

State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico

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This *IDS Bulletin* focuses on the role of civil society actors in the design of sectoral reforms and the possibilities of social accountability resulting from this role. In addition to large institutional reforms in social assistance and health, the articles cover education reform in India as well. They are compiled from the first year fieldwork findings of the study called 'Modes of Service Delivery, Collective Action and Social Accountability in Brazil, India, and Mexico'.

Begun in 2005, the study assesses whether sector-wide reforms of public services, involving forms of decentralisation, pluralisation of service providers, or user/citizen participation, could enable greater accountability from below. 'Critical cases' focus on the large urban centres of countries where reforms have been extensive and varied: São Paulo, Delhi and Mexico City. They have relatively more active civil societies, a substantial history of service delivery by public agencies, and are focal points for public policy. Here national reforms can be expected to lead to changes in the pattern of state-society interactions. Political processes can increase social accountability, and expand and improve coverage of public services for those in poverty, acknowledging the severe constraints that exist on the agency of poor individuals.

Potential tension between different governance roles defines an important research frontier as knowledge of social accountability advances. These contributions are a first at developing a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of the mutually reinforcing or exclusive nature of these civil society governance roles, and of the new governance institutions that attempt to combine these roles in innovative but possibly contradictory ways.

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