Critical Success Factors for Citizen Report Cards:
The experience of Public Affairs Foundation

Background

Weak accountability and lack of corrective action from Governments, and absence of collective action from civil society are generally the cause of poor service delivery in developing countries. The development of the Citizen Report Card approach in 1994 for assessing quality of public services in Bangalore, by Public Affairs Centre was a pioneering exercise in providing service delivery agencies with feedback from their clients, the citizens as well as in motivating citizens to voice their demand for improved service delivery.

Public Affairs Foundation, Bangalore, set up in 2003, has subsequently used the CRC approach in various projects within India as well as in other countries. Projects within India include CRCs conducted in West Bengal on services delivered in rural areas by Gram Panchayats, on services of the Municipal Corporation of Kolkata, and the services delivered in 40 ULBs around Kolkata; CRC on services of Protector of Emigrants and recruiting agents for the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, CRC on Gram Panchayat services in Kerala with KILA, Social Audit of public services in Delhi state, Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Nagaland, Punjab; CRC on Non Motorised Transport in Pune for the World Bank; CRC on Gram Panchayat services in Maharashtra to rank GPs, CRC on municipal services in Mysore City; corruption citizen report card in Raichur for a local NGO and CRC on Forest Services in Jharkhand. These represent a mix of sectoral, urban, rural and specialised CRCs.

Projects in other countries include CRC on public services in Kyrgyzstan, on Ethiopia, Zanzibar, Tajikistan, on water and sanitation in Kenya, Pakistan, Vietnam, Ukraine, and an ongoing one in Tanzania.

This working paper uses the experience of PAF in conducting CRCs in various locations and contexts for over seven years to examine the critical factors that contribute to the success of a CRC in bringing about reforms in service delivery. It demonstrates how differences in certain factors influence the extent of impact of the CRCs in various contexts. While certain factors emerge as commonly critical for the success of the CRC, there are others that are unique to the context.

Citizen Report Card – The Tool

The Citizens Report Card is a simple and credible tool to provide systematic feedback to public agencies about various quantitative and qualitative aspects of their performance. CRCs elicit information about users' awareness, access, usage and satisfaction with public services. In the context of poverty reduction programmes, it often complements the expert analyses and conventional poverty monitoring indices with a "bottom-up" assessment of pro-poor services. CRC identifies the key constraints citizens, especially the poor and the underserved face in accessing public services, their appraisals of the quality, adequacy of public services and the quality of interactions they have with the providers of the services. CRC offers several recommendations on sector policies, strategies and programmes to address these constraints and improve service delivery.

Citizen Report Cards entail a random sample survey of the users of different public services (utilities), and the aggregation of the users' experiences as a basis for rating the services. CRCs also help to convert individual problems into common sectoral issues. It facilitates prioritization of reforms and corrective actions by drawing attention to the worst problems highlighted. CRCs also facilitate cross fertilization of ideas and approaches by identifying good practices.

Citizen Report Card studies provide a benchmark on quality of public services as experienced by citizens. Hence, they go beyond particular problems the specific problems that individual citizens may face, and place each issue in the perspective of other elements of service design and delivery, as well as a comparison with other services, so that a strategic set of actions can be initiated.

Citizen Report Cards capture citizens' feedback in simple and unambiguous terms by indicating their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For example, the most basic but clear feedback that a citizen may give about the provision of Primary Health is total dissatisfaction. To appreciate this feedback, we must relate it to the ratings given to other dimensions by the same person. For example, satisfaction with the behaviour of doctors may be rated worse than availability of medicines. When we look at these two pieces of information, we can conclude that provision of health services may be a cause of dissatisfaction, but the priority for corrective action may be on improving the attitude and behaviour of doctors. Hence measures of citizens' satisfaction across different dimensions of public services constitute the core of Report Card studies.

Citizen Report Card studies do not stop with measures of satisfaction - they go on to enquire into specific aspects of interaction between the service agency and the citizen, and seek to identify issues that emerge in connection with the same. In more simple terms, it suggests that dissatisfaction has causes, which may be related to the quality of service enjoyed by the citizen (like reliability of water supply, or availability of learning materials in a public school), the type of difficulty encountered while dealing with the agency to solve service problems (like complaints of water supply breakdown), and hidden costs in making use of the public service (special tuition fees to teachers or investments in filters to purify "drinking water"). Therefore we can see that Report Card studies go into different aspects of performance in interfacing with citizens, to provide indicators of problem areas in public services.

Citizen Report card studies are not merely a means of collecting feedback on existing situations from citizens. They are also a means for testing out different options that citizens wish to exercise, individually or collectively, to tackle current problems. For example, whether citizens were willing to pay more or be part of citizens' bodies made responsible for managing public water sources. Hence, Report Cards are also means for exploring citizens' alternatives for improvements in public services.

An important aspect of Citizen Report Cards is the credibility they have earned. The conclusions in a Report Card are not opinions of a few persons who think in a particular manner, nor the complaints of a few aggrieved citizens. The methodology involves systematic sampling across all subsections or segments of citizens - including those who are satisfied as well as the aggrieved - and presents a picture that includes all opinions. This is possible because the methodology makes use of advanced techniques of social science research, for selecting samples, designing questionnaires, conducting interviews, and interpreting results. As a result, the report cards provide reliable and comprehensive representation of citizens' feedback.

Outcomes of Citizen Report Cards: The concept of citizen feedback surveys to assess the performance of public services is relatively new, and fast gaining wide acceptance. The responses to Report Cards indicate impact at four levels:

Stimulating Reforms: Report Card studies clearly brought to light wide panoply of issues, both quantitative and qualitative that sends strong signals to public service providers. The use of a rating scale permitted the respondents to quantify the extent of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service of an agency, as well as different dimensions of its service. The inter-agency comparisons that a report card

permits make possible quantification and rankings, which demand attention in a way that anecdotes do not.

Social Audit of public services in Delhi conducted in the year 2006 and 2008 stand testimony to the fact that the findings of the first social audits were accepted by the service providers and the reforms were initiated, the positive outputs of these reforms were reflected in the second social audit of Delhi. Complete satisfaction across services increased except for water services where the reforms initiated failed to show the impact in that time.
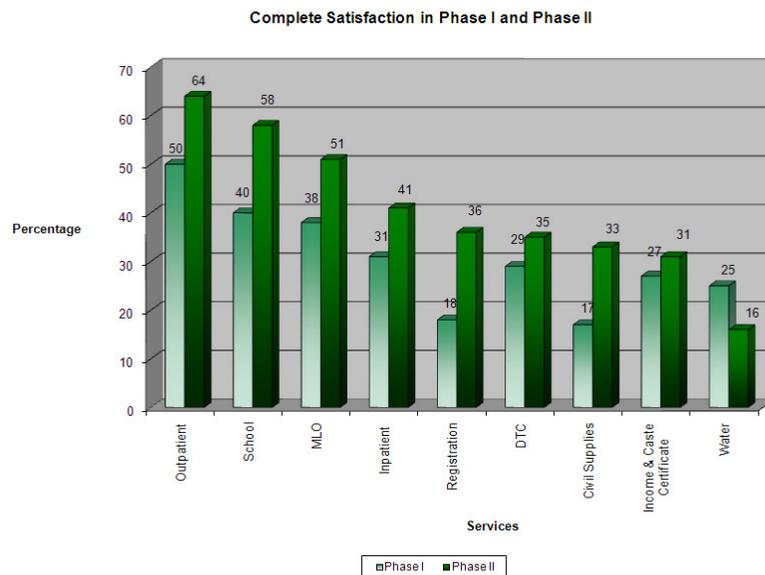
Source: Social Audit of Public Services in Delhi 2006 and 2008

Activating Stakeholder Responsiveness: Many agencies used the Report Card findings as a diagnostic tool to trigger off further studies and internal reforms. These findings help senior leadership to monitor effectiveness of administration across wide areas, in a simple and direct manner, free of technical details. For administrators and planners, it provides insights into aspects of service delivery where greater care, supervision and investment may be required.

Monthly pass scheme by Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Service (BMTC) Based on the user feedback in the Bangalore Citizen Report Card study, BMTC introduced monthly pass scheme for frequent commuters which was well accepted.(this is substantiated in a statement made by the MD in an interview for a film made on CRC by PAC)

The Delhi CRC resulted in the Food and Civil supply department coming up with a novel idea of distributing kerosene in a sachet; the innovation resulted in reduced wastage at the source of distribution and the users receiving the designated quota of kerosene per month. Malpractices in distribution of kerosene reduced, number of users reporting corruption came down from 0.4% to 0.2% and compared to first social audit (18%) more than half the users (42%) in the second social audit reported complete satisfaction with kerosene distribution.

The CRC in Dadra and Nagar Haveli on the service of School education was well accepted by the Education department which triggered interest in conducting a specific CRC on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the union territory.

Raising Public Awareness: The Citizen Report Card findings are always placed in the public domain, and disseminated widely through the media. Needless to say, specific findings and the novelty of the method used, make it useful and attractive for the media. Since issues of poor public service come up from time to time, the media as well as researchers link it to Report Card findings, and use the valid and reliable base for raising issues and proposing change. In Karachi, the media played a big role in dissemination of the findings from a CRC on Water and Sanitation.
Mobilization of State – Public Partnerships: Seminars and meetings are an integral part of disseminating Citizen Report Card findings, and involve both government officials and representatives of civil society organizations and NGOs. Report Cards gave this critical segment a handy tool to focus on issues of concern and stimulated them to move from anecdotal and subjective issues to facts and figures while requesting public service agencies for specific improvements in priority areas. It also provided these groups with an opportunity to understand the constraints under which service providers` function, and explore options for community initiatives for problem solving. CRCs in Bangalore stimulated residents of the city to come together to monitor public works and demand better services for themselves. These Residents Welfare Associations act as partners with the service providers in bringing about reforms as well as in monitoring service delivery.

In short, the insights derived from CRCs can shed light on the degree to which services are reaching the target groups, the extent of gaps in service delivery, and the factors that contribute to any misdirection of resources and services. They help identify issues that constrain effective access and usage of services, like availability, ease of access, quality, reliability and costs. CRCs also help to identify possible ways to improve service delivery by actively seeking suggestions from citizens.

The critical success factors for the CRC to be effective are :

1. **Assessment from the citizen perspective**: one very important factor why the CRC finds acceptance in Civil Society Organizations as well as in Government circles is the unique angle it looks at service delivery from. In the past service delivery has been viewed from the supply side angle, while the CRC takes the citizen or user perspective to measure performance of service providers. Satisfaction which is a subjective measure is quantified and presented in a forceful manner. In the seven years of its existence PAF has found this unique aspect of CRCs to be a critical factor in drawing both Civil Society and Government actors into the fold of its proponents and users.

2. **Proactive leadership in service provider agencies:** The second critical factor that has helped in the success of the CRC approach in the experience of PAF is the presence of a leader who has the vision to recognize the advantage the CRC provides them in designing their reform agenda in a focused manner. Where there have been leaders who have had this vision to understand what the CRC provides and the intelligence to use them to their advantage, the CRC has been very successful in resulting in remarkable changes and improvements in service delivery in some cases, which subsequent CRCs have shown proof of. Special mention is to be made of the case of Delhi, where the Chief Minister invited PAF to conduct two rounds of Social Audits (using the CRC approach) and used the findings to introduce accountability, community participation and improved services in one sweep. Another example is that of the collector of THE Union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli who commissioned PAF to carry out a Social Audit (again using the CRC approach) who not only pulled up his own departments and made them respond to the findings with immediate pointed action but also leveraged the comparison with Delhi to garner support for further reforms in the Union Territory. There have also been leaders who have used the CRC to measure the impact of the reforms they have introduced, or to legitimize the internal expertise led reforms they had planned(Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is an example)

3. **Presence of a local champion**: The presence of a local champion who supports the CRC and the changes it can catalyse is another significant factor that leads to the success of the CRC. While this local champion could be from the service provider agency, he/she could also be a prominent member or organization from the Civil Society, or from among the political leadership or a

combination of both as has been seen by PAF in other countries it has carried out the CRC in. Two good examples are those of Ethiopia and Kenya where a consortium was formed to run the CRC with keen collaboration among all stakeholders. Involvement of the mayor in the case of Kolkata is another example of the role of a local champion.

Interest in higher levels of Government: Sometimes keen interest in the higher levels of Government drives the usage of the CRC. If higher levels of Government recognize the power of the CRC, they are able to provide incentives to the lower levels of Government to use the CRC to identify their weaknesses and initiate reforms with support. One good example of this phenomenon is the interest shown by the Planning commission of India in response to the Delhi Social Audit. The Deputy Chairman of the planning commission of India sent a communication to all states sharing the findings from the Delhi Social Audit. This letter not only suggested that all states consider using the CRC approach in their state but also assured financial support for one such effort in an urban area.

4. **Active Civil Society**: Where Civil Society organizations are strong and active, in those locations CRCs have proved successful. The corruption CRC in Raichur is the result of the passion of the NJMO to reveal the underbelly of how corruption takes place in Raichur in the provision of essential public services to the poor and vulnerable in rural as well as urban areas.

5. **Intelligent and non partisan media:** Where the media is objective, intelligent, and quick enough to pick up on the issues that can be identified and highlighted the CRC has been strengthened in its impact and efficacy. One significant example is that of Pakistan in the case of the CRC in Karachi. The media played a significant role in the success of the CRC there.

6. **Strong support from donor agencies**: Donor agency support for the CRC has very clearly smoothened the process of the CRC and the pressure it creates on the service providers to initiate reform. Most Projects of PAF whether within India or abroad have been strengthened by the support provided by donor agencies such as the World Bank, UNDP and DFID.

7. **Presence of strong local partners for PAF:** Where PAF has had strong local partners as in the case of Kenya, Ethiopia and Zanzibar, and in some cases in India, the CRC has been more effective with support in terms of quality assurance as well as in terms of advocacy support which is contextualised.

8. **Scientifically Robust methodology**: The methodology that a CRC follows is scientifically very sound and robust. This gives it a tremendous amount of credibility and acceptance among policy makers and advisors. Since it is very difficult to assail the methodology, CRC has built a credibility that provides it an easy entry into circles where it would easily be tough to enter.

9. **Objectivity of the findings**: The fact that the CRC presents a very objective picture of how services are provides allows it to gain acceptance among

service providers who are usually wary of criticism that focuses on the shortcomings or service provision. The CRC 's balanced approach of presenting good as well as poor aspects of quality of service convinces them of its utility.

10. **Adaptability/ flexibility of the approach**: The CRC approach is very flexible and can be adapted to suit a varied set of scenarios without losing its credibility or utility. That is shown from the range of services, locations, contexts it has been used for. The fact that the CRC approach has been used in Vietnam by higher levels of Government to evaluate the services provided by lowere levels of Government, that it has been adapted to evaluate services provided at national level as well as those provided at the grassroot level by the Gram Panchayats shows its adaptability.

It is evident that the presence of these factors has resulted in enhancing the impact of CRCs, However, there are also examples of situations where the absence of some of these factors has resulted in dampening the impact as well. One example is when changes in leadership happen at the service provider agencies or at Government Departments, there is a risk that the new official may not be a champion of the CRC approach or that they might decide not to take forward the reform measures the CRC may point out the need for.

. The list presented above is neither exhaustive nor final. There are other factors that can be critical and there can be new factors PAF may come across as it progresses in its path towards adapting the CRC to new and challenging scenarios and contexts.

List of Citizen Report Card based studies ongoing / conducted by the Public Affairs Foundation.

National

1) A Citizen Report Card on corruption in Raichur district, Karnataka, 2010
2) A Citizen Report Card on public services provided by Mysore City Corporation and Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA), 2010
3) Social Audit of Public Services in Amritsar, Punjab, 2010
4) Social Audit of Public Services in Kohima district, Nagaland state , 2009
5) Social Audit of Public Services in the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli, 2009
6) A Citizen Report Card on Non-Motorized and Public Transport Services in Pune, 2009
7) Designing a Credible Rating System & Developing a Client Charter for Recruiting Agents; Designing and Implementing a Report Card on the Offices of the Protectors of Emigrants & Recruiting Agents and; Developing Guidelines for Establishing a National Professional Body for Recruitment Agents, 2009
8) Designing and Implementing Citizen Report Cards for 60 Gram Panchayats in West Bengal, 2009
9) Social Audit of Public Services in Delhi, 2006 and 2008
10) Demand Assessment on water and sanitation services in 6 medium sized towns in India, 2007
11) Assessing Citizen Satisfaction in Urban Service Delivery in Kolkata Metropolitan Area, 2007
12) Design and Development of a roadmap to implement user feedback mechanism in Maharashtra, 2004
13) Service Delivery Report Card – Development of Methods & Baseline Surveys for the Jharkhand Participatory Forest management Programme, 2004

International

1) A Citizen Report Card on the public services of water, road, health and education in Tanzania, 2010
2) A Community Score Card to enhance accountability and process monitoring of community based conditional cash transfer programs, 2010
3) Citizen Report Cards on Critical Services in Kyrgyz Republic, 2008
4) Designing & Implementing a Citizen Report Card on Water & Sanitation Services in Karachi, Pakistan, 2007
5) Implementing a Pilot Citizen Report Card Study in Tajikistan, 2005
6) Implementing Consumer Report Cards in Water & sanitation Sector in Africa, 2006
7) Citizen Report Card on Pro-Services in Ethiopia, 2004
8) Participatory Service Delivery Assessment of Pro-Poor Services in Zanzibar, 2004