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Citizen Report Cards

Citizen “report cards” are public accountability mechanisms based on citizen surveys of the performance and quality of government services. They allow citizens to monitor state performance. In addition, they:

- Provide quantitative information from the perspective of public service users which can help government agencies make changes and improve service;
- Can assist in prioritizing reform efforts and allocating public resources;
- Aggregate and communicate poor people’s realities to government officials, decision makers, and the public;
- Foster voice, discussion, and debate, and build demand for reform;
- Treat users of public services as clients or customers whose voices matter in the design, delivery, and assessment of government services.¹⁴⁰

The citizen report card was developed by civil society in Bangalore, India in 1993 in response to concern about the quality of public services.¹⁴¹ The methodology used in the Bangalore citizen report card has since spread and is currently being used countrywide in India as well as in other countries, including Ukraine, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Citizen report cards are also used to assess the performance of public agencies in Canada, Denmark, Ghana, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Different country contexts have led to different models for institutionalizing report cards:

<i>Administering agency</i>	<i>Advantage</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Civil society organization	Builds public pressure for reform	Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore
Government service provider agency	Ownership of the process by the agency	United Kingdom, Canada
Government oversight agency	Most comprehensive in process and product	United States

Examples of public sector report card experiences from Bangalore, India, Ukraine, and the Philippines are discussed below.

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¹⁴⁰ World Bank 2001b.

¹⁴¹ This section draws on Paul and Sekhar 2000 and on material from the Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore, India, available at <http://www.pacindia.org>. See also World Bank 2001a and the website of the Participation Thematic Group at www.worldbank.org/participation/

Bangalore's Report Cards on Public Services

In 1993 Dr. Samuel Paul and a small advisory group of local leaders initiated the first report card on Bangalore's public services. Based on a sample survey of middle-income and poor (slum dweller) households, the report card assessed public services from the perspective of the user. It was not an opinion poll, but rather reflected people's actual experiences with a range of public services. The exercise was then institutionalized as a core function of the Public Affairs Centre (PAC), a nonprofit organization in Bangalore founded in 1994 and dedicated to improving the quality of governance in India. PAC completed a second report card in 1999 to provide a comparative assessment and benchmarking device to gauge whether public services improved or declined between 1993–94 and 1999.¹⁴²

Findings

The second report card showed that most public services in Bangalore had improved to some extent in the five years since the first report card.¹⁴³ Slum dwellers reported improvements in service quality for all agencies, though in varying degrees. Yet the second report card's findings revealed a generally low level of citizen satisfaction with government services, with less than 50 percent of respondents satisfied in most cases.

Among slum dwellers, the services that were rated satisfactory by more than 70 percent were: public transport (83 percent), primary schools (74 percent), electricity (73 percent), and public hospitals (73 percent). The lowest satisfaction ratings were for the police (only 25 percent satisfied). Problems with services most frequently involved garbage collection, drainage, streetlights, roads, and telephones. Bribery was described as a pervasive problem, and satisfaction with time taken to solve problems was very low.

Nearly two-thirds of the poor reported that they were willing to pay more for services if quality and reliability were improved. More than half were willing to pay more for water and health services. Only 5 percent were aware of anti-poverty programs meant to benefit them, making the percentage of poor people who attempted to use the programs very low. In any case, applicants rarely succeeded in getting benefits.

The report card demonstrated that corruption remained widespread in most agencies with few exceptions. The incidence of corruption in almost all agencies increased between 1993–94 and 1999, and the average amount paid in bribes rose dramatically in four of 10 agencies. The proportion of slum dwellers paying bribes declined by 22 percent, but the average amount paid increased by 71.5 percent. In addition, more people visited agencies in 1999, but their rate of success in having their problems solved declined. For slum dwellers, the incidence of problems rose from 22 percent in 1993–94 to 34 percent in 1999, while problem resolution declined from 38 percent to 1.3 percent.

¹⁴² For more on benchmarking, see Kingdom and Jagannathan 2001.

¹⁴³ See Paul and Sekhar 2000 for detailed findings.

Outcomes

Despite the negative findings of the second report card in some areas, the process led to a number of positive outcomes. After the publication of the first report card, civil society groups in Bangalore took on a range of government reform activities. Media coverage of the report card's results contributed significantly to informing the public and drawing attention to problems with government services. Public agencies became engaged in the efforts sparked by the report card, and some agency leaders initiated collaborative programs with citizen groups and their networks. In some cases, service providers adopted the report card approach as an internal monitoring device. In telephones, electricity, and water supply, bill collection was streamlined and decentralized. Increased competition in services (such as cellular phones) also spurred improvements between the first and second report cards.

The second report card also attracted wide media attention and public interest and stimulated civil society to put further pressure on local government to improve performance. Agency leaders acknowledged that their responses to the report cards were stimulated by public pressure to improve services, and many officials now view report cards as a guide to better delivery of services and greater public accountability. As a result of Bangalore's success, a number of cities and countries have replicated or adapted the report card method.

Methodology

The first report card was based on surveys of approximately 480 middle-income and 330 low-income (slum-dweller) households. Focus group discussions were held, and pre-tested questionnaires were used to collect data on respondents' levels of satisfaction with a range of public services. The second report card was based on a sample of 1,339 middle-income and 839 low-income households and used similar scales for responses as in the first report card to allow appropriate benchmarking. A multi-stage stratified sampling plan ensured representativeness. The field work was conducted by Gallup MBA India Pvt. Ltd., a market research agency. The report cards covered water supply and sewage, power, telephones, ration shops, police, public buses, the regional transport office, hospitals, and the development authority. The survey of the slum-dweller sample covered primary schools but did not ask about telephones, the regional transport office, or the development authority.

Lessons Learned

To move from the report card to reform and improvement of public services, the Public Affairs Centre recommends a number of steps based on its experience:

- Identify critical services/agencies and design both short- and long-term reform strategies;
- Build support constituencies and partnerships and determine capacity/resource requirements;
- Find “quick wins” to build momentum for reform;
- Focus on services and agencies rather than on individuals;
- Identify a “local champion” to support and encourage the report card process;
- Use an independent and technically competent local NGO or professional organization to carry out the study, and establish local ownership of the process.

The People's Voice Program in Ukraine

Inspired by Bangalore's experience with citizen report cards, the People's Voice Program was created in Ukraine to promote public participation in building an open, accountable, and effective government by bringing together the supply and demand sides of reform. The International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS) is the lead local institution for the program and works with a number of local partners to gather and disseminate information on public services through citizen surveys for improved service delivery. The project is a World Bank pilot initiative, funded in partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency.¹⁴⁴ Two Ukrainian cities, Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk, were selected because their mayors had agreed to be "local champions" and their city governments had shown willingness to cooperate. ICPS implemented the program in the spring of 1999 with the goals of monitoring local service delivery through the public sector scorecard approach and supporting local reform initiatives.

Findings

Although some public services, such as the post office, telephone company, local schools, and infrastructure, received positive evaluations in the People's Voice surveys, the study revealed widespread dissatisfaction with service quality. In general, survey respondents found the performance and integrity of public agencies to be no better than "average" (a rating of 3 on a scale of 1 to 5). Problems were most frequently cited in the housing authority and health services. Citizens who interacted with agency officials about service problems found them neither helpful nor friendly. The highest frequency of bribe-taking was in hospitals, road police posts, and visa offices. Over a third (36 percent) of respondents reported that they paid bribes "on their own initiative"; 28 percent paid because bribes were solicited by officials, while 36 percent paid on the advice of others. Despite dissatisfaction with services, 93 percent of citizens had never filed a complaint because they believed that doing so would be futile. While 80 percent of citizens were aware of government rules and regulations, 50 percent claimed that these rules and regulations were not followed by public agencies.

Entrepreneurs who were surveyed indicated that they encountered a number of problems in their interactions with the public sector. They cited arbitrary interpretation and enforcement of regulations as significant obstacles, as well as the high costs of regulatory compliance and tax inspections. Respondents indicated that 40 percent of senior managers' time was spent dealing with government. These problems were considered greater than those related to corruption. The respondents found municipal government to be hostile toward business, and they had little confidence in the court system for resolving commercial disputes in a fair, honest, and timely manner. The survey revealed problems (late or insufficient payment) in public procurement. The entrepreneurs also indicated dissatisfaction with the lengthy process of business registration.

¹⁴⁴ See the website of the International Centre for Policy Studies at http://www.icps.kiev.ua/pvp/home_e.html. Also see UFE Foundation and others 2000; Ternopil Urban Development Agency and others 2000.

Outcomes

In response to the dissemination and public discussion of survey results, the People's Voice Project has generating dialogue among citizens and public officials in the cities of Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk. The free-flow of information has resulted in unprecedented actions by municipal authorities and by citizen groups for improved public services. For example, municipal officials in Ternopil set up several task groups to develop concrete solutions to the most critical problems identified by survey respondents. The surveys also mobilized Ternopil residents to pressure the local government to create "service centers" as one-stop shops where people can pay for all of their municipal services. The service centers are also intended to become clearinghouses for filing and monitoring citizen complaints.

In terms of citizen action, the project has supported the establishment of NGO coalitions and citizen action groups in both cities. The project has improved the capacity of its NGO partners to be more sustainable by providing training in human resource management, strategic planning, media relations, and coalition building. As citizens in both cities identified education as a primary area of concern, NGOs, parents, and education officials have held dialogues and are developing proposals to improve the local education system. In Ternopil, these dialogues have produced the "City Blueprint for Education" an Education Plan for 2005. The city of Ivano-Frankivsk convened the multi-stakeholder Ivano-Frankivsk Education and Advisory Council in October 2001. In addition, community advisory boards have been established in both cities to create an agenda of issues and needs for citizen engagement to further educational reforms. In both cities, other citizen working groups are focusing on strategies to improve transport, housing, and business development.

In summer 2001, the People's Voice Program expanded to two additional Ukrainian cities – Chuguiv and Kupyansk – conducting surveys on the quality of public services involving citizens, business representatives and public servants. In both cities, the public evaluates service quality as less than satisfactory, with the most problematic institutions for citizens being local housing offices, public health clinics, and the city energy department.

Methodology

The study's methodology used pre-tested surveys with standard questionnaires conducted through face-to-face interviews with random samples of 500 households and 100 entrepreneurs.¹⁴⁵ The surveys asked citizens and business people about their experiences with the following government agencies: the post office, health services, phone service, housing authority, school authorities, state savings bank, office of social benefits, tax inspection, road police, hospital, local executive committee, customs service, visa department, police, and courts.

Lessons Learned

ICPS identified several factors as very important in implementing the project effectively:

- Commitment and engagement of city mayors and local government officials;

¹⁴⁵ The program also surveyed a sample of civil servants.

- Close cooperation with local NGOs;
- Establishment of local NGO coalitions working in different sectors;
- Additional surveys over time to reassess services, monitor progress, identify lessons learned, and recommend steps for the future.

The Filipino Report Card on Pro-Poor Services

The Filipino Report Card on Pro-Poor Services was conducted in the spring of 2000 as a follow-up to the World Bank's Philippines Poverty Assessment.¹⁴⁶ It was based on a national survey of client satisfaction with public services designed to help the poor. The survey asked poor Filipinos about constraints they encountered in accessing public services, and about their views on the quality and adequacy of services and the responsiveness of government officials. This information provided insight into citizens' priorities and problems and raised the issue of how different services could better meet people's needs—especially the needs of the poor.

Findings

The survey findings showed that poor Filipinos used health facilities less than those with higher incomes, despite the fact that a larger percentage of the poor were sick. One in five poor households that used private facilities did not have access to government facilities, especially in poorer and more remote areas. Satisfaction with health care was lowest in urban areas. Payment for health care by the poor was almost entirely out-of-pocket, as insurance coverage was low overall. High prices for medicine were especially burdensome.

In education, about 10 percent of school-age children (ages 7 to 12) were not in school during the period of the survey. Dropouts were mostly from poor families, with the reasons most often related to illness or physical disability, followed by economic need and poor academic performance. Very few poor and middle-income households used private schools, which charged tuition fees 10 times as high as public school tuition. Families spent about 2 percent of income on enrollment for each child in school.

Water supply services reached about 64 percent of the Filipino population. About a third relied on self-provision from their own wells or rainfall collection. Among the poor, 75 percent were without access to home-piped water, and most of them had not applied for access. The median per capita daily water consumption of the poor was barely 30 liters and was lower among the small percentage that relied on water vendors. Water supplied by all sources was considered unsafe for drinking.

Half of the households sampled considered their housing inadequate. The urban poor were less satisfied with their housing than the rural poor. Only 53 percent of poor households owned the land on which their house stood, although a large percentage (81 percent) owned their home. Only 6 percent of poor households applied for housing assistance, while larger percentages of the middle- and high-income groups applied for assistance (9 percent and 14 percent respectively).

¹⁴⁶ World Bank 2001b. See also <http://www.worldbank.org/participation/philsocial.htm> for information on the Philippines social "weather stations" system.

In addition, the approval rate for assistance was lower among the poor than among the higher-income groups.

According to the survey, rice was important to the welfare of the poor. Though the availability of subsidized rice was limited, poor people purchased more subsidized rice than those classified as middle-income. Yet higher-income people purchased more rice in general and thus benefited more from the subsidy on the whole. Survey respondents recommended geographical targeting to the poor.

Outcomes

The Report Card is being used by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's administration to revise the Philippines Medium Term Development Plan and to develop new poverty alleviation strategies and programs. The Department of Budget and Management intends to institutionalize client feedback and "performance-based budgeting" so that all public agencies will use the information generated by the survey and other measurement tools for allocating funds. This is an unprecedented measure to obtain regular citizen feedback on key public services, bringing citizens directly into the budget allocation process.

At the time of writing, a number of "localized" Report Card initiatives are also underway in various cities throughout the Philippines and the report card model is being replicated in other countries like Vietnam, India, and Albania.

Methodology

The report card survey was undertaken by the World Bank in collaboration with Social Weather Stations, an independent survey research organization in the Philippines. The survey was carried out in March and April 2000 and included a sample of 1,200 households distributed across the four regions (National Capital Region, Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao) in proportion to population. The questionnaire asked for information on awareness, access, use, and satisfaction related to pro-poor public services in five areas: health care, primary education, housing, water, and subsidized rice distribution.

Lessons Learned

Similar assessments in the past have failed to make a lasting impact because they were one-time exercises that lacked follow-through. Incentives for reform and improvement are more likely to increase if service providers know they will be monitored again. The Philippine experience points to the need to institutionalize the report card system as a process to be repeated periodically to assess progress (or lack thereof) in service delivery.

Resources

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