



# Newsletter\_9\_Piyush\_Kamal\_Ex-IRS

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## Ethical Accountability and Transparency in Public Service

**Accountability** and **transparency** are two crucial aspects of government oversight that ensure ethical engagements. Both of these characteristics are increasingly recognized as fundamental qualities of good democratic governance.

**Accountability** is the aspect of administrative responsibility through which officials are held answerable for general notions of democracy and morality.

- Accountability is the fundamental requirement for preventing the abuse of power.
- It ensures that power is directed towards achieving efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, and transparency.
- Accountability means being answerable for the performance of tasks assigned to a person.
- Accountability is the process whereby public sector organizations, and the individuals within them, are responsible for their decisions and actions and submit themselves to appropriate external scrutiny.

**For instance,**

- **The Citizen's Charter** clearly spelled out the responsibilities of various agencies of the government. By laying down the timelines for rendering the specific services they proactively make themselves accountable to the citizens.
  - The Citizens Charter of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) provides for **inter-alia service delivery standards** which include the specified timelines for the issue of refunds or redressal of grievances.
  - **E-Governance** initiatives for providing an accountable administration include a framework for efficient handling of public grievances through the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS).
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**Transparency** means that the criteria, process, and decision-making systems are openly known to all in a public manner. Citizens' charter becomes an important measure for transparency in institutional setup.

Transparency means that citizens have an inherent right to know the truth about public issues and the government ensures that this right is met.

- Transparency allows stakeholders to collect information that may be critical to uncovering abuses and defending their interests. Likewise, transparency increases the accountability of Government officials.
- It allows ready information to the citizens in a manner that they may be able to claim their entitlements.

Public administrators are expected to be forthcoming with all information related to their agency. The purpose of public administration is to serve the public. If the public is not provided with the data obtained by that agency, then the service relationship is bound to get damaged.

Major Initiatives to Enhance Transparency in India include –

- Right to Information Act,
  - Public Services Bill,
  - Citizens Charters,
  - e-Governance,
  - e-Bhoomi, e-Choupal,
  - e-procurement, e-NAM
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## Way Forward

Today's governments operate in a very complex environment with stakeholders consisting of different interest groups, competing demands on limited resources, and complex legal requirements; therefore, more accountability and transparency are required to encourage responsible governance.

The **objective** is to ensure public trust along with minimum discretion—

**Public trust:** Accountability facilitates a feedback mechanism between the Government and its citizens. So the accountability to the citizens is most critical in order to ensure the sustenance of public trust and confidence in the existing democratic systems.

- The accountability mechanisms also need to keep pace with developments of modern government structures particularly in the era of digitalization.
- There is a need to sensitize all the functionaries towards their responsibilities and duties in the accountability frameworks.

**The minimum element of discretion:** For better transparency, there should be a Citizen's Charter and well-defined Standard Operating Procedures for performing various jobs. The element of discretion needs to be minimized to ensure responsiveness, transparency, and accountability.

Hence backed with proper implementation, the tools of accountability and transparency can be used judiciously to achieve ethical governance objectives.