



## ***The Future of Fiscal Transparency and Accountability in India***

### **A Consultation**

Constitution Club of India, Rafi Marg, Delhi

October 26, 2018

#### *Draft Agenda*

9.30 am - 10.00 am      Registration

**10.00 am - 10.15 am      Welcome and Introduction**

**10.15 am - 11.30 am      Union and State Finances: State of the Play**

The last two decades have witnessed significant improvement in the engagement of CSOs, social movements, policy researchers and media with the Union Government's budgets and similar developments in some of the States. There has also been some reciprocation of this development in the decisions and actions of the Union and State Governments. However, it could be argued that we are still far from witnessing extensive public engagement even with the Union Budget. The engagement of select actors in the accountability ecosystem with State Budgets is confined to less than half of the States. Availability of relevant and accessible information about the Union and State Budgets declines severely at the district and sub-district levels. In such a context, this session would identify some of the major barriers to fiscal transparency and accountability at the level of Union and State Governments and outline the strategies that could be pursued in the coming years to address the challenges.

11.30 am - 11.45 am      Tea

**11.45 am - 1.00 pm      Challenges and Opportunities at the Level of Local Governments**

With uneven progress over the last two and a half decades, fiscal decentralisation in India remains an unfinished agenda. Yet, the role of rural and urban local governments has seen a gradual expansion on the expenditure side of the country's fiscal architecture. The recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission have tried to give the local governments' finances a boost. However, there are serious gaps on the one hand in availability of human resources and technical capacity for fiscal management in the local governments and on the other hand major loopholes in the accountability mechanisms in this domain. Even the engagement of CSOs, social movements, policy researchers and media with local government finances in the country has been clearly insufficient. The challenges in this domain, therefore, are formidable. But triggering public engagement with government finances can be best pursued at

the level of local government budgets. Against this backdrop, the session will discuss some of the major challenges and opportunities for enhancing fiscal transparency and accountability at the level of local governments in India.

1.00 pm - 1.45 pm

Lunch

1.45 pm - 3.30 pm

### **Technology and Fiscal Governance**

India has seen a proliferation of technology-driven initiatives in various aspects of governance and delivery of publicly funded services over the last decade. But the progresses in technocratic efficiency within the government system through better technology might not always lead to empowerment of people; it could on the contrary even reinforce centralisation and exclusion. The increasing reliance on technology for improving governance, therefore, has been a subject of intense debates. On the other hand, there are also specific experiences of technology-enabled projects both by governments at different levels and non-government actors that have generated useful insights on how technology can be used to improve fiscal governance in the country by facilitating and strengthening public engagement with government finances. This session will focus on identifying the important insights from such initiatives and building an understanding of what kind of strategies need to be pursued in this domain.

3.30 pm - 3.45 pm

Tea

3.45 pm - 5.00 pm

### **Principles and Implications of the New Data Protection Regime**

The idea of proactive disclosure of information has covered a lot of ground in this country with the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005. There has been a growing recognition of the fact that free access to comprehensible and reliable information available through different modes, both offline and online, is crucial for improving governance. However, the recently brought out Draft Personal Data Protection Bill of 2018 has opened up pertinent questions about the potential far reaching implications it would have for the RTI Act in terms of access to information as well as for democratic platforms and accountability ensuring mechanisms such as social audits. Therefore, a discourse on the principles that govern the balance between the right to privacy and the right to information as far as government finances are concerned becomes relevant and crucial at this juncture. Given this backdrop, the session would aim at facilitating a discussion on these issues to inform further debates.

5.00 pm - 5.30 pm

**Summing Up**