not differ significantly across tribes and also between the Anuppur and Dindori districts.

Table 1. Mean, S.D., And T-Test of Performance Between Anuppur and Dindhori Districts (N=640)

Items	Dindori		Anuppur		t	Sig.
	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.		
Applications for registration	3.5875	.63727	3.4969	.70377	1.708	.088
Obtaining job card	3.6344	.63399	3.4906	.66712	2.794	.005
Getting work-side facilities	3.6219	.63158	3.5219	.68993	1.912	.056
Allotment of work and working days	3.5594	.63560	3.4313	.69591	2.432	.015
Amount and timely payment of wages	3.6156	.62778	3.4313	.64445	3.666	.000
Payment of equal wages	3.5938	.63143	3.4906	.68566	1.979	.048
Amount and timely payment of compensation	2.9656	.62000	3.0188	.62319	-1.081	.280
Getting Unemployment Allowances	3.5688	.61458	3.4844	.68096	1.645	.100
Getting medical treatment	3.5406	.64198	3.4875	.68102	1.015	.310
Conduct of social audit	3.5844	.62277	3.4500	.65582	2.658	.008
Total Mean	3.5272	0.62969	3.4303	0.67278	1.8728	0.091

Sources: Computed from Survey data

T-tests were executed to examine the differences in the scores of each of the items in the performance scale and the overall mean of the performance (given in Table 1). As can be seen from the table the mean performance of each of the items as well as the overall mean of the Dindori district was more than that of the Anuppur district. However, the hypothetical assumptions of no difference in the mean scores between Dindori district were retained for item #1 'applications for registration', item #3 'getting worksite facilities', #7 'amount and timely payment of compensation' and item #8 'getting unemployment allowance', meaning that part of Ho2 was partly accepted. Whereas the contention of no difference for the other items in the performance scale was significantly rejected. Also, there exists a significant difference in the overall performance between the Anuppur and Dindori districts (t = 1.8728, p = 0.091) at 5% level of significance.

Table 2. Anova Of Training, Audit and Satisfaction Across Districts (N = 640)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Attended training	Between Groups	13.514	1	13.514	13.293	.000
	Within Groups	648.609	638	1.017		
	Total	662.123	639			
Attended social audit	Between Groups	35.156	1	35.156	30.313	.000
	Within Groups	739.944	638	1.160		
	Total	775.100	639			

	Between Groups	3.025	1	3.025	8.797	.003
Overall Satisfaction	Within Groups	219.375	638	.344		
	Total	222.400	639			

Sources: Computed from Survey data

ANOVAs were conducted to investigate the differences in the mean scores of the three dependent variables, that is, training, audit and satisfaction across the districts (see Table 2). None of the ANOVA results withholds the contention of no difference stated as part of H_01. This explained that there were significant differences in attending training $F (1; 638) = 13.293$, $p < 0.05$ audit programmes $F (1; 638) = 30.313$, $p < 0.05$, and as well as satisfaction about MGNREGA, $F (1; 638) = 8.797$, $p < 0.05$. Further, it was understood that though the respondents' rate of attending both the training and audit programme was somehow higher, their satisfaction level with the overall progress of the programme was quite low.

Structural Analysis of the Proposed Model of Overall Satisfaction Proposed Model: Contextual Mediated Model Predicting Overall Awareness

H_02: The distal variables, namely attending training and social audit after mediating the effect of the proximal variable, namely overall awareness and overall performance will significantly predict an outcome of overall satisfaction.

Results of the fit model of 'Overall Satisfaction' shown in Table 3.1a yielded a good fit (NFI = 0.901, GFI = 0.943, CFI = 0.903, RMS = 1.374). The corresponding structural path model predicting outcomes (that is, overall satisfaction) expressed in the form of standardized path coefficients with attending programmes such as training and audit acting as distal contextual factors, and overall awareness and overall performance acting as proximal contextual factors were given in Figure 3.1. The structural path parameters in comparison with the unstandardized and standardized regression weights are shown in Table 3.1b and Table 3.1c. Inspection of the paths and tables exposed that all four possible paths from the distal context to the proximal context and both the two possible paths from the proximal context to the outcome (that is, overall satisfaction) were significant. Attending the training programme had a positive significant relationship with both overall awareness and overall satisfaction, so also attending the social audit programme. As expected, both overall awareness and overall performance, after mediating the effect of training and audit, had a strong positive relationship with overall satisfaction.
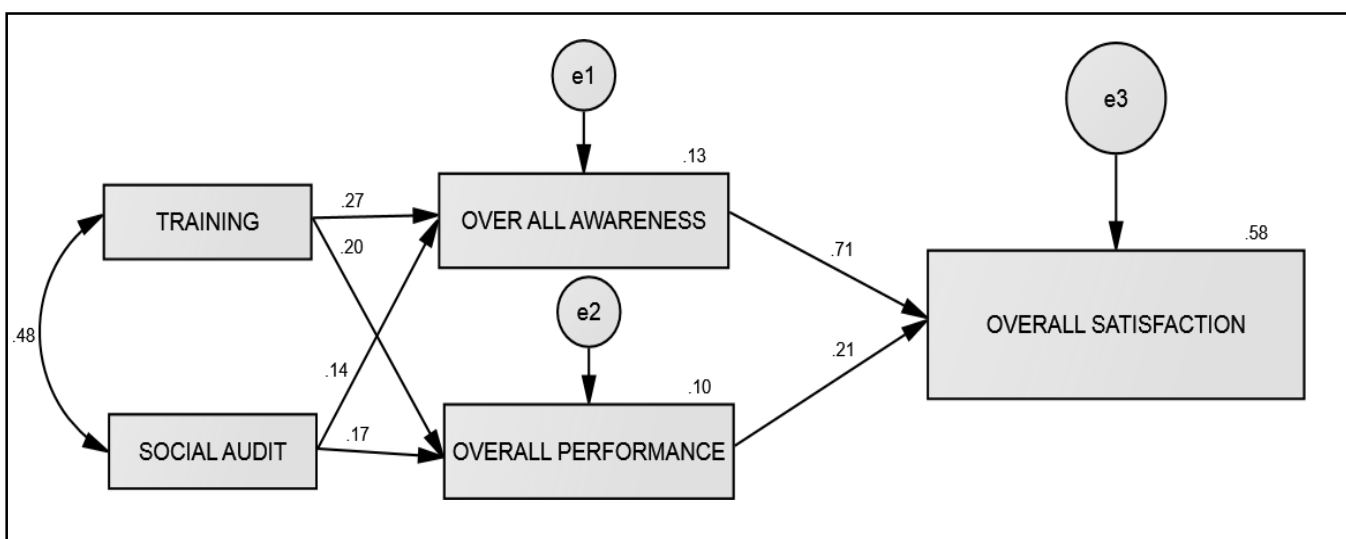

Fig. 3.1: Model of relationships (std B coefficients) between Training, Social Audit, Overall Awareness, Overall Performance and Overall Satisfaction.

Table 3a. Model Fit of The Overall Awareness

Models	Scores
The Normal Fit Index (NFI)	0.901
The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.943
The Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.903
Root-mean-square (RMS/ RMR/RMSE)	1.374

Sources: Computed from Figure 3.1.

Table 3b. Regression Weights of Overall Awareness: (Gruop Number 1 – Default Model)

	Estimates	S. E	C. R	P
Training ☐ Overall Awareness	0.387	0.056	6.929	***
Training ☐ Overall Performance	1.175	0.237	4.953	***
Social Audit ☐ Overall Awareness	0.203	0.056	3.626	***
Social Audit ☐ Overall Performance	1.016	0.238	4.264	***
Overall Awareness ☐ Overall Satisfaction	0.663	0.023	29.165	***
Overall Performance ☐ Overall Satisfaction	0.048	0.005	8.816	***

Sources: Computed from Figure 3.1

Table 3c. Standardised Regression Weights of Overall Awareness: (Group Number 1 – Default Model)

	Estimate
Training ☐ Overall Awareness	0.274
Training ☐ Overall Performance	0.199
Social Audit ☐ Overall Awareness	0.143
Social Audit ☐ Overall Performance	0.172
Overall Awareness ☐ Overall Satisfaction	0.708
Overall Performance ☐ Overall Satisfaction	0.214

Source: Computed from Figure 3.1.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The experience of the Madhya Pradesh government with social audits is a distinct experiment in incorporating systems of accountability within the framework of government. It provides a few interesting perspectives on the efficiency of consistent, ongoing social audits. Regarding awareness, the beneficiaries stressed the conduct of awareness-related training, seminars and workshops frequently at the grassroots level including all Job card holders. A growing body of empirical data on social audits points to the fact that they do have a considerable and long-lasting impact on citizens' awareness levels. Additionally, research indicates that it has some effects on implementation procedures, and during this process, it markedly raises worker confidence and self-respect as well as their capacity to interact with local officials. To determine whether overall performance and awareness can predict overall satisfaction as a result of balancing the impacts of training and social audit, this study examined that hypothesis. Additionally, it was observed that

all predictors, whether they were operating as proximal or distal predictors, significantly predicted on each outcome. Training and social auditing both strongly influenced the outcome of overall performance and awareness. This indicated that participation in social audits and training was linked to improved performance and awareness. In another sense, more social audits and training sessions will increase performance and raise awareness. Additionally, after moderating the effects of both the distal predictors, both the proximal predictors—general awareness and general performance—strongly predicted an outcome of general satisfaction. This clarified why performance and awareness were reliable indicators of satisfaction. In a more straightforward sense, beneficiaries' levels of satisfaction rise as their levels of awareness and performance do.

Decentralised planning, proactive disclosure, and social audits—the three pillars on which accountability is built—do not function in these states. The traditional castes, which are more concerned with factional politics than with advancing social causes, give rise to the panchayat leadership. Therefore, if the Indian government institutionalises social audits to guarantee openness inside the MGNREGA, it will need to set aside specific resources for auditing. Partnerships between panchayats and CSOs can be successful if involvement in rural institutions increases. Any system of governance should be evaluated with standards set by the degree of public involvement in its operation (Hossain & Helao, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative to significantly expand these panchayats' capacities, going beyond the usual toolkits and training manuals.

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