UNIT 12 TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY*

Structure

12.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of transparency and accountability;

- Discuss the need for transparency and accountability;

- Highlight the various mechanisms of transparency and accountability; and

- Make an appraisal of transparency and accountability in practice.

12.1   INTRODUCTION

The changing scenario of the globalised world has increased the expectations of people for better quality and standard goods and services from the service providers. The corporate giants and dwarfs moulded themselves according to the changing needs of the people and attempted to meet the customers' expectations through better service delivery. Public agencies too felt the impact of globalisation as also the need for reforms in the administrative processes and practices. Transformation was visible in the governance process. The main idea behind such reforms was providing better quality goods and services to the citizens. Concepts such as accountability, transparency and participation started gaining ground in the governance.

In the wake of rising corruption and corrupt practices as also the distrust of the citizens towards the government and the governance process, the issues of transparency and accountability became all the more important. Transparency and accountability have become globally relevant and vital for good and effective performance and responsible governance. The two major pillars in the architecture of good governance are strengthening the relationships between the electorate and their representatives.

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In this Unit we shall explain the concepts of transparency and accountability, examine the need, and its mechanisms.

12.2 TRANSPARENCY: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Transparency has become one of the key concepts of contemporary times.It refers to openness in government policies and decisions. It means that the decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It implies that the information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement.

Transparency International defines transparency as a principle that allows those affected by administrative decisions, business transactions or charitable work to know not only the basic facts and figures but also the mechanisms and processes (Rai, 2011). It is based on the premise of the free flow of information and its accessibility and availability to those who are affected by the decisions, which are taken in the process of governance. The information provided has to be understandable and of relevance to the concerned.

It refers to a situation in which the business and activities of the government are done in an open manner without any secrecy so that people can trust that their elected representatives are fair and honest. It means that all the government actions should be scrupulous enough to bear public scrutiny. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is in an easily communicable form and medium. A vigilant citizenry is vital for the functioning of democracy. It facilitates accountable administration, prevents arbitrariness in administration and makes it responsive to citizens.

In political and administrative sense, it corresponds to openness in governance about all the decisions and actions. It includes freedom of information as a civil right, open meetings, financial disclosure, budgetary review and audit and so on.

12.3 MEANING OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is the key component of good governance. It is the obligation of an individual or organisation to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. It is explaining and justifying what has been done, what is being done currently and what is being planned. It is about giving information on the available resources and regular evaluation to determine if the goals are being met. It is the process of carrying out the representatives' assigned mandate, and the willingness to face the consequences of their official actions, which would be published through the acts of periodic reporting (Vijaylakshmi, 2006). In simple terms, accountability is answerability for one's actions or behaviour. In the concept of governance, it is the mechanism or methodology through which a public agency or public official fulfils assigned duties and obligations.

Accountability is also defined as answerability for performance or the obligation to report to others. It is a process of being called to account to some authority for one's actions, or of giving an account (Mulgan, 2000). It means to explain, justifyand answer questions about how resources have been used and to what extent. It is a form of introspection by institutions to examine their operations and at the same time have a critical review from outside.

Accountability can be described as a force on external behaviour to ensure that there is firm compliance with specific policies and directives. It can be seen as a constraint on

arbitrary use of powers. It is a mechanism of making governance effective through bettering or improving service delivery and governmental answerability.

Accountability, thus, entails an element of control by bringing within its ambit not only bureaucracy, but legislature, executive and judiciary as well. It has to ensure answerability as well as proper enforcement for violating certain laid down norms. It involves making politicians, administrators, governmental, non-governmental and private sector organisations, accountable for their activities. It is a necessity for ensuring public officials' answerability to citizens through political executives.

In general, accountability is ensured through adherence to organisational rules and regulations, complying with laws, following professional code of conduct and being responsive to all key stakeholders. In the present globalisation scenario there are several stakeholders including market, civil society, citizens, media and involvement of all in the governance process makes accountability complex.

12.4 NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In a democracy, people elect their representatives and give them the power to rule and govern on their behalf. In return they expect that the elected representatives will make policies and programmes for the benefit of the people. In other words, it becomes the duty of the government to work in the interest of the citizens, ultimately leading to their welfare. In delivering goods and services and performing welfare role, the government spends a huge amount of money a major chunk of which comes from tax payers.In such a scenario, the government becomes answerable to the public and it has to give an account of money spent, whether the development goals have been realised, and the benefits are reaching the masses, whether the various policies and programmes of the government are leading to welfarism and the government funds are handled in accordance with rules and regulations. The citizens have a right to know all these and thus they need to be informed about the decisions and actions of the government. Keeping all this in view, it becomes important that the government functions in a transparent manner and is made accountable for its decisions and actions.

Transparency and accountability in governance is required because of the following reasons:

- **Expansion of government's role and activities:** In India, the main aim of the State after independence was to bring about socio-economic change and speedy development. The collapse of colonialism opened an entirely new area of administration and governance which focused on developmental goals and poverty eradication. The new policies included the areas of human concern such as development of women, children and physically challenged, marginalised sections and so on. All this led to expansion of government departments with overlapping boundaries for work. In such a scenario, the need for accountability and transparency was felt so that one could keep a check on the functioning of various departments.

- **The concept of delegated legislation** : As the States' functions and areas of operation expanded, we saw a simultaneous increase in delegated legislation. The legislature delegated its power of legislation to executive. As a result, the permanent executive became both the formulator and implementer of laws. This led to increase in the powers of the executive. Thus, to keep a check on the powers and functions of the executive, accountability and transparency became necessary.

- **Politics-bureaucracy nexus** : In a democratic country like India which is committed to welfarism, we see a close collaboration and cooperation between the politicians and the bureaucrats. This sometimes forces the bureaucracy to get committed to the government. The bureaucrats instead of being committed to the policies get committed to ruling party's agenda. In such a situation, the bureaucracy becomes highly politicised and neutrality takes a back seat. This calls for suitable checks.

- **Check corruption and corrupt practices** : There has always been a fear that the system may become corrupt, due to absolute power. This was very true for India as it was on the path of speedy socio-economic development and in order to achieve this goal, the government and administration were vested with vast powers. There are many instances of government indulging in corrupt practices, be it misuse of governmental machinery during elections, favouring their near and dear ones in appointments and promotions, disregarding constitutional norms, rules and procedures to serve their own interests, political patronage and so on. While A.D. Gorwala Report exposed this aspect as early as 1950s, in current times we come across several such instances. The quantum of black money, politics of opportunism, various scams and scandals are a proof that we need a mechanism to check corrupt practices.

- **Apathetic nature of the citizens** : In a democracy, people's participation should not only be limited to electing their representatives. They need to play a larger role. But in a country plagued with so many social evils, illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, people are not active participants. As a result, the benefits and fruits of development do not reach the needy.

The citizens for long have been treated as vote-bank. The politicians used them for their own political motives. Huge amounts of money were spent on development programmes and projects, but the real development was nowhere to be seen. Had the citizens been aware and been active participants, they would have always questioned the misuse of money and power. In such a scenario, it becomes all the more important to make the system transparent and accountable.

The above points make it clear that there was an urgent need for accountability and transparency in the system. It was necessary to check that laws work as they are prescribed and that too without any delay and wastage; that politicians and administrators exercise lawful and sensible administrative discretion; they recommend new policies and propose changes in existing policies; and enhance citizens' confidence in the administrative institutions of government (Bhattacharya, 2001). Apart from this, it is required for controlling abuse of bureaucratic power and discretion to ensure that policy enforcement is as per standards and quality, and that it could facilitate continuous improvement in governance (*Ibid.*).

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) Explain the concepts of transparency and accountability.

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2) Give reasons that necessitate transparency and accountability.

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12.5   MECHANISMS OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In view of the gaps mentioned above, the demand for answerability, responsiveness and transparency gathered momentum in democracy across the world and India was no exception to this. As a result, a number of mechanisms have been initiated towards this in India from time to time.

Accountability calls for:

*   Making laws work with minimum waste and delay

*   Exercising appropriate administrative discretion

*   Recommending new polices and proposing changes in existing policies and programmes

*   Enhancing the confidence of citizens and government

*   Access to information and freedom of expression

*   Responsiveness of public agencies to the citizens' needs

There are various mechanisms of ensuring accountability and transparency. These encompass parliamentary control over expenditure through questions, cut motions in parliament, parliamentary committees, auditing, public interestlitigation, judicial decisions and so on.

We shall discuss some of them now:

Central Vigilance Commission

The Central Vigilance Commission, set up in 1964, as a follow-up of the recommendations of the Santhanam Committee, by the executive resolution of the Government of India, is an institution which makes the public officials and administration accountable for their acts. It is a non-statutory body which falls within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Personnel. It is conceived as the apex vigilance institution which is free from any executive authority, monitoring all vigilance activities. The jurisdiction of the Commission covers all employees in public undertakings, corporate bodies and other institutions working under the central government, the Delhi Metropolitan Council and the New Delhi Municipal Committees.

Over the years, there has emerged a web of vigilance agencies in the country. These

agencies are responsible for ensuring accountability of public servants through the vigilance mechanism. It is a body for reviewing and keeping vigilance over all organisations but it does not take any action against them. The advisory role of the commission extends to all matters of vigilance administration referred to it by the departments/organisations of the government.

Comptroller and Auditor General

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), a Constitutional authority, is another accountability mechanism in India. It is the guardian of the public purse and it is the duty of CAG to see that only authorised expenditure in made out of the Consolidated Fund of India. The office of CAG carries out its duties in an autonomous manner and is independent of any kind of executive control. The CAG presents its report to the Parliament through the Public Accounts Committee. It ensures that the money shown in accounts is utilised for the prescribed purpose and the expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it. Some of the major scams in India such as Bofors, 2G-3Gspectrum, Coalgate and Commonwealth Games, have been exposed by the CAG.

Lokpal and Lokayukta

The first Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), constituted in 1966, gave priority to the problem of redressal of citizens' grievances and recommended the creation of Ombudsman type institution in order to remove the sense of injustice from the minds of adversely affected citizens and also to instil public confidence in the efficiency of the administrative machinery (Jain,1996). The ARC recommended the establishment of two special authorities designated as Lokpal and Lokayukta to deal with the complaints against administrative acts of Ministers and Secretaries at the central and state levels respectively.

The Lokpal and the Lokayuktas were to be independent of the executive as well as the legislature and the judiciary. The investigations and proceedings were to be conducted in private and were to be informal in character. Their appointment, as far as possible, was to be non-political. Their proceedings were not to be subject to judicial interference. The recommendations of the ARC were accepted by the Government of India, and accordingly in May, 1968 a Bill named *Lokpal and Lokayukta Bill*, 1968 was introduced in the LokSabha and was passed by it on August 20, 1968 and was then sent to the RajyaSabha for consideration. However, the bill could not be passed as the LokSabha was dissolved in December 1970.

The Bill was once again introduced in the LokSabha in 1971, but could not be passed. Since then several attempts were made to establish these institutions. However, the Bill was finally passed as a result of civil society movement led by Anna Hazare. The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act came into force from 16 January 2014.

In the meanwhile, some of the states initiated the Lokayukta Bill. Odisha has been the first state to pass the Lokayukta Act and create the institution of Lokayukta in 1970, followed by Maharashtra in 1972, Rajasthan in 1973, Bihar in 1974, UP in 1975, Karnataka in 1979, Madhya Pradesh in 1981, Andhra Pradesh in 1983, Gujarat in 1986, Punjab in 1995, and so on. The Lokayuktas have the power to start investigations at their own initiative and can call for relevant files or documents, from the state government, if necessary for their investigation.

Citizen's Charter

Citizen's Charter is a non-agency devise for people's participation. It is a document representing an effort to focus on the commitment of the public organisations towards

its clients/citizens. It is a manifestation of public organisations' desire to provide quality services to its clients. The idea behind the charter is tapping citizen's responses to the actual working of government organisations and to build efficiency and effectiveness of public services.

The concept was first initiated in Great Britain when a white paper was issued in the form of Citizen's Charter in 1991. This was followed by other countries like Australia, Canada, Malaysia, India, etc., for providing better services to citizens.

It is a concept based on government-citizen relationship. It views public services through the eyes of those who use them i.e., the citizens. Although citizen's charter is not enforceable by the citizens, it provides a tool for improving the public delivery system based on certain standards, quality and time frame. It gives more power to the citizens and also more freedom to choose.

The **key elements of citizen's charter** are:

- **Standards** – setting, monitoring and publication of standards of service that the user can expect. This enables citizens to understand what they can expect from the organisation and approach accordingly.

- **Information and openness** – full and accurate information should be readily available in a simple language. This would include those who are involved in the service delivery. The availability of timely and appropriate information to the citizens adds to their satisfaction and enhances the prestige of civil service in their eyes. Charters should also provide the details pertaining to official hierarchy, where citizens can get information and in case of non-availability of the concerned officer, an alternative should be provided in the charter.

- **Choice and consultation** – public sector should provide choice wherever available, in consultation with those for whom the services are being made available. It should enable citizens in giving feedback to public offices, on the basis of which they can improve their delivery system further.

- **Courtesy and helpfulness** – it should ensure that citizens receive courteous response from public officials when they come to public offices. The public offices should treat all citizens with equanimity so that no citizen feels discriminated at the hands of the public personnel.

- **Putting things right** – the charter has to ensure that the services are provided within the norms. If something goes wrong either in the quality or standard of services, immediate apologies should be offered to citizens and at the same time, citizens should be offered alternative solutions. The redressal system should be quick enough to cater to citizens' complaints.

- **Value for money** – it is about efficient and effective delivery with minimum utilisation of resources.

Thus we see that the components of the citizen's charter are a reiteration of the norms which are integral to the foundation of accountability of public administration. There is no doubt that the citizen's charter strategy, if formulated and implemented in an objective, conscious and committed manner to give the citizens their due, can lead us towards good governance (Jain, 2002). Citizen's charters are a good example of the changing the attitude of government towards citizens.

Social Audit

Social audit is an innovative mechanism for ensuring transparency and accountability. It

came into prominence in the wake of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which gave Constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions. It scrutinises the efficacy of any public utility within a social relevance framework. It is an effort undertaken to ensure that the work done by the government is actually benefitting the citizens. It is a process that enables an organisation to assess and demonstrate the social, economic and environmental benefits of its programmes and their impact on various stakeholders including the public. It assesses whether the expenditure has made any difference to the well-being of the community and whether it has led to development and welfarism. Social audit evaluates the performance of the organisation on the basis of its core community values and how far it has impacted the different social groups prevailing in the society.

Social audit is a very effective tool for strengthening grassroots democracy. It provides an opportunity to the citizens to scrutinise the development initiatives which ultimately benefit the citizens. It is a continuous process which ensures that all the decisions and their rationale are made public as soon as they are made. It has to be integrated into public service delivery.

Right to Information

Right to information has emerged as a prominent concern in the field of governance and is regarded as one of the most important social innovations of this century in the field of accountability and transparency. It continues to be advocated as a pertinent component of policy packages to *improve* governance in developing countries. In fact, it has become an important instrument through which openness, transparency and accountability can be brought about in the governance process and citizens' grievances redressed. It also strengthens the foundations of grass roots democracy through people's participation in local governance and development activities. In other words, Right to Information is a basic necessity of good governance.

Right to information has been derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948. According to Article 19 of UDHR, "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression without any interference and to seek information, receive and impart ideas through any media regardless of frontiers". It is a fundamental human right and the touchstone for all freedoms to which UN is consecrated (UNGeneral Assembly Resolution, 1946).Sweden was the first country to provide this freedom to its citizen's way back in 1766. This freedom was part of the Freedom of the Press Act. It was incorporated as a reaction towards excessive administrative secrecy as also press censorship. It was followed by Finland in 1951, Denmark and Norway in 1970, United States of America in 1966. Britain had the Official Secrets Act, which was put aside when the Freedom of Information Act was enacted there in 2000 and amended in 2005.

In India, the Right to Freedom of Information is not explicitly provided for in the Indian Constitution. However, Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which confers the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression, includes the Right to Information when read with Article 19 of United Declaration on Human Right (UDHR). Even the Supreme Court of India interprets this Right as part of Article 19(1)(a). The Supreme Court way back in 1975, expressed this proposition in a landmark judgement in the state of UP vs. Raj Narain Case (Chadah, 2006).

Since this judgement, the Supreme Court has time and again talked about giving right to freedom of information to the citizens. Apart from this, there has been political commitment too with regard to the citizens' Right to Information. In 1977, the Janata

Party promised an open government and declared that it would not misuse the intelligence services and governmental authority for 'personal and partisan ends' (Guha Roy,2003). The second attempt in this direction was made in 1989. The Government was not ready to disclose information relating to Bofors and other deals (Guha Roy,1990) The National Front in its Election Manifesto talked about its commitment to 'open government and declared in very clear terms that it would guarantee the citizen's Right to Information through Constitutional provisions.Gradually the demand for Right to Information got intensified and took the shape of mass movement initiated by Aruna Roy in Rajasthan. A people's organisation called Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan through series of public hearings made the government respond to the demands of information and accountability. It gave an opportunity to the people to demand information on expenditure on developmental activities ensuring accountability and redressal of grievances. Subsequently, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government introduced the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill, 2000 in the Parliament which was finally passed in 2002 and was enacted in 2005.

Right to Information opens up government's records to public scrutiny, thereby arming citizens with a vital tool to inform them about what the government does and how effectively; thereby making the government more accountable. Transparency in government organisations makes them function more objectively thereby enhancing predictability. Information about functioning of government also enables citizens to participate effectively in the governance process. In a fundamental sense, Right to Information is a basic necessity of good governance (*Government of India, 2006*).

One of the key provisions of RTI is self-disclosure of information in public domain. According to this where adequate information is available, citizens can demand services and claim rights due to them from appropriate authorities and officials.

In a system seething with corruption and becoming increasingly insensitive to the problems of the disadvantaged citizenry, RTI has shown promise of empowering citizens to ensure accountability and act as an enforcer of good governance (*Gandhi, 2009*). The RTI Act is a torch-bearer that can lead to more open, accountable, responsive and people-friendly governance.

Ensuring transparency and accountability requires electoral reforms, improving the efficacy of institutions including police and judiciary.

12.6   OPERATONALISATION OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The discussion on the various mechanisms with regard to transparency and accountability in the preceding sections makes clear that no doubt there have been various initiatives from time to time in this direction. But what is important is their operationalisation. We need to know whether the initiatives taken are really beneficial in ensuring accountability and transparency in the system and governance process. Citizens have become an essential component in enforcing accountability. Along with this, a transparent system that allows for answerability to public conduct becomes a necessity.

When we refer to the operationalisation of the transparency and accountability mechanisms, we see that Right to Information (RTI) is a very potent weapon and its positive role has been witnessed especially at the grassroots levels in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).The MGNREGA guidelines stipulate that all information be displayed to the public through display boards and paintings on the walls of the panchayat offices. Apart from this, there is also a

provision that all the MGNREGA accounts and their summaries at the gram panchayat level should be made publicly available for scrutiny (Aiyar and Samji, 2012).

RTI at the grassroots level is being implemented through social audits of MGNREGA. It has been successfully implemented, in some states, with the unique partnerships between governments and civil society organisations (CSOs). Andhra Pradesh in 2006, embarked on a process to institutionalise social audits for all MGNREGA programmes in the state. The government collaborated with CSOs and built up a 35-member team which could facilitate and manage the audit process. During the audit, details of government expenditure on MGNREGA are verified, assets developed are assessed and information on it is shared with village communities. The audit ends with a public meeting, where the findings of audit are shared in the presence of local government officials and politicians (*ibid.*).

The government - civil society partnership is also visible in Rajasthan. In November 2007, the Rajasthan government collaborated with the *Soochna Evam Rojgar Adhikar Abhiyaan*, to develop a decentralised worksite management system. The purpose of this *Abhiyaan* has been to create a pool of trained worksite managers that take daily measurements of worksites and determine daily output. The key emphasis is on transparency *(ibid.)*.

In Delhi, a voluntary organisation called *Parivartan*, has been quite successful in facilitating the use Right to Information in addressing their grievances, getting the pending works done by the government departments and also inspecting the government works. It is helping the poor people in getting ration cards or receiving their ration quota on Antyodaya card under the public distribution system by exercising the RTI (Guha Roy, 2006).

There are some glaring examples when the Lokayukta has come forward and tried to weed out corruption prevailing in the various state institutions. In 2010 in Karnataka, major irregularities in mines in Bellary, including those owned by Obulapuram Mining Company and by the prominent politicians, who were then ministers in the Government of Karnataka had been exposed by Lokayukta. The Lokayukta's Report uncovered major violations and systemic corruption in iron-ore mining in Bellary. It recommended banning all exports of iron ore and limiting iron ore production for captive production of iron and steel. Lokayuktas if given a free hand, can definitely function towards building a transparent and accountable system.

The emergence and use of e-governance or digital governance, in the governance process has further ensured transparency and accountability. The main idea behind e-governance is to bring government services to the beneficiaries in a transparent, speedy, easy and efficient way. The ICT-based governance opened new economic opportunities, brought transparency in public-private transactions, insights into outsourcing processes and accountable administration. It introduced a minimum guarantee against arbitrary exchanges and government procurements and some form of standardisation of procedures (Nath, 2016).

The state level e-governance projects such as Akshaya in Kerala, Gyandoot in Madhya Pradesh, Digital Saksharta Abhiyan in Haryana, SWAGAT in Gujarat, APSWAN and TWINS in Andhra Pradesh, Bhoomi in Karnataka, E-mitra in Rajasthan, Lokvani Project in Uttar Pradesh etc., are a proof that ICT is extensively being used in the various government departments for enhancing efficiency, transparency, accountability and providing better services to the people. The application of electronic means in the interaction between government and citizens (G2C) and government and business (G2B) as well as in internal government operations (G2G) has simplified and improved

democratic government and business aspects of governance (Saxena, 2005). By providing online access and information to the citizens with regard to land records, caste and income certificates and various other government services, things have become very simple and easy for the citizens. Just by a click of the mouse, they get things readily available at their doorsteps. E-governance and digitalisation is changing the way governments are addressing the problems of the citizens and delivering them. Digitalisation will go a long way in making the system accountable and transparency. We have discussed in detail about the impact of ICT on governance in Unit 8 of this Course.

There are challenges in the operationalisation process. There is need for strong political will, bureaucratic commitment, and awareness on part of citizens that can bring the desired change.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) List the various mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability.

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2) Give some initiatives towards operationalisation of transparency and accountability in governance.

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12.7   CONCLUSION

Thus, we can say that accountability and transparency are vital to the functioning of democracy especially in India. They help in keeping a check on the use and misuse of power of the government and keeps the public informed. There are complex issues which involve involvement of multiple actors to contest it. Active participation from all segments of the society is required to further strengthen it and question the arbitrary actions and decisions of the government. The role of the civil society too becomes important. We have seen how Anna Hazare and his team compelled the government to come up with the Lokpal Bill which was long overdue. The media too has to play an effective role in furthering the flow, authenticity and quality of information. It has to become a responsible and an active participant in increasing awareness among people, lending a voice to the voiceless and generating debate on the use and misuse of RTI and exposing corrupt practices of the government without any fear or favour (Mishra, 2009). The experience gained so far, is a clear indication that we are moving towards a more transparent and accountable system. It is hoped that in near future with more and more use of digitalisation in the administration and administering of basic facilities to the citizens, effective accountability and transparency is achieved.

12.8 GLOSSARY

E-governance : It is electronic governance. When governance is done by using ICT, it is called e-governance. In other words, it is governing through an electronic mode. It is the performance of government functions through the applications of ICT, the most important and well known part of which is internet. Thus, it is a process of reforms in how government works, shares information and delivers services to internal and external clients.

Ombudsman : It is the earliest democratic institution for the redressal of public grievances. It is a device for controlling the ever growing powers of bureaucracy. It is effective in taking necessary corrective measures against cases of maladministration or wilful neglect on the part of the administration. An Ombudsman is generally considered as a person who is commissioned to protect citizens against any possible maladministration.

SWAGAT : It refers to State-wide Attention on Public Grievance by Application of Technology in Gujarat. It is an ICT based application to improve the public redressal system relating to government services.

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12.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1)   Your answer should include the following points:

- Transparency refers to openness in government policies and decisions.

- Accessibility of information to those who will be affected by the decisions.

- Accountability is answerability for one's actions or behaviour.

- Obligation of an individual or organisation to account for its activities, accept responsibility and disclose results in a transparent manner.

2)   Your answer should include the following points:

- Increase in government's role and activities.

- Delegated legislation.

- Ensure suitable checks in politics-bureaucracy nexus.

- Check corruption and corrupt practices.

- Apathetic nature of the citizens.

Check Your Progress 2

1)   Your answer should include the following points:

- Central Vigilance Commission.

- Comptroller and Auditor General.

- Office of the Lokpal and Lokayukta.

- Social Audit.

- Right to Information.

2)   Your answer should include the following points:

- Role of Right Information as a potent weapon in the implementation of MGNREGA at grassroots level.

- Important role played by Lokayuktas in recent times especially in the state of Karnataka.

- Use of ICT based governance in several states through projects such as Akshaya, Gyandoot, and Swagat etc.