

## **Citizen Report Cards**

### **Why is this practice called a good practice?**

Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) on public utilities, pioneered by the Public Affairs Centre (PAC) is now widely recognised as a powerful voice mechanism. Anchoring on the concept of user feedback, 'Citizen Report Cards' provide a simple and widely replicable tool for improving transparency and public accountability. When citizens' voice provides an objective assessment of both qualitative and quantitative aspects of different public services, based on first-hand interactions with the agencies providing these services, it is possible to rank the agencies on the quality of performance. This '*report card*' can then be used to stimulate collective action by citizens, and provide organisational leaders with an opportunity to design reforms and bring in a strategic reorientation. Experiences with report cards, both national and international, have amply demonstrated its potential for demanding more public accountability and providing a credible database to facilitate proactive civil society responses.

CRCs emerged in a highly disabling context of growing dissatisfaction with public services compounded by the helplessness among ordinary people about public institutions, which were seen as non-responsive and non-accountable.

### **Where is this good practice located?**

Though pioneered in Bangalore, CRCs have been extensively applied in varied contexts, both in India and elsewhere.

### **How would one reach the location?**

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## Indicators for evaluation

1. PROBLEM ADDRESSED TO BY THE PRACTICE and the legal framework for such provisions in the Constitution and regulatory systems

Citizen Report Cards emerged as an “accidental tool” when a group of concerned citizens attempted to create an informed dialogue by objectively exploring the potency of citizen’s voice to nudge a reluctant state to be responsive and accountable. In particular, there were three disabling conditions that led to the CRC: (a) the monopolistic nature of public service which provides no effective exit option for citizens/users and the resultant low levels of collective actions to demand improvements in service delivery. (b) low awareness among citizens on expected standards and norms of service delivery and also, on their legal entitlements and (c) failure of existing top-down accountability mechanisms and structures to ensure proper monitoring and regulation. Given the non-confrontational approach, CRCs fall within constitutional framework that guarantees freedom of speech and expression.

2. PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL PEOPLE-

A major feature of a CRC is that it relies on direct feedback from the community. Using scientific random sample survey techniques, households are identified for a survey to generate objective and credible information on quality of public services. Prior to this, a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are conducted with different population groups like women, children and the disadvantaged to generate context specific issues and themes for the structured probe. However, what distinguishes a CRC from any other surveys is the public character of its dissemination; CRC findings are always discussed and disseminated at the local level to generate critical awareness on the issues that emerge from the survey and trigger collaborative mechanism to explore service improvement measures.

### THE PARTICIPATION MATRIX

THEMES	STAGE I	STAGE II
▪ GUIDING QUESTIONS	Quality of civic services; Identifying stress areas; Grievance redressal mechanisms	Using Citizen Report Cards as a leverage for changes; Benchmarking progress
▪ KEY ACTORS	NGO, Community	Community, State
▪ MEASUREMENT	Survey; Case Studies	Consultations, Triangulation
▪ DISSEMINATION	Media reports, Workshops, Meetings	Advocacy, Documentation

3. ACCOUNTABILITY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS TO THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE SERVICE, such as use of Citizens charters, grievance redressal systems, response timings, mention any legal recourse used by beneficiaries.

From an accountability perspective, CRCs can fill a number of roles. CRCs can potentially reveal areas where the institutions responsible for service provision have not fulfilled their obligations, and translate findings into 'rights based' advocacy statements and positions. A powerful outcome of CRCs is the generation of user feedback on hidden costs like bribes. Furthermore, the nature of corruption (whether bribes are paid voluntarily or extorted) and the size of payments can be effectively highlighted and tracked. Feedback can also be used to estimate the amount of private resources spent to compensate for poor service provision (e.g. water purifiers, voltage stabilizers, private tuition, etc.).

Rather than taking a legal recourse (which may provide short term benefits, but leave the larger system touched), CRCs aim to generate a potent informed demand to trigger systemic changes, including policy prescriptions.

4. SPEED & EASE OF SERVICE DELIVERY, such as the simplicity and user friendliness of the office, which provides services or the technology, which inspires people to participate.

PAC has consistently made efforts to disseminate the CRC methodology far and wide. In initial phases of the evolution of CRC, capacity building workshops were regularly organized to sensitize and train civil society actors to carry out CRCs in varied contexts. However, of late, an e-learning product (web based and offline CD supported) has been developed to enable scale-up this approach. The toolkit can be accessed at [www.citizenreportcard.com](http://www.citizenreportcard.com).

5. SOCIAL WELL BEING, Activity mapping, What transformation do you witness in the local area or region such as capacity building in terms of literacy, skills and Self Help groups to solve their own problems without any government support.

CRCs have resulted in many potent local outcomes and spin-offs. In urban settings like Bangalore, CRCs have enabled local stakeholders like the Resident Welfare Associations to advocate for reforms and change by highlighting the findings. For specific disadvantaged categories like urban poor women and residents of slums, CRCs have enabled them to use the findings to hold their elected representative responsible; in one inspiring case from Mumbai, local slum dwellers used the CRC findings to come up with a "citizens manifesto" which they presented to prospective candidates at the time of elections.

6. TRANSPARENCY in the sense the technology used and updating period, usability of service portal, knowledge of decision makers

The public character of CRCs makes it completely transparent. The approach, methodology and the findings are not only presented in the public domain, but also allowed to be interrogated by all stakeholders at public forums. Most CRCs releases are carried out in the nature of an “Open House” attended by all service providers, elected representatives and the general public.

7. REPLICABILITY, Can the same be applied on a larger platform nationwide, if not what handicaps do you anticipate?

CRCs have been replicated widely, both geographically and sectorally. There have been CRCs on public services in several cities in India and abroad, an All India CRC on five basic services in all states, CRCs on Health, Education, Industrial policy, irrigation etc. (See List of Published Works at the end for examples). However, some caveats apply: Report cards are likely to be used by civil society groups in relatively open and democratic societies that respect dissent. This is not to say that non-democratic settings cannot benefit from this tool. But its proper use is unlikely to happen unless there is strong interest on the part of the political leadership to listen to public feedback and use the findings to improve public services or other aspects of governance. Some pre-conditions also need to be in place to ensure the acceptability of report cards. The credibility of those who use the tool and engage in advocacy is extremely important. The exercise should be seen as impartial and independent. The conduct of the survey and the interpretation of its findings should be done with utmost integrity. In general, competent and professionally managed organizations need to act as intermediaries for this to happen. These conditions apply irrespective of whether the initiative comes from civil society or the government.

8. APPROXIMATE COST-BENEFIT ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICE, cost invested, obtained from outside sources, please write if this has not been provided to the evaluator by the NGO.

#### **Financing a Citizen Report Card**

Whether in India or overseas, CRCs have been variously financed by public and corporate sector contributions, aid agencies, and other donors. Similarly, the average cost of a CRC varies, depending on sample size, levels of analysis, and whether the interview and data collection process is outsourced, or conducted by an in-house team.

*Outsourced versus in-house* - Currently, the average cost of outsourcing the survey process to a professional market research firm in India is between US\$

5.00 (Rs. 200) and US\$12.5 (Rs. 500) per questionnaire. This cost includes the entire range of activities involved, including pre-testing the questionnaire, the hiring and training of enumerators, the conduct of the field survey, data cleaning and entry, preliminary analysis and basic tables. Thus, administering a CRC to a minimum sample of 350 people in India costs around US\$ 1, 750 (Rs 70,000) to US\$ 4,375 (Rs. 1,75,000). From PAC's experience, the staff time required to analyse and write a detailed 'customer satisfaction' report on this data adds a further Rs 70,000 per month to this cost.

Costs can come down dramatically when in-house staff is used for the survey process. In fact, a number of NGOs - such as SEWA in Ahmedabad, Apnalaya in Mumbai, and APSA in Bangalore - have opted for this route. However, using in-house staff presents the danger of bias, since they have often worked closely within the local communities they will be interviewing and may not be fully objective in eliciting answers from respondents. One strategy is to swap survey staff across localities, placing them in unfamiliar communities.

Among the other approaches being examined to minimize CRC costs are partnerships with universities, in which students will conduct fieldwork, and collaborations among a network of NGOs.<sup>1</sup> Such collaborations would also have the added benefit of bringing varied research and advocacy skills into the CRC exercise enabling greater mobilization and impact at both the grassroots and policy level.

From its varied experience over the years, PAC has found it most cost-effective to undertake all CRC-related analysis in-house, even when it decides to outsource all fieldwork to a market research firm. For this reason, it advocates that CRCs be funded in a manner that keeps CRC design and subsequent advocacy with the initiating NGO or local agency, even if the survey administration process is outsourced. Only in this way can local needs and perception be authentically captured.

*Sample-related costs* - On an average, CRC costs double with every new layer of segmentation incorporated into survey design and analysis, since it necessitates a larger sample size for the data to be statistically valid. Thus, while a minimum sample of 300-350 would be sufficient to understand customer satisfaction with water services, for instance, 600 respondents would be required to provide comparative information for 'poor' versus 'non-poor' groups.

Similarly, sample sizes have to vary to reflect the percentage of the population that uses the service being surveyed. For instance, since 100% of respondents use water and sanitation services, even a small sample would produce statistically valid results. However, if only 50% of a given population avails of a

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<sup>1</sup> PAC (PAF) is examining these options in CRC surveys in a variety of African countries.

service, then the sample size would have to be increased to capture a sufficient number of users. Similarly, if target communities are heterogenous, or if there are significant demographic and service-related differences between the variety of localities being surveyed, sample sizes must necessarily be larger.

9. PARTNERSHIP with local administration such as Tehsildaar, SDO, BDO or District Administration or other technology providers Microsoft, NIC or Samsung etc, or other local NGOs
10. SUSTAINABILITY, Suggest if this practice has a future in Indian socio-economic conditions. This should also give an assessment of the inner strength and weakness of the practice such as a SWOT analysis (Strength, weakness, opportunities, threats).

The evolution of the CRCs over the last 15 years clearly point to the growing application of this concept in India. From an initial contestation posture (civil society holding the state accountable), the tool has also made deep inroads within the service providers and political leaders as a potent diagnostic pointer to reform services.

The success of this intervention can be viewed from two perspectives:

- a□ of ensuring citizen participation, as an end in itself, and
- b□ of putting in motion steps that would improve service delivery.

From a functional perspective, it is useful to examine the above in relation to three domains from which they can be derived. These domains are:

- a□ factors related to internal characteristics of the community or related **endowments**
- b□ factors related to design of the intervention, or **innovations**
- c□ factors external to the community, which act as **incentives** for success.

**Endowments:** We can see four significant factors internal to the community that have contributed significantly to the success of this initiative. They are:

- a□ Keen awareness and sensitivity to the problem being addressed
- b□ Issues and concern shared by almost all members of the community
- c□ Cause of problem and target of corrective action outside the community
- d□ Minimal immediate demand on resources from the community.

The difficulty encountered with poor quality of civic services is a continuing part of the struggle to cope with life in the slums. These difficulties are encountered almost every day, and the demands they place on the daily routine of the poor, particularly women, are intense. An effort to mobilise action around such a theme therefore draws strong interest and support.

Given the issue at hand, the problems addressed are of similar intensity to most members of the community. If water supply fails or sewage lines clog, almost all are badly affected. This makes possible a high degree of shared concern, and homogeneity in the group taking on the issue.

The cause of the problem is primarily seen as a consequence of failure of the local governments to discharge responsibilities to the poor. Since the operational face of the local government is the arrogant civil servant who denies them service, it is easy for the community to locate the cause of the problem outside, without internal discord. This, in turn, makes it possible for generating cohesion for collective action.

**Innovations:** The effort also derives significant benefit from the strategy for intervention. The three components to be highlighted are:

- a□ Simplification of activities, and identifying competent stakeholders to handle them
- b□ Breaking up the larger task into a series of mutually reinforcing activities that are discussed upfront
- c□ Initiating the process with activities that evoke low levels of conflict and resistance.

The effort gains from a systematic breaking up of the larger task into a set of simple tasks. Instead of leaving the entire set of tasks to be managed by the community, appropriate resource persons or agencies are identified and co-opted into the effort. While this increases the burden of co-ordination, the confidence gained from the resultant synergy makes a significant difference.

The sequence of tasks and events makes it possible for the different stakeholders to concentrate on the task at hand, with a clear picture of what is to follow. This is possible because of the learning experiences from previous efforts. More important, it makes possible systematic preparation well in advance of the actual implementation.

The initial steps in the effort are driven by a vision of change, but do not challenge the status quo. Putting together the information base falls in the realm of conventional research. The strength of the output becomes apparent only when it is presented in a manner that confronts the service providers. As a result, the intervention gathers a fair deal of momentum before it runs into conflict situations.

**Incentives:** The effort also benefits significantly from processes and events that are external to the community. They are:

- a□ Physical proximity to the agencies and persons they have to interact with
- b□ Building on programmes and activities already on stream
- c□ Leverage with institutions and programmes of national significance

The effort derives substantial advantage from being able to focus on persons and institutions that are within range of contact. While some of this means dealing with junior functionaries, the location of higher officials is not at a major constraint to access. This makes it possible to deal with issues and persons, on a hands-on basis, which the community can relate to.

The work of the local NGO has established a credible setting for the intervention to take shape. In some ways, it is presented as an extension or a forward linkage of previous efforts. While this view endows the new effort with some achievements from the past (however small), it also makes it look more tangible and capable of producing results.

The design of the interventions also draws legitimacy and power from commitments made by institutions and agencies superior to the local governments. The demand for improvement is, therefore, not based on needs alone, but on also on procedures and laws mandated by other arms of the state. This means that the effort can expect support from external institutions, including judicial remedy, in case the local government does not respond appropriately. With judicial activism and Public Interest Litigation in a real threat, this incentive often serves to open up room for dialogue.

**Assessment date: 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2008**

## **List of Recent Published Works on CRCs from Public Affairs Centre (PAC)**

### **Public Services in Hubli-Dharwad - A Citizen Report Card**

ISBN: 81-88816-09-4

Sita Sekhar, Meena Nair, Venugopala Reddy, 63p, 2007

### **Improving Public Service Delivery through Citizen Report Card - Learning Tool Kit on [www.citizenreportcard.com](http://www.citizenreportcard.com) and CD.**

Public Affairs Centre, 2007

### **Who Benefits from India's Public Services? A People's Audit of Five Basic Services**

ISBN: 817188527-6

Samuel Paul, Suresh Balakrishnan, Gopakumar K. Thampi, Sita Sekhar, M.Vivekananda, 296p, 2006

Published by Academic Foundation, New Delhi

Rs. 695

### **Benchmarking Bangalore's Public Services: What The Third Citizen Report Card Reveals**

ISBN: 81-88816-06-X

Sita Sekhar & Manisha Shah, 112p, 2006

### **Setting a Benchmark: Citizen Report Card on Public Services in Bhubaneswar**

Centre for Youth and Social Development & Public Affairs Centre, 125p, 2005

### **Are they being Served? Citizen Report Card on Public Services for the Poor in Peri-Urban Areas of Bangalore**

Sita Sekhar, Meena Nair, Venugopala Reddy, 70p, 2005

Published by Association for Promotion of Social Action and Public Affairs Centre

### **Benchmarking India's Public Services: A Comparison across the States**

Samuel Paul, Suresh Balakrishnan, K.Gopakumar, Sita Sekhar, M.Vivekananda, 48p, 2005