

Lesson Two

Accountability in Public Administration

Accountability is the obligation of public officials to answer for their actions, decisions, and use of public resources. It is a cornerstone of democratic governance and a key mechanism to ensure that power is exercised responsibly. In public administration, accountability can be seen from multiple dimensions: **political accountability** holds elected and appointed officials responsible to legislatures and the electorate; **legal accountability** ensures that officials operate within the law and can be challenged in courts for unlawful actions; **administrative accountability** emphasizes internal checks within the bureaucracy such as supervision, audits, and performance evaluations; and **social accountability** involves citizens, media, and civil society groups in holding public officials answerable. Effective accountability systems reduce corruption, improve service delivery, and enhance government responsiveness and effectiveness.

Mechanisms for Ensuring Accountability

There are several institutional, legal, and social mechanisms in place to hold public administrators accountable. **Institutional mechanisms** include parliamentary oversight (such as question hours, committees, and budget reviews), administrative audits, and the role of independent agencies like vigilance commissions or ombudsman offices. These bodies monitor the performance of public officials and investigate allegations of misconduct. **Legal mechanisms** include constitutional provisions, statutory regulations, and judicial review. Courts have the power to check the legality of administrative actions and provide remedies to aggrieved citizens. Instruments like the **Right to Information (RTI) Act** empower citizens to demand information from public bodies, promoting transparency and enabling informed participation. **Whistleblower protections** are also vital, allowing individuals within the system to report unethical behavior without fear of retaliation.

On the **social front**, mechanisms like **Citizen Charters** and **social audits** provide platforms for public engagement in governance. Citizen Charters outline the standards of service delivery expected from government departments and give people a framework for redressal in case of lapses. Social audits, especially in welfare schemes, allow communities to examine the financial and operational details of projects and demand accountability from implementing officials. Additionally, the role of a free press and active civil society cannot be overstated—they act as external watchdogs, often bringing issues of misgovernance to public attention and pressuring authorities to act.