

PARTNERING TO MAKE BUDGETS WORK FOR THE PEOPLE

Public Affairs Centre (PAC) – India

Established in 1994, the Bangalore-based Public Affairs Centre (PAC) is a civil society organization dedicated to improving the quality of governance in India. To this end, PAC undertakes and supports research, disseminates research findings, facilitates collective citizen action through awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, and provides advisory services to state and nonstate agencies. PAC is known globally for its pioneering Citizen Report Cards (CRCs), as well as its work on electoral transparency, public works monitoring tools and approaches, and the recently launched audits of the Right to Information Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India. PAC emphasizes the use of research as a stimulus for action, and its work is based on the premise that an informed and active citizenry is the key to improved governance. While conventional policy research concentrates on policy issues and administrative processes, PAC’s work focuses on governance as experienced by average citizens. PAC carries out its work through three main units: the Public Policy Research Group, the Participatory Governance Research Group, and the Citizens Action Support Group.

PAC Uses Citizen Report Cards to Improve Public Service Delivery in Bangalore

Today Bangalore is one of the largest metropolitan centers in India and a major center for software and industrial output. However, in the early 1990s the city was characterized by inadequate and low-quality public services. Electricity, water, garbage removal, and other municipal services were unreliable and difficult to access. Roads, parks, and other civic amenities were poorly maintained, and new telephone connections took years to actualize. Corruption was rampant and considered an accepted practice in acquiring basic (sometimes “free”) services. It was in this context that Dr. Samuel Paul and a small advisory group – inspired by the private sector practice of client satisfaction surveys—initiated the first citizen report card exercise in Bangalore in 1993. The following year, this group officially registered as the Public Affairs Centre.

The first report card surveyed 480 middle-income and 330 low-income (slum dwellers) households that had interacted with any public service provider in the preceding six months. The study covered eight agencies that had

the highest user interaction rate, including the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), public banks and hospitals, and electricity, water, sanitation, transport, and telephone service agencies. A questionnaire elicited user responses on the overall satisfaction with service delivery, as well as staff behavior, number of visits required to complete a task, frequency of problem resolution, and information provided.

The 1993 report card revealed low levels of public satisfaction with the performance of service providers. For example, only 1 percent of BDA customers were satisfied (65 percent dissatisfied). Respondents reported widespread corruption in almost all public agencies, and a third of the urban poor surveyed reported having paid a bribe to public officials in the previous six months. PAC carried out a second CRC in 1999, which indicated a partial improvement in certain services, such as telephone service and hospitals. However, overall citizen satisfaction remained low, with most agencies scoring less than 50 percent for satisfaction levels. People

INDIA
Open Budget Index 2010
Overall Score: 67
Government provides significant information to the public on how it manages public resources.

Availability of budget documents critical for effective public input:

Pre-Budget Statement	No
Executive’s Budget Proposal	Yes
Citizens Budget	Yes
Enacted Budget	Yes
In-Year Reports	Yes
Mid-Year Review	Yes
Year-End Report	Yes
Audit Report	Yes

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seemed even less satisfied with the way staff interacted with them. The scale of corruption reported also increased during this period.

Benchmarking Bangalore’s Public Services
What the Third Citizen Report Card Reveals



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Although no dramatic improvement in the quality of service was reported between 1994 and 1999, responses indicated that there had been attempts to address public dissatisfaction. In telephone service, electricity, and water supply, bill collection was streamlined and new systems were introduced for registering routine service breakdowns. The Bangalore City Corporation (BCC), the city's governing body, initiated a joint program with local citizen groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to improve public services. The BDA, with assistance from PAC, prepared its own report card to compile feedback from its customers on corruption and identify weak areas in service planning and delivery. A series of trainings was organized for BDA managers and field officers, and the agency's internal systems and practices were reviewed. Like the BCC, the BDA began to host a joint forum of NGOs and public agencies to consult on solving high-priority issues.

PAC conducted the third CRC in 2003, this time expanding it to include an assessment

of reform initiatives and an examination of the extent to which citizen feedback relates to agency reforms. Findings indicated that satisfaction with services had continued to improve and that corruption seemed to have decreased significantly. The extent to which citizens experienced problems had also dramatically declined across most service agencies.

For all three report cards, many newspapers and magazines prominently displayed the key findings and highlighted the issue of corruption in public services. PAC also made agency-specific presentations to senior officials of several service providers, in addition to providing all agencies with written summaries of the findings. Dissemination of the report card findings also took place through seminars and meetings in different parts of the city. A series of "open house" meetings was organized for citizen groups, where the groups discussed issues pertaining to property taxes, traffic control, and public interest litigation, among others. PAC also

organized workshops for NGOs working in slum areas and open houses for agencies and the public.

PAC's report cards helped quantify public feedback on corruption, staff behavior, and other qualitative attributes of public service delivery. In contrast to isolated complaints, these scores highlighted patterns of public perceptions about agency performance, based on their user experiences. Such data gave citizen groups the kind of information they needed to hold public agencies responsible for their actions. Media dissemination of the findings spurred a huge public outcry and stimulated civil society to put pressure on local governments to improve performance. Agency leaders admitted that most of their responses were the result of this publicity and the subsequent pressure of citizen groups. Many officials now view report cards as a guide to better delivery of services and greater public accountability.

PAC's Participation in the Partnership Initiative

For its work with the Partnership Initiative, PAC is focusing on the provision of maternal care in Bangalore. The city government manages and operates 24 maternity homes that provide services to expecting mothers and newborns. Each year, nearly 50,000 women receive antenatal exams in these maternity homes, and approximately 50 percent of those women deliver there. Prior evidence, some of which was collected by PAC through a CRC evaluating the maternity homes, indicates widespread corruption. To address this problem, PAC will map existing service standards and provisions through a CRC exercise followed by Community Score Cards (CSCs) in three maternity homes. Simultaneously, a Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) will be applied to the same three maternity homes in order to identify and evaluate the link between the service delivery problems and expenditure problems. Through the PETS, PAC will seek to address issues regarding infrastructure, staff salaries, user fees, and the procurement and disbursement of food and medicines.

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The IBP's Partnership Initiative is a collaborative effort that seeks to enhance the impact of civil society budget work in selected countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The initiative strives to contribute to the development of sustainable institutions; to increase public access to timely, reliable, and useful information; to enhance the effective participation of civil society in policy and budget processes; and to establish a platform of good practices on which future generations of civil society can build.