Deepening Democracy

A Decade of Electoral Interventions by Civil Society Groups

1996 - 2006

Public Affairs Centre
Bangalore
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Affairs Centre (PAC) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated to improving the quality of governance in India. PAC’s focus in this regard is primarily on areas in which the public can play a proactive role. Beginning as a small but proactive citizens’ initiative to stimulate informed choices during the Bangalore Municipal Elections in 1996, PAC has since striven to enhance transparency, accountability and citizen participation in electoral processes. PAC’s campaigns, in collaboration with citizen groups and other NGOs, have endeavoured to stimulate informed choices in Parliamentary, Assembly, Urban Local Body and, very recently, Gram Panchayat elections. Following the success of PAC’s Informed Choices Campaign in Bangalore, the campaign for electoral reforms soon spread to various parts of the country and has assumed a national character. Several civil society groups, notably the Association for Democratic Reforms, the People’s Union for Civil Liberties, Catalyst Trust, Lok Satta, and Agni, to name a few, continue to actively pursue the common goal of cleansing the electoral process by engaging various stakeholders in the governance for reform. While some of these initiatives have already led to revolutionary reforms, others have created a groundswell of public opinion and participation in the election process.

Over the years, PAC has initiated several regional and national campaigns, both independently and by networking with like-minded organisations. The dissemination of relevant information, the application of innovative tools, and the creative use of the media have been some of the key strategies used. Although, by and large, the impacts of these initiatives remain intangible, they have contributed to a more efficient and citizen-friendly system, a more responsive official machinery, and the encouragement of groups across the state and country to undertake similar initiatives. They have also resulted in a perceptible improvement in the attitude of officials, from one of hostility and indifference to that of mutual admiration and cooperation. With almost a decade of experience at the forefront of electoral reforms, PAC staunchly believes that any improvement in the quality of governance will neither be meaningful nor sustainable without a corresponding improvement in the quality of the elected leadership.

This document provides a sweeping view of PAC’s electoral interventions over the years, tracing its history from a small citizens’ initiative in Bangalore to a nationwide movement for electoral reforms. The uniqueness of PAC’s efforts lies in its ability to reach out to various stakeholders in

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1 Gram Panchayats are the third and lowest tier of local self-governance (known as Panchayati Raj institutions or PRIs) in the rural areas
the electoral arena, such as the electorate (citizens), candidates, officials in charge of electoral processes, and the media. Although PAC’s initial efforts were focused on empowering voters, it soon began to focus on working with the concerned authorities to improve the system. PAC’s campaigns have targeted two main stakeholders: (1) voters, who are the ultimate stakeholders, representing the demand side, and (2) election authorities, in charge of managing the process, representing the supply side. The information campaign initiated in 1996, which was a precursor to the landmark Supreme Court judgement on the mandatory disclosure of candidates’ antecedents, aimed to motivate voters to make an informed choice. This was followed by motivation and awareness campaigns aimed at urging citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote. The outcome of these activities was a boost in participation on the part of informed citizens in the electoral process and increasing demands for accountability and transparency in the system. The media, too, were effectively utilised to spread this message to citizens who had hitherto resigned themselves to a corrupt and non-participatory system. Public participation and public support of PAC’s efforts, combined with the intense glare of the media, have resulted in increased pressure on authorities to perform. The resulting reforms, some initiated in collaboration with PAC, are proof of the power of advocacy and the citizens’ voice in ushering in reforms.
INTRODUCTION

India is widely renowned as the “world’s largest democracy”, and elections are often described as the “keystone” of this democracy. In such a political milieu (where the quality of governance is greatly influenced by its political institutions, processes and leaders), electoral reforms have been spearheaded by a number of key players, including non-government organisations (NGOs), the independent Election Commission, and the judiciary. The media has always supplemented the efforts of these actors, highlighting the nature of and need for reforms. In India, where elected representatives are the key architects of development for their respective constituencies, any improvement in the quality of governance depends in part on the quality of electoral processes. Improving the quality of elections, therefore, is crucial for effective policymaking, development planning and policy implementation.

The past few decades, however, have witnessed a rapid deterioration in India’s democratic way of life. All over the country, democratic processes and institutions have come to be characterised by a lack of transparency and accountability. The abuse of financial and political power, the increasing criminalisation of politics, the rise of caste-ism and communalism, and asymmetrical information flows have frustrated citizens and alienated them from the electoral system. Ills plaguing the Indian society have been attributed to those in power, namely the politicians and the bureaucracy. On the one hand, the political institutions seldom reflect the mandate of the people, and therefore lack legitimacy. On the other hand, it can be argued that the root cause of the crisis is the apathy, indifference and illiteracy of Indian citizens.

It is in this context that in 1996, the Public Affairs Centre sought to intensify the involvement and interest of citizens in the electoral process, and to stimulate informed choices in the selection of candidates. Encouraged by the positive response to PAC’s first-of-its-kind campaign, carried out by citizens and the government alike, civil society groups across the country began to experiment with electoral reforms. This effort has developed over the years to encompass a range of programmes, such as cleansing the electoral rolls, studying the backgrounds of candidates and disseminating this information, advocacy with political parties against nominating persons with criminal backgrounds, and motivation campaigns to increase voter turnout. The impact of these initiatives is partly reflected in the reforms pertaining to various electoral issues and problems over the last five years.

Objectives of PAC’s Electoral Interventions

- To enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process
- To facilitate informed choices among voters
- To enhance citizen participation during electoral revisions
- To increase voter turnout
- To secure the rights of voters
- To promote the free and fair conduct of elections
- To build the capacity of citizens to demand better governance
SECTION I:

A. Transparency: empowering the electorate through information:

Promoting informed choices

Over the years, PAC has endeavoured to stimulate informed choices in elections. The Centre has partnered with leading newspapers and resident welfare associations (RWAs) to disseminate information about candidates to voters. When PAC initiated its first experiment in 1996, no provision existed for candidates to disclose information about themselves. As a result, voters were never fully aware of these candidates’ histories, nor were any efforts made to provide such information.

The situation prompted PAC to initiate an innovative exercise (the first in the country) during the 11th Lok Sabha (Parliamentary) elections in Karnataka. The objective of the campaign was to inject some transparency into the process by providing voters with details about the candidates. PAC collaborated with a leading daily newspaper, the Deccan Herald, to collect and disseminate background information about candidates belonging to major

Confessions of a ‘born-again’ voter!

During the Lok Sabha elections in 1998, PAC constituted ‘The Bangalore Citizens Joint Action Committee’, comprised of 16 city-based NGOs and welfare associations, to coordinate a campaign for voter motivation. (This small initiative encouraged citizens to shake off their indifference and actively participate in the electoral process. Here, in her own words, is a confessional statement from a neo convert who happened to be the Editor of Bangalore Times, a supplement of The Times of India.

“Earlier this week when I went to avail my constitutional right to cast a vote for the government of my choice. I was doing it practically for the first time in my life. Two organisations were responsible for changing my attitude. The first was the Bangalore Citizens Joint Action Committee, comprised of equally occupied professionals who make time to provide the people of Bangalore with information about aspiring candidates so that they can make informed choices when they vote. The second influencing body that got me to vote was the church. During Sunday services, on the eve of the election, the priest suddenly spoke forth on how vital it was for everyone present and eligible to do so, to cast a vote. He did not advocate any party, but simply suggested that we should take the ‘KNOW YOUR CANDIDATES’ information handbills that were being distributed outside the church, then pray for the divine wisdom and vote accordingly.”

(Source: “I confess it was wrong”, Heart line-Ingrid Albuquerque. Times of India, February 20th 1998.)
political parties. After reporters collected details from candidates regarding their educational and
criminal backgrounds, as well as their plans and priorities, the data were analysed by PAC and
publicised diligently by the media. For the first time, it became apparent that transparency with
respect to a candidate’s history and background was possible.

Elections to the Bangalore City Corporation (now known as the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike or
BMP) held later in the year provided PAC with a chance to follow up on this experiment, this
time in partnership with citizen groups and other NGOs. The effort was conceived of and
designed to empower resident groups to participate actively in the electoral process. Members of
resident groups interviewed candidates and collected information on a variety of personal details.
This experiment, aptly named the Choose the Right Councillor programme (CRCP), was
conducted in eight wards in Bangalore and information about 100 candidates was compiled,
analysed and disseminated through leaflets and neighbourhood newspapers. The exercise was
documented in a film entitled “Whose Vote is it Anyway?”, to provide interesting and valuable
insights on the conduct of the programme and to enable groups across the country to conduct
similar exercises. What emerged from this experiment was the empowerment of civic groups vis-
à-vis processes of governance. With active support from PAC, these groups were able to respond
to the challenges of infusing transparency and active participation in the electoral process. The
unique exercise also inspired civil society organisations in other parts of the country, notably
Mumbai and Chennai, to undertake similar initiatives.

**Apex court upholds voters’ right to know**

The campaign received a fillip with a landmark Supreme Court verdict on March 13, 2003,
making it mandatory for candidates to declare their criminal backgrounds, assets and liabilities,
and educational qualifications at the time of filing nomination papers. The Court’s verdict itself
was a result of intense civil society advocacy, under the banner of the National Campaign for
Electoral Reforms (NCER), of which PAC was a member. The Election Commission of India, in
its order dated March 27, 2003, instructed all Returning Officers to put in place machinery to
implement the Supreme Court judgment with regard to national and state elections. The apex
court’s judgment mandated that candidates must furnish details of their assets, liabilities,
educational qualifications and criminal antecedents. PAC’s initial campaigns, in fact, had gone
one step further, in that candidates were interviewed and a variety of resulting information was
disclosed, including their sources of income, whether they paid property taxes, their priorities for
the ward, whether they had criminal or corruption charges against them, etc.

**Voters’ right to information**

In a fortuitous move, the All India State Election Commissioners’ (SEC) Conference held in July
2003 unanimously resolved to implement the disclosure rules in local body elections, thus
broadening the ambit of the Supreme Court verdict. The elections in August and October 2003 to
the City Municipal Councils of K.R. Puram and Mahadevapura, respectively, situated in the
suburbs of Bangalore, presented the first ever opportunity in Karnataka to test the
implementation of the Supreme Court verdict. PAC not only analysed the affidavits filed by candidates to assess the quality of disclosure and compliance with norms laid down by the State Election Commission, but also conducted a door-to-door campaign to disseminate the poll antecedents to voters, in partnership with a local NGO, Shree Sadguru Seva Samsthe (SSSS).

PAC’s campaign strategy was to disseminate the information on candidates’ history to voters in a simple and reader-friendly format. After collecting photocopies of affidavits from the returning officers, information was extracted from these affidavits and entered into ward-wise leaflets prepared by the PAC team. After double-checking the formats, they were given for printing and disseminated (as far as possible) to each and every household by the local partner group, Shree Sadguru Seva Samsthe. Leaflets were prepared in English and the local language, Kannada, with the objective of stimulating informed choices among voters. The exit poll in Mahadevpura revealed that 85 percent of those who had received the PAC leaflet reported using the information to make their choice.

Wide publicity of the irregularities observed in the K.R. Puram polls, followed by advocacy with the SEC, resulted in vast improvements during the Mahadevpura elections, which were characterised by greater compliance with disclosure laws. This meant that the Commission had responded to PAC’s proposals and had taken steps towards improving compliance. That even a small but watchful civil society group could stimulate the government to perform better was a hopeful sign. PAC’s experience has brought forth the need for concerted, vigilant and proactive action by the Central and State Election Commissions, the media and civil society organisations across the country, so as to prevent the recurrence of large-scale violations of disclosure laws as was witnessed in the K.R. Puram elections (see Annexure I, campaign No.11).

Thanks to a small experiment in Bangalore, the Informed Choices is now recognised as a viable tool for greater electoral transparency. The initiative has been scaled up over the years - PAC has worked with civil society groups across Karnataka to painstakingly collect and disseminate information, most notably in rural areas where the benefits of disclosure laws are yet to reach the citizens. The campaign has been replicated by various groups across India, and has also received international acclaim; in 2005, the World Bank Institute showcased PAC’s electoral interventions (including the Informed Choices campaign) as one of 15 case studies on social accountability mechanisms in Asia.

B. Voter motivation and participation

“Go out and vote” campaigns

PAC has observed that the low voter turnout in urban areas is directly linked to the lack of information on the electoral process. Inadequate information flows to citizens, coupled with an indifferent bureaucracy, has to a large extent resulted in an apathetic urban middle class. PAC’s voter motivation and awareness campaigns have targeted this section of the population, notably
the youth and the upper-middle class. The Centre has partnered with RWAs, cable TV networks, radio stations, corporate networks and advertising agencies to conduct programmes aimed at motivating citizens to “go out and vote”, and to educate them about the need to exercise this fundamental right.

**Creatively yours**

The distinctive feature of PAC’s campaigns is that each one of them has adopted a unique approach or strategy to cater to its specific target audience. For example, PAC used the unexpected mid-term polls of 1999 as an opportunity to join hands with Swabhimana, a platform of civil society organisations whose vision is to make Bangalore a cleaner, greener and safer place, to launch an awareness campaign. The main objective of the campaign was to substantially increase voter turnout. With the target groups being the youth and the upper-middle class, the PAC-Swabhimana campaign utilised the creative services of MAA Bozell, a leading advertising firm, to influence the thinking of these largely apathetic groups. As in all its campaigns, various corporate and business groups financially supported this one, and MAA Bozell willingly provided its services pro bono.

The campaign saw an outburst of creativity aimed at leading voters to the polling booth:

- A special programme called *Vote for My Sake* was launched, wherein more than 100,000 badges were distributed among school children as the messengers of voter awareness. Children were educated about the importance of voting, and they carried this message to their parents and other eligible voters in the family and neighbourhood.
- A *Soul O' the Poll* cartoon contest was held, targeting the youth. The contest elicited keen interest and participation among school and college students.
- A vintage car and motorbike rally was held in association with the Karnataka Vintage and Classic Car Club. These antique vehicles travelled across the city with catchy and stimulating messages to motivate citizens to exercise their right to vote.
- Hoardings and buses displayed humorous and thought-provoking messages.
- Three major cable television networks in the city beamed messages as fillers and scrolls.

The campaign made a huge impact on citizens in Bangalore and was successful in drawing attention to the election, which was otherwise seen as a routine affair. With the success of the campaign in Bangalore, groups from across the state were motivated to launch similar campaigns with PAC’s support. The programme was also replicated by various organisations in other states, and was even adapted successfully in Bangladesh.
Civic responsibility

In 2001, PAC again joined hands with Swabhimana to launch an information dissemination campaign on the need to defeat bogus votes. The campaign urged voters to exercise their franchise in order to prevent their vote from being used fraudulently. Such campaigns have also focused on initiating a dialogue with major political parties to convince them to select honest and competent candidates.

An attempt was also made to instil a sense of responsibility among political parties during the mid-term poll of 1999. PAC, in association with other like-minded NGOs, released a Citizen’s Manifesto urging all political parties to commit themselves to a set of issues that matter most to citizens, and to provide a responsible, accountable and transparent government. The Manifesto emphasised a set of eligibility requirements:

➢ Proven track record of community service
➢ Submission of property/income tax returns
➢ No standing criminal or corruption charges
➢ Being a resident of the constituency
➢ Following the code of conduct laid down by the Election Commission

Vote Today, Don’t Curse Tomorrow

PAC launched a massive campaign during the Parliamentary and State legislative elections of 2004. The theme of the campaign, “Vote Today, Don’t Curse tomorrow”, developed by a leading advertising firm, Brand-Comm, was used by the media as a motivating punch line to motivate voters in the forthcoming elections. A nationwide media campaign was launched, and a series of promotionss featuring celebrities such as cricketer Rahul Dravid, cine-star Aamir Khan and Kannada film star Ramesh Aravind, were aired on national and regional television channels and radio broadcasting networks. These celebrities’
endorsements also appeared on other materials such as newspaper advertisements, posters and hoardings. The media blitz generated a good response, with citizens sitting up and taking notice of the ‘cast your vote’ message propagated by these celebrities. The campaign targeted the urban youth – youngsters who feel if a star has endorsed it, it’s a “cool” thing to do. Moreover, the endorsement by popular icons lent further credibility to the campaign.

**IT for Change**

PAC’s campaigns have also started tapping into the potential of information technology. For the 2004 elections, PAC developed a microsite on elections with the help of Mahiti, an organisation that provides simple and affordable information and communication technology services to the civil society sector. The microsite was replete with information on how, when and where to vote, how to use electronic voting machines, what to do if someone casts his or her vote in your name, details of the history and background of candidates hailing from Bangalore, etc. Popular websites such as MSN and Indiatimes, which featured advertisements, editorials, banners, pop-ups and opinion polls on the PAC campaign, also contained links to the PAC microsite. The run up to the elections witnessed a three-fold increase in visits to the PAC website (from an average of 93 visits per day in March to 292 visits per day in April), while the MSNIndia website registered more than 14,000 hits, with more than 3,000 people clicking on the Indiatimes pop-ups and banners. Mass e-mailing through corporate networks reached more than 3,500 companies.

**C. Efforts toward streamlining systems**

**Voter registration drives**

Electoral rolls or voters' lists are official lists which determine who is eligible to vote and where. For every constituency/area, the electoral registration officer prepares a list of voters in which the names of potential voters of the constituency/area are serially arranged along with other particulars. One needs to register on the current list of voters before one can vote.

PAC supplements the efforts of the Election Commission of Karnataka during the yearly revision of electoral rolls. The revision, conducted simultaneously across the country, aims to provide citizens with an opportunity to include their names on the voter’s list and to exercise their fundamental right to vote. It is also an occasion for citizens to delete the names of non-resident/deceased persons, object to inclusions and correct details on the list. Unfortunately, the lack of adequate publicity and of coordinated efforts by the Election Commission and the Bangalore City Corporation resulted in consistently poor turnout during revisions.
During the run-up to the Lok sabha elections in 1998, large-scale omission of names from the electoral rolls was observed. Against this background, PAC first assisted the authorities in creating wide publicity about the revision of electoral rolls and the need to verify one’s name on the rolls. Responding to the irregularities in voter rolls that surfaced during the 1998 Lok sabha polls, PAC conducted a massive awareness campaign urging people to verify and register their names in the voter’s list during the nationwide summary revision of electoral rolls in 1999. The support of the SEC lent further credibility to the campaign. The media were extensively used, and existing networks were utilised to disseminate information. Once again, MAA Bozell provided creative inputs pro bono, which significantly impacted the campaign.

The campaign resulted in the process’s being made citizen-centric, by initiating citizen friendly measures such as designating polling booths as registration centres and declaring weekends as special registration days. PAC’s intervention resulted in greater thought and creativity in the entire process, with citizens the direct beneficiaries. A helpline was established for the first time to redress public grievances, and more than 800 calls were recorded within a month. An exit poll that was conducted to assess the impact of the campaign showed that 66 percent of people who had visited the booths reported their source of information as one of the media that PAC had used. It was estimated that in Bangalore, there was a six percent increase in the total number of registration of voters, compared to 2.5 to 3 percent during the previous revision of electoral rolls. Since then, PAC’s awareness campaign has become a regular feature during the annual summary revision of the voter's list in Bangalore.

**Voters’ Sabha**

A large number of irregularities were detected in the run up to the Kanakapura lok sabha elections to be held in February 2002. To address this issue comprehensively, PAC appealed to the aggrieved voters in Bangalore to file written reports of such irregularities. In response to this appeal, PAC received reports of more than 350 names missing from the voters' list. Thereafter, PAC organised a “Voters’ Sabha” in March 2002, an interactive meeting that provided an opportunity for aggrieved citizens to articulate their woes to the concerned authorities. Members of civic groups across the city also attended the Sabha, and highlighted various discrepancies they had discovered on the electoral rolls, including the omission of several entire apartment blocks. The discussions also focused on how to improve the procedure for preparing and revising the electoral rolls. Suggestions included computerising the voters’ lists and making them available on CD-ROMS for interested institutions or individuals to purchase, making requisite forms available in ward offices, the availability of post offices and nationalised banks in every locality for easy access, and that ID cards, displaying the voter’s date of birth, be made compulsory. Based on the list of complaints on missing names, the election authorities directed the BMP to take appropriate action to include the names on the list. Copies of Form 6 or the Inclusion Form for inclusion of eligible voters on the voters’ list was also made available in the Assistant Revenue Officer’s (ARO) offices and Designated Photography Locations (DPLs), so that the voters with names missing on the list could easily access these forms to once again include their names.
Streamlining the process

The effect of PAC’s consistent efforts were noticed during the summary revision of 2003, when it partnered with NGOs and radio stations in six cities across the country to organise awareness campaigns through the dissemination of information leaflets translated into various local languages. Although citizens continued to encounter problems during registration, there was noticeable improvement in the efforts of the BMP to streamline the process. Over the phone, officials politely directed citizens to the Assistant Revenue Officer’s office or to the nearest polling booth, and some also patiently explained the procedure and necessary documents for enrolling on the voter's list. Moreover, unlike in Mumbai and K.R. Puram, where the election offices were badly organised and officials made no effort to create publicity about the summary revision effort, in Bangalore the BMP announced the effort in the major newspapers. In addition, each ARO office had a big banner in Kannada at its entrance announcing the revision.

Voter helplines

The main purpose of the 2003 campaign was to utilise the medium of radio to effectively broadcast information to citizens on the summary revision. The radio promotions also announced a hotline number for callers with queries on the process of registration. PAC’s campaigns facilitate the redress of grievances through the establishment of telephone helplines. PAC identifies volunteers in various towns and cities in Karnataka, who are then supplied with information kits that contain details on the summary revisions, important dates, locations, etc., in order to help them effectively man the helplines. They are also provided adequate training on how to guide callers with the utmost courtesy, as most callers are already disillusioned and dissatisfied with the response by the government authorities.

Over the years, PAC staff have noticed a trend in calls received by the helpline. It has been observed that most callers are unaware of the summary revision, and are extremely grateful for having been provided the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. In the 2003 revision exercise, for example, feedback from callers revealed that though eager to enrol, citizens were completely unaware of the procedures involved, reflecting a lack of publicity. While the majority of the queries were related to new registration, many callers also enquired about the procedure for obtaining an Elector’s Photo ID Card (EPIC) and the kind of proof needed to procure it. Many callers had recently shifted from another town or city and wanted to enrol their names in their new locality. Callers also complained about the indifference of officials in charge of registration, forcing them to run around from one office to another without proper assistance. There was an enthusiastic response from students, especially those who recently turned 18.

"My questions were answered clearly and carefully. I appreciate the patience shown in understanding my questions and offering short but clear directions on how to get the mistakes rectified. PAC should keep up their good and much needed work."

- Ian Correa, National Director, HOPE Foundation. Bangalore, 2000
Checking anomalies in the voters’ list

PAC has also supported resident associations in their endeavours to examine discrepancies in the voters’ lists of their respective constituencies. In 2001, PAC launched the Campaign for Verification of the Voters’ List to inform the public about the process and to give them more information on how to participate. Armed with information kits provided by PAC, RWAs went about the task of conducting random verifications in their localities. Groups reported several discrepancies on the rolls, such as names of deceased persons, which were reported to the concerned authorities for corrective action. During the Gram Panchayat elections in February 2005, PAC resource persons trained civil society groups in ten districts on how to verify electoral rolls in their Panchayats, the first time this exercise had been carried out in the state’s rural areas. Groups were able to obtain copies of the rolls and conducted random verifications in select villages. The exercise brought to light a number of anomalies on the list and belied the presupposition that the rolls are in better order in villages than they are in cities. Findings were made known to the SEC, and PAC recommended that discrepancies in the voters’ lists in the Panchayats called for immediate attention.

Elector’s Photo Identity Card (EPIC) Programme

The Election Commission of India initiated a campaign to issue photo ID cards to eligible voters in Karnataka during May 2002. In recognition of PAC’s past electoral interventions, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in Karnataka invited the organisation for a meeting to discuss and participate in the EPIC voter awareness programme. PAC drafted press releases for the BMP, which were published in all leading dailies, thereby resulting in greater turnout at the Designated Photography Locations. The media publicity campaign was very effective in sensitising the press, and almost all the leading newspapers carried this information as a regular feature. Macro Infotech, the firm to which the BMP sub-contracted the distribution of ID cards, reported a greater than 40 percent increase in turnout as compared to the initial launch phase, and attributed the increase to information dissemination through the print media. Since then, PAC has supplemented the Election Commission’s efforts at publicising the EPIC programme in and around Bangalore. It has also conducted workshops for civil society organisations (CSOs) across the state, with the objectives of improving the efficacy of the programme and enhancing the participation of electors in the process of obtaining or correcting their photo identity cards.

D. Capacity building for civil society organisations

It is evident from PAC’s experience that uninformed and poorly organised citizen groups have little chance of making a strong and sustainable impact on the quality of governance. Recognising this fact, the Centre has devoted significant efforts to capacity building and networking as a strategy to widen the reach of its initiatives. Special efforts have gone into the preparation of materials for PAC’s capacity building workshops. PAC has developed resource kits in English and Kannada on urban and rural local body elections, as a guide to help NGOs,
CSOs and community based organisations (CBOs) in educating, sensitising and motivating people to vote. The kit contains information on how to conduct various electoral campaigns, and is used by PAC resource persons in their training programmes. Immense interest has been shown across the state for such training and orientation on elections, especially in the past two years.

“It’s Time to Act”

During the Urban Local Body (ULB) elections in 2001, PAC decided to launch a state-wide campaign to facilitate a participatory and better informed electoral process in the state. During the first phase of elections, the Centre created a network of interested groups in various parts of Karnataka, such as Mysore, Tumkur, Davanagere, Hassan, Shimoga, Bhadravathi, Doddaballapur, Challakere and Chickmagalur, towards carrying out the “It’s Time to Act” Campaign. A kit on ULB elections was prepared and disseminated to all partner groups. More than 200 organisations in Bangalore alone were supplied with information kits regarding details about the verification process. Public meetings with the contesting candidates were organized in all the places mentioned above, opening up a new window of opportunity for the voters to engage in dialogue with their future leaders. It was nice to see that the groups made use of media like cable TV networks to broadcast the interviews of the candidates and communicate their ideas effectively to the public to help them make better choices in the election.

As a follow-up to the campaign, PAC organised an interactive session between the groups and officials of the Election Commission of Karnataka. The groups involved in the programme shared their experiences, so that an assessment could be made on its success and a future agenda developed. Mr. H.C. Nagendra, Karnataka’s Joint Chief Electoral Officer, chaired this evaluation meeting and interacted with the groups. Various suggestions to improve the system based on the experiences of the campaign were compiled and presented to the Commission for further action.

PAC has been able to bring together a large number of groups across the state in its efforts toward free and fair elections. Most civic groups had limited their efforts to specific issues such as HIV/AIDS, women’s empowerment, micro-credit, disabilities, etc. With their involvement in PAC’s campaigns, for the first time many groups were able to go beyond these issues and participate in the larger realm of governance reforms. PAC’s campaigns are ideal platforms to conduct training, and have served as good capacity building exercises. Of late, groups in the far-flung and under developed districts of North Karnataka have evinced interest in participating in PAC’s electoral campaigns. There has also been demand for such capacity building programmes from groups outside Bangalore, such as in the state of Orissa.

Strengthening community participation in rural governance - Interventions during Gram Panchayat elections

In July 2003, the State Election Commission extended the disclosure law to Panchayat elections. With this, the Karnataka SEC joined the handful of states that have taken a proactive stance on voluntary disclosure at the grassroots. The Gram Panchayat (GP) elections in Karnataka, held in
February and March 2005, presented an ideal opportunity for PAC to work in rural areas of the state. Until then, PAC's electoral interventions had been confined to the urban areas. With the objective of enhancing the quality of Panchayat polls and to promote informed participation by voters, PAC embarked on a four-pronged campaign called “Parinamakari Panchayati” (effective local governance).

PAC trained groups in several districts on how to verify electoral rolls, scrutinise affidavits of existing candidates, train candidates (especially women) to file their nominations and organise public meetings (called Mukha-Mukhi) where contesting candidates declared their past achievements and future plans for a particular village. The Parinamakari Panchayati programme brought to light a number of interesting findings, such as widespread anomalies on the voters’ list in the villages, including names of deceased persons. Although CSOs made an attempt to conduct the informed choices programme, many were forced to abandon it due to the immense difficulties involved in procuring photocopies of affidavits, pointing to the fact that reforms initiated in urban areas were yet to percolate down to the villages. Almost all the partner groups were able to organise Mukha-Mukhi (face-to-face) meetings in their respective Panchayats. The large turnout and the quality of debate and discussion were encouraging. The promises made by the candidates in this public meeting were recorded, such that people could follow up later. The programme suffered a blow in Bellandur, (widely regarded as a “model Gram Panchayat”, on the outskirts of Bangalore), however, where certain candidates along with their close associates prevented PAC from conducting such an information campaign. But by and large, the programme was met with enthusiasm by CSOs and villagers, encouraging PAC to continue with its agenda of strengthening rural governance.

PAC also organised meetings at which partner CSOs could interact with the election authorities in Bangalore and convey the lessons, as well as the hardships, that they discovered during the programme. A number of recommendations were then forwarded to the SEC to improve transparency and citizens’ participation in the electoral process.
Interventions during Zilla and Taluk Panchayat elections

Later, PAC launched a similar campaign during the Zilla Panchayat and Taluk Panchayat (the upper two tiers of the Panchayati Raj system) elections, held in December 2006. In its continued efforts to improve the quality of polls and strengthen rural governance, PAC collaborated with CSOs in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Bidar, Bangalore South, Shimoga, Kolar, Davanagere, Bellary, Bagalkot and Chitradurga districts. The groups organized dissemination of information with regard to the competing candidates and Mukha-Mukhis meetings with the candidates in the above mentioned places.

A noteworthy feature during this campaign was that the SEC trained the Returning Officers throughout the state before the polls, making use of the satellite training facility available at the Administrative Training Institute in Mysore, following PAC’s recommendations. The SEC also cooperated with PAC by issuing a letter of instruction to the concerned authorities to provide the copies of the candidate’s affidavits to public interest groups upon payment of a nominal fee.

Despite these instructions, the groups encountered a lack of cooperation and struggled to obtain the required information in time. Nevertheless, these highly motivated groups from the above-mentioned districts managed to collect and disseminate the information on candidates to encourage citizens to know their candidates before casting their vote. These groups also organized public meetings in selected taluks and obtained encouraging responses from the public. The public meetings organized by Maithri Seva Samithi in the Hospet taluk, for instance, held a mirror to the candidates’ ignorance. Candidates who arrived at the meeting without any knowledge of the local issues had to regret for the same in public. The candidates became anxious when information regarding their education, criminal record and property details were put in the public domain. This experience is just an example of what transparency can do to for people’s electoral freedom.
SECTION II

INSTRUMENTS OF ADVOCACY

PAC has always believed in creative approaches in its campaigns to increase voter turnout, whether for registration, voting, or even obtaining voter ID cards. It has adopted unique approaches to impart its electoral messages to a wide range of target audiences ranging from school children to IT professionals. It has utilised the creative services of noted advertising agencies such as MAA Bozell and Brand Comm to influence the thinking of the largely apathetic residents of Bangalore. In most cases, these agencies have offered their services pro bono. The major modes of dissemination used by PAC are listed below:

• **Newspapers, neighbourhood newspapers, and vernacular magazines:** been an invaluable media tool for PAC to advocate its campaign messages since 1996, as they offer economical yet wide-reaching benefits. Leading daily newspapers like the Deccan Herald and the Times of India have supported the Informed Choices. Reporters have collected information from candidates (even before the Supreme Court judgment) and widely disseminated the analysis conducted by PAC. Neighbourhood newspapers have carried the information leaflets on candidates compiled by PAC during elections, and have also publicised reports with regard to revisions and EPIC campaigns.

• **Video & film:** The Choose the Right Councillor Programme during the Bangalore City Corporation elections in 1996 was documented by a film entitled *Whose Vote is it Anyway?*, to provide interesting and valuable insights into the conduct of the programme. The film, shown to interested groups across the country, has been used as an effective advocacy aid to stimulate ordinary citizens to make informed choices in elections, and to encourage organised groups to undertake similar efforts.

• **Television networks :** Television was another medium that was extensively used by PAC during the Parliamentary and State legislative elections of 2004. Celebrities such as cricketer Rahul Dravid, cine-star Aamir Khan and Kannada film star Ramesh Aravind urged voters with the message, “Vote today, don't curse tomorrow”. These appealing advertisements were aired on national and regional television channels and radio broadcasting networks. This strategy generated a good response, with citizens sitting up and taking notice of the ‘cast your vote’ message propagated by these celebrities.

Cable TV networks such ICE TV, Siti cable have rendered their support to PAC’s campaigns, with programmes ranging from repetitively informing voters about various procedures for registration to interviewing PAC members and telecasting documentary films and street plays motivating voters to actively participate in the election process.
• **Radio and websites:** PAC has used these media extensively to motivate and inform citizens on how to enrol on the voters’ list, collect their EPIC and exercise their franchise. Radio stations like Radio City 91 FM in Bangalore and Radio Mirchi in Mumbai, as well as popular websites such as indiatimes.com and msnindia.com, have supported numerous campaigns by publicising the voter helpline or the PAC website. Radio City 91 FM has also aired interviews with PAC members on various occasions and conducted on-air quizzes on issues related to electoral revisions.

• **Mass emails:** PAC’s campaigns have made use of this simple but effective tool of communication to reach thousands of people during voter registrations, polls and EPIC campaigns. Through mass emails, PAC’s messages have hit the computer screens and bulletin boards of many corporations, NGOs and other organisations across the state. Personal emails on corporate networks such as the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the National Association of Service and Software Companies (NASSCOM) have also carried PAC’s messages to thousands of companies.

• **Children’s civic clubs:** PAC and Swabhimana, through their Children’s Movement for Civic Awareness (CMCA) programme, have successfully installed civic clubs in about 60 schools in Bangalore with the objective of inculcating civic values among the city’s youngest citizens. As part of their activities, these children have marked their presence in PAC’s electoral campaigns by encouraging their elders to vote in elections. A special programme called *Vote for My Sake* was launched during the mid-term Lok Sabha elections in 1999, through which children distributed more than 100,000 badges aimed at raising voter awareness. Again during the BMP elections in 2001, children from about 30 schools in Bangalore carried messages and influenced their parents to take an oath to vote during elections. Having been educated about the importance of casting one’s vote, children successfully carried this message to their parents and other eligible voters in the family and neighbourhood.

• **Promotions aimed at youth:** Designing campaigns on an important but mundane issue like elections for the common man has been a great challenge to PAC over the years. This is true especially of youth, who are quickly losing their interest in politics and are generally aloof when it comes to voting. PAC aimed specifically at these individuals when it organised its *Soul O' the Poll* cartoon contest during the mid-term polls in 1999. The contest elicited keen interest and participation among school and college students. Similarly, a vintage car and motorbike rally was held in association with the Karnataka Vintage and Classic Car Club. These antique vehicles rallied across the city with catchy and stimulating messages to motivate voters to exercise their franchise.

• **Hoardings & billboards:** In order to reach out to the busy, on-the-move populace of Bangalore, catchy, humorous and thought-provoking messages were displayed on hoardings
at major junctions in the city during various campaigns. Such messages were also put in full view behind the city buses in order to enlighten and motivate voters across the city.

- **Street plays:** During the special summary revision of the voters’ list in 2004, PAC engaged the services of ‘Some-poorna’, a group of young engineers and software professionals who dabble in street theatre. The group conducted a street play aptly entitled *Sath Praje*, a term which means *true citizen*, but can also be interpreted colloquially to mean *dead citizen* (the play urges people to be the former). It was performed in prominent locations in Bangalore to motivate the youth to actively participate in the electoral process. The play elicited encouraging responses, even in busy, commercial areas of the city, suggesting that the crowds in such areas could be stimulated to take part in the electoral process.

- **Helplines:** PAC has consistently set up telephone helplines to help during elections, summary revisions of electoral rolls, and the issuing of photo ID cards in and around Bangalore. Every time the helplines are set up, PAC has been flooded with calls from citizens asking for information. This proved to be a very effective medium of information dissemination and has a personal and appealing touch to it. The Bangalore Mahanagara Palike has also adopted this idea and has started setting up zonal helplines at its ARO offices for citizens.

- **Others:** Last but not the least, customary aids like pamphlets, posters, leaflets and brochures have been used by PAC in its campaigns since the beginning. Autorickshaw announcements have also proved to be a popular medium in rural areas close to the city like City Municipal Corporations (CMCs).
SECTION III

OUTCOMES & IMPACTS

Given the nature of the electoral arena in India, which is largely influenced by the ‘3 Ms’ (money, muscle and mafia power), PAC has been able to measure the impacts of its campaigns only to a limited extent. At times the message conveyed by CSOs tends to get lost in the deluge of propaganda by political parties. The money that the Centre spends on its electoral campaigns is but a tiny fraction of the millions of rupees spent by parties and other vested interests. In addition, caste and communal forces are exponentially stronger than civil society organisations, and to overcome these forces requires concerted efforts by groups across the country. For example, PAC spent considerable time, effort and resources in swaying the electorate to cast their vote during the 2004 parliamentary elections. Although many citizens wrote back congratulating the Centre and expressing their intention to go out and vote in that election, actual statistics showed that all over the country the voting percentage had, in fact, fallen. Nonetheless, PAC’s interventions have:

(1) **Highlighted the importance of candidates’ disclosure of information:** PAC’s campaigns were a precursor to the Supreme Court’s decision on mandatory disclosure of electoral information. Groups across the country have emulated this model, which has also sparked interest among civic groups in other developing nations such as Bangladesh. Watchdog groups like the Election Watch have emerged in recent years and done precisely what PAC had initiated in 1996: monitor and disseminate information on candidates’ backgrounds. The Election Watch, of which PAC is a member, concentrates on the criminal backgrounds of candidates. The recently enacted national right to information legislation has further reinforced the citizens’ right to such information.

(2) **Facilitated informed choices:** PAC’s informed choices campaigns have always concluded with exit polls to assess these campaigns’ impact. Exit poll results point to the fact that the electorate that received the information (through leaflets, newspaper articles, cable TV promotions, autorickshaw announcements, etc.) had used it in making their voting choice. The exit poll conducted in Mahadevpura municipality in October 2003 showed that 85 percent of respondents that received and read the leaflet were influenced in their voting choice. Those interviewed (including candidates) were appreciative of the campaign and suggested that PAC publicise it further in order to benefit a larger numbers of citizens.

(3) **Underscored the importance of advocacy in electoral reforms:** Since its first intervention in 1996, PAC has supplemented the efforts of the State Election Commission and the Election Commission of Karnataka by injecting greater transparency into electoral processes. Both agencies have, time and again, acted upon PAC’s recommendations for a more citizen-friendly and streamlined electoral system. Senior officials have interacted with PAC’s partner groups and taken these groups’ experiences into consideration for further improving
the system, especially at the district and village levels. The EC and the BMP have, on several occasions, incorporated PAC’s suggestions for a more robust summary revision campaign and participatory EPIC programme. PAC’s advocacy has had implications for both policy and action across the country, as was evident in the campaign for the “Right to Information in Elections” organised by PAC during the elections held in K.R. Puram and Mahadevapura CMCs.

(4) **Helped increase voter registration:** Based on PAC’s suggestions, the BMP undertook various initiatives during the special summary revision of 2004, including encouraging online registration, designating post offices as registration centres, and setting up help desks at control rooms to provide information to citizens. PAC supplemented these efforts with a multi-media awareness campaign, effectively harnessing the power of radio, websites, cable TV and mass emails. In addition, street plays, information leaflets, and neighbourhood newspapers were used to further publicise the revision programme. As a result of these initiatives, the BMP and the Election Commission confirmed that the number of registrations increased three-fold in and around Bangalore as compared to the previous year.

(5) **Helped increase voter awareness and participation:** The deluge of calls received by the helplines points to the fact that citizens are eager to participate in the electoral process but are unaware of how to do so. Helplines have been flooded with calls from citizens keen to exercise their right to vote. Clear and patient replies from PAC staff have motivated callers to participate in the electoral process. In Bangalore, the turnout at Designated Photography Locations, where voters collect their ID card, doubled during the EPIC programme of 2002 as a result of the helpline installed by PAC.

(6) **Disseminated information:** In 2002, PAC published its *ABC of Voting, A Voter’s Guide* as an educational tool to create awareness among voters on various electoral matters. The Voter's Guide, written in an FAQ format, is also available in other regional languages. Excerpts of the Guide have been disseminated as information leaflets during campaigns. During the summary revision of 2003, the newspaper *Mid-day* published all the relevant
information from the Guide free of cost in Mumbai. Again, information leaflets were distributed free of cost in the suburbs of Mumbai by an agency called Just One on One.

(7) **Performed research and analysis:** PAC’s work on elections is not just about promoting citizen action and informed choices. It also involves meticulous research and the subsequent dissemination of its analysis. PAC’s publication, *Holding a Mirror to the New Lok sabha* (2005), presents the findings of a systematic analysis of the data taken from the affidavits of 541 Members of Parliament (MPs) elected in 2004 to the Lok sabha (out of a total number of seats of 543). The affidavits were taken from the websites of the state election commissions. Their processing took some time, as the information had to be downloaded from various websites and translated from different languages. There were also some data gaps in the affidavits, as members did not disclose all the facts required of them. The publication has been widely disseminated to legislators across the country and has key policy implications.

(8) **Catalysed a change in attitude on the part of officials:** Senior officials in the State Election Commission and the Election Commission of India are now eager and willing to work with PAC and act upon its recommendations. There is also a visible change in the attitude of BMP officials in charge of the voters’ list revision process. During the revision of 2003, PAC staff made random calls to ascertain the efficacy of help desks set up by the BMP. It was observed that throughout the revision, officials were extremely helpful over the phone, guiding citizens to the concerned office/polling booth nearest to them and patiently addressing queries. It was also observed that officials were present in all offices on the last Sunday of the revision (during its special drive). This indicated a sea change in the attitude of officials, and a former Deputy Commissioner of the BMP has publicly acknowledged PAC’s role in this welcome change.

(9) **Increased capacity of civil society organisations:** Before PAC’s electoral interventions, CSOs were unwilling to think beyond their regular concerns and participate in the larger realm of governance. The capacity building aspect in PAC’s campaigns has enabled resident associations and CSOs in smaller towns and cities, and even villages, to advocate for better governance. The Supreme Court verdict on mandatory disclosure of poll antecedents by
candidates has further strengthened their resolve to make a positive impact on elections. The increased demand for training has resulted in the creation of a full-fledged training/capacity building component at PAC, with a specific focus on groups in remote districts of Karnataka. The demand for such training has also come from civil society groups in parts of Africa, where electoral reforms are becoming a major issue in civil society circles.
SECTION IV

LIMITATIONS & RISKS

PAC has examined its various campaigns and has done a systematic study of their successes and failures, while also identifying certain limitations and risks encountered over the years.

- **Difficulty in scaling up:** Given the magnitude of caste/communal/money/muscle/mafia power, scaling up is an uphill task and civil society efforts are but a drop in the ocean. At times the message conveyed by CSOs is overshadowed by the enormous propaganda taken up by political parties during elections. These forces are exponentially stronger than civil society organisations, and to overcome these forces requires concerted efforts by groups across the country.

- **Limited resources:** The resource-intensive nature of the campaigns, combined with funders’ hesitance to provide resources, presents a challenge. Much time and effort is required to convince these funders of the campaigns’ usefulness and integrity, as the results are not immediately visible, and their outcomes are not always tangible.

- **The slow, inconclusive nature of the poll reform process:** The public’s low rate of involvement is a major cause for the current state of affairs. Citizen apathy can be attributed to the fact that more often than not, politicians cease to act as representatives of the very people who elected them once they take office. Moreover, elections do not appeal to people as much as other more tangible issues, such as children’s rights, for example.

- **Candidates’ suspicion of the information dissemination campaign:** Elections in India have traditionally been fought on the basis of caste loyalties rather than informed choice. The right to information in elections is an extremely recent phenomenon that has the potential to change the very nature of politics. The attempt by NGOs to disseminate information (some of which could harm the prospects of a candidate, such as criminal antecedents) has not been welcomed by all. During the Mahadevpura elections in 2003, PAC staff and volunteers (including women) were physically harassed by supporters of a political party who mistook them for supporters of another political party launching a smear campaign against their candidate. It is imperative to inform candidates about the campaign beforehand and ensure their support.

- **Printing of erroneous information:** During its information dissemination campaigns, PAC has been extremely careful when transferring information from affidavits to leaflets and brochures. Knowing full well that a simple mistake could result in a serious backlash (elections in India are extremely volatile), PAC staff double- and triple-checks information on their leaflets. Until they are confident that partner groups can do the data transfer on its own, PAC staff do it for them. In spite of this, some lapses have occurred. In these cases,
PAC immediately issues clarifications in the leading daily newspapers and withdraws distribution of materials in question. In spite of occasional threats of violence, PAC has continued undeterred with its information dissemination campaign.

- **Citizens’ lack of faith in campaigns:** At times, government systems are not geared to respond to the reforms initiated by PAC. As a result, citizens sometimes lose faith in the campaigns if they are not followed by immediate measures to correct the problems they reveal. This has happened in the case of Shree Sadguru Seva Samiti, a voluntary organisation that has worked with PAC on its electoral campaigns for the past five years. With PAC’s support, SSSS had painstakingly collected and submitted 860 applications for inclusion and 600 names for deletion from the voter’s name from the K.R. Param area during the summary revision of October-November 2004. However, it came to light in August 2005 that the concerned authorities had “misplaced” these applications; as a result, none of the applicants could get their voter ID cards. Irate citizens accused SSSS of not having acted on the applications. PAC complained to the concerned authorities, which have taken action and suspended a negligent official. However, this case illustrates that citizens often lose faith in civil society groups when the government machinery does not respond accordingly.

**Future Directions**

Although PAC has faced several constraints, including a lack of resources and a slow and non-inclusive poll reform process, it has made an effort to scale up and institutionalise its electoral programs. This has been possible, to a large extent, because of the interest evinced by both civil society organisations as well as various governments. PAC has been able to move beyond Bangalore, and has developed linkages with groups across Karnataka, as well as in other states. Programmes were also replicated by organisations in other states, notably Lok Satta in Andhra Pradesh, Agni and YUVA in Maharashtra, and the *Election Watch* programme across the country. PAC’s Informed Choices was also adapted successfully in Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier, the Centre’s electoral component has also been recognised by the World Bank Institute as a noteworthy case study on social accountability initiatives in Asia.

PAC has been wary of various constraints and risks in its endeavour to scale-up its initiatives. Thus far, PAC’s electoral campaigns have consciously steered clear of political parties and figures. However, in its future campaigns, PAC plans to involve politicians, recognising the possible benefits of such an alliance. PAC plans to do this in collaboration with the ‘new-age’ or ‘new-generation’ politicians, who have openly declared their commitment to a more transparent and accountable electoral process.
# ANNEXURE I

## Chronology of PAC’s Electoral Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Lok Sabha Elections in Karnataka - <em>Know Your Candidate</em> Programme, 1996</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Background &amp; Objective</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>When PAC initiated its first experiment in the electoral arena, there was no provision for candidates standing for election to disclose information about themselves. As a result, the voters were never fully aware of candidates’ backgrounds and history. This undemocratic approach prompted the Public Affairs Centre to initiate an innovative exercise during the 11th Lok sabha elections in Karnataka. The objective of the campaign was to bring a modicum of transparency to the election process by providing voters with detailed background information on the contesting candidates.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partner</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Deccan Herald, a leading English daily newspaper in Bangalore, partnered with PAC for the campaign and played an important role in information dissemination.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>About the Campaign</strong></td>
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</table>
| • PAC had undertaken the programme to get responses from the candidates belonging to major political parties in 12 constituencies in Karnataka.  

• A questionnaire was prepared, which sought information on several aspects of the candidates’ backgrounds such as education, profession, sources of income, expenditures, criminal record, tax payment, change of political affiliation, achievements and specific plans of action.  

• The information was made public and disclosed to the voters in order to enable them to make an informed choice in the forthcoming elections. |
<p>| <strong>Impact</strong> |
| The candidates interviewed disclosed a variety of personal details. The data was analysed and publicised meticulously by the media. The Deccan Herald brought out a series of exclusive write-ups on this issue. For the first time it became apparent that it is certainly feasible to promote transparency with respect to candidates’ backgrounds. |</p>
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<tr>
<th>2. Elections to Bangalore City Corporations - Choose the Right Councillor Programme, 1996</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Background &amp; Objective</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Partner</strong></td>
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<td><strong>About the Campaign</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
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### 3. 12th Lok Sabha Elections in Bangalore - 1998

**Background & Objective**

The success of the previous campaign experiences during elections to the Lok sabha and the Bangalore City Corporation had strengthened PAC’s resolve to effect changes in the electoral systems and confidence in promoting transparency and citizen’s participation in the electoral process. During the 12th Lok sabha elections in 1998, a large-scale omission of names from the electoral rolls was observed. In response to this alarming situation, PAC constituted the Bangalore Citizens Joint Action Committee, comprised of 16 city-based NGOs and welfare associations, to coordinate the campaign.

**Partner**

The Times of India (TOI), a leading national newspaper, was partnered with PAC for this endeavour.

**About the Campaign**

A questionnaire was prepared which covered a wide range of relevant issues such as educational background, occupation, whether candidates reside in the constituency in which they are standing for election, criminal record, details of tax payments, public service record, changes to party affiliation, plans and priorities for the constituency and information on how the Local Area Development Fund would be used. The information collected was compiled and analysed. It was then published and disseminated across the city with the help of TOI.

**Impact**

The impact assessment study of the campaign showed that the information published was perceived to be both credible and useful. As many as 77 percent of the respondents felt that it helped them in making a choice while voting, and over 50 percent of them revealed that their choice was based on the credentials of the candidates and not on party affiliation.

### 4. Mid-Term Lok Sabha Elections - 1999

**Background & Objective**

In 1999 the coalition government at the time failed to prove its majority, resulting in mid-term polls. These unexpected elections provided PAC with an opportunity to launch an awareness campaign in association with Swabhimana, a platform of civil society organisations whose vision is to make Bangalore a cleaner, greener and safer place to live for generations to come. The main objective of the campaign was to substantially increase the percentage of eligible voters participating in the election. The campaign targeted the youth and the upper-middle class, sections of the electorate who generally tend to be alienated from the electoral process.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>The PAC-Swabhimana campaign was creatively supported by MAA Bozell, a leading advertising firm, and financially supported by various corporate and business groups.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| About the Campaign | A number of initiatives were undertaken to popularise the campaign:  
- A special programme called *Vote for My Sake* was launched, wherein more than 100,000 badges were distributed among school children as the messengers of voter awareness. They carried the message to their parents and other eligible voters in the family and neighbourhood.  
- A *Soul O' the Poll* cartoon contest was held, targeted at youth. The contest evinced a keen interest from school-going and college students.  
- A vintage car and motorbike rally was held in association with the Karnataka Vintage and Classic Car Club. These antique vehicles rallied across the city with catchy and stimulating messages to motivate voters to exercise their franchise.  
- Hoardings and buses carried humorous and thought-provoking messages on voting.  
- Three major cable television networks in the city beamed messages as fillers and scrolls.  
- Intensive press advertisement campaigns were held just prior to the elections. |
| Impact | The campaign made a significant impact on citizen participation. With the success of the campaign in Bangalore, groups from across the state were motivated to launch similar campaigns in their respective areas with the support of the Centre. The programme was replicated by various organisations in other states as well, such as the Lok Satta in Andhra Pradesh, Agni and YUVA in Bombay, and YUVA in Maharashtra. The programme was also adapted successfully in Bangladesh. |
### 5. Electoral Revisions - *Protect Your Voice, Your Vote*, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background &amp; Objective</th>
<th>The Election Commission of India undertook the revision of electoral rolls in Bangalore during October and November 1999. PAC supported the campaign by initiating an information campaign that motivated Bangaloreans to verify the voters' list, to disseminate information on the summary revisions and to facilitate the redress of grievances related to summary revisions.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Swabhimana partnered with PAC to make revision process more effective by collaborating with various media and MAA Bozell, an advertising firm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Campaign</td>
<td>The State Election Commission’s (SEC) cooperation to PAC’s campaign rendered an authentic character to it</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The most important accomplishment of the revision was that the voting process was brought closer to the people by making designating polling booths function as registration centres and designating weekends as special registration days.</td>
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<td>• Media were extensively used and existing networks were utilised to disseminate information. MAA Bozell, a leading advertising agency, provided creative inputs pro bono that made a significant difference to the campaign.</td>
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<td>• A helpline was established for the first time by the Centre to redress the grievances of the public. More than 800 calls were recorded within the first month.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>An exit poll was conducted to assess the impact of the campaign. The results showed that 66 percent of people who had visited the booths reported their source of information to be one of the media that PAC had used to disseminate the information. It was estimated that in Bangalore, the percent increase in the total number of registered voters was about 6 percent as compared with 2.5 - 3% of in the previous years. This increase in awareness and participation can be directly attributed to the PAC/Swabhimana information campaign.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<p>| Background &amp; Objective | In November 2000, PAC initiated a campaign during the Summary Revision of the Voters’ list for 2000-2001 in Karnataka. Since the information available on the process of electoral revision was not sufficient, PAC supplemented the efforts of the State Election Commission by communicating vital information regarding voter registration for the preparation of an accurate and complete |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About the Campaign</th>
<th>Voters’ list. The objective was to widely publicise the information to increase voters’ participation.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Various resident welfare associations in Bangalore actively disseminated the information provided by PAC on the summary revision to their locality people and motivated them to enrol themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- PAC advertised the summary revision through various media like daily newspapers, cable TV networks, vernacular magazines such as <em>Taranga</em> and <em>Sudha</em>, emails, posters and flyers.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One of PAC’s most effective interventions during the event was the setting up of helplines to answer people’s queries.</td>
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<td>- Volunteers were identified in eight different towns and cities in Karnataka and were supplied with information kits which contained details on the summary revisions, important dates, locations, etc. to help them install helplines in these places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>The programme was well received by the public. The most frequently asked questions concerned details on how to ensure inclusion on the voters’ list. After the summary revisions, PAC communicated with the people who had used the helpline to receive feedback on its efficacy. An analysis of the user feedback showed that more than 69 percent of people who had called the helpline took further action with regard to enrolment/deletions and transposition.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background &amp; Objective</th>
<th>With the success of the voter awareness campaigns in Bangalore, PAC decided to launch a state-wide campaign to facilitate a participatory and better informed electoral process in the state. During the first phase of elections to local bodies in Karnataka in May 2001, the Centre created a network of interested groups in various parts of the state, including Mysore, Tumkur, Davanagere, Hassan, Shimoga, Bhadravathi, Doddaballapur, Challakere and Chickmagalur, which would partner with PAC to conduct the <em>It’s Time to Act</em> campaign.</th>
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<tr>
<td>About the campaign</td>
<td>- The campaign was modelled on the Public Affairs Centre’s <em>Kit on Urban Local Body Elections</em> and was produced as a guide to help organisations in educating, sensitising and motivating people to vote.</td>
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<td>- The kit contained information on a variety of activities, ways to conduct voter’s education and motivation programmes, as well</td>
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as different methods of organising the CRCP.
- The programme was publicised by using various media.
- Public meetings with the contesting candidates were organised in almost all of the places mentioned above.

### Follow up
On 15 July, 2001, PAC organised a follow-up meeting to the campaign. All the groups involved in the programme were invited to share their experiences, so that an assessment could be made on its success as well as to develop a future agenda. Mr. H.C. Nagendra, Joint Chief Electoral Officer in Karnataka, chaired this evaluation meeting and interacted with the participatory groups. Various suggestions to improve the system, based on the experiences of the campaign, were compiled and presented to the Election Commission for further action.

### 8. Bangalore City Corporation Elections - Vote for a clean, green and safe Bangalore, 2001

#### Background & Objective
In light of the Bangalore City Corporation’s elections, PAC and Swabhimana cooperated to support the initiatives of the BMP in making Bangalore a cleaner, greener and safer city. The focus of the campaign was to inform the public about the verification of the voters’ list, to appeal to major political parties to field capable, upright and responsive candidates, and to promote the voter motivation and awareness campaign and the Choose the Right Councillor programme.

#### Partner
Resident welfare associations, cable TV networks, Radio City 91 FM, and Brand Comm were partners in the campaign.

#### About the Campaign
- In the first phase of the campaign, the Centre used various forms of media to educate the citizens of Bangalore on the verification of the voters’ list, and to motivate them to participate. A one-day hotline was set up to receive complaints from citizens, and to forward them to the concerned officers in the BMP for further action. More than 200 organisations in Bangalore were supplied with information kits regarding details about the verification process.
- The second phase of the campaign focused on initiating a dialogue with major political parties to pressure them to select responsive, capable, honest and competent persons as their candidates for the 100 wards of the BMP.
- The third phase covered two broad areas. The first was voters’ education and motivation campaigns, aimed at increasing voter turnout and creating awareness about the need to defeat bogus
votes. This was made possible with the help of various forms of media. The other area was an information dissemination campaign on candidates’ antecedents, called the Choose the Right Councillor programme. Contesting candidates were interviewed about their background information and priorities, and this information was widely publicised to the citizens through meetings, leading daily and neighbourhood newspapers, and various publications. 27 resident welfare associations collaborated with PAC and Swabhimanana in this effort, covering 18 wards.

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<tr>
<td>The hotline received more than 150 queries and the complaints with regard to non-issue of inclusion forms to the citizens were brought to the notice of the concerned officers in the BMP and the State Election Commission. Subsequently, the authorities ordered all the Assistant Revenue Officers’ offices to henceforth issue copies of Form 6 - the inclusion form, for the inclusion of eligible citizens on the voters’ list.</td>
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**9. Voters' Sabha - An interactive meeting to redress voters grievances, 2002**

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<tr>
<th>Background &amp; Objective</th>
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<td>A number of anomalies had been detected during the run up to the elections to the Kanakpura Lok sabha, held in February 2002. Due to the missing names from the voters’ list, many of the voters could not exercise their franchise. To address this major issue comprehensively, PAC appealed to the aggrieved voters in Bangalore to file written reports of such cases. In response, PAC received reports of more than 350 names missing from the voters' list. PAC organised an interactive meeting called Voters’ Sabha on March 19, 2002, that provided an opportunity for the aggrieved citizens who could not vote in these elections to air their woes to the concerned authorities. The meeting was attended by Mr. H.C. Nagendra, Joint Chief Electoral Officer of the Election Commission of India-Karnataka. The objective of the Sabha was also to discuss means for improving the procedure for preparation and revision of electoral rolls.</td>
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<th>About the meeting</th>
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<td>- A large number of members of civic groups, representatives of various organisations, and other individuals from across the city attended the Sabha. Civic groups made presentations of their cases and highlighted the various discrepancies they had discovered on the electoral rolls, which even included the omission of several entire houses and apartment blocks from the electoral rolls.</td>
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The groups also suggested changes to the existing procedures of the preparation and verification of the electoral rolls.

One suggestion was to make the electoral rolls citizen-friendly by computerizing them and making them available on CD-ROMS for institutions or individuals to purchase. Others requested to make the requisite forms available in ward offices, post offices and national banks in every locality for easy access, and that ID cards, with details of the date of birth of a voter, be made compulsory for every voter.

Based on the list of complaints on missing names, Mr. H.C. Nagendra directed the BMP to take appropriate action and to include the names in the list. Copies of Form 6 (the inclusion form) were also made available in the ARO offices and Designated Photography Locations (where the voters’ ID cards in a locality are issued), so that voters whose names are missing from the list can get these by filling out the form.

### 10. Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) Programme in Karnataka and Initiatives Taken Up by PAC, 2002

**Background & Objective**

The Election Commission of India initiated this programme to issue photo ID cards to eligible voters (those who have not already received cards) in Karnataka in May 2002. In recognition of PAC’s electoral interventions, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in Karnataka the organization for a meeting on May 7, 2002 to discuss and participate in the EPIC voter awareness programme.

PAC launched an awareness campaign to improve the efficacy of the EPIC programme and to enhance the participation of voters in the process of obtaining or correcting their photo identity cards.

**About the EPIC programme**

Interventions in Bangalore - Within the city, the BMP subcontracted the distribution of ID cards to Macro Infotech. The agency adopted state-of-the-art online technology whereby a voter can obtain his/her card within 15 minutes at Designated Photography Locations set up in every Assembly Constituency. Heeding PAC’s advice, the BMP undertook various measures to publicise the programme. Despite these efforts, however, it was observed during the initial phase of the campaign that turn out at the DPLs was less than 30 percent. Given the situation, PAC intervened to supplement the efforts of the BMP and other concerned authorities in the state to increase voter turnout at the DPLs by devising innovative public communication strategies.
These strategies included:

- **Media publicity:** PAC staff took stock of the situation by visiting the DPLs personally and also discussing how to partner with the Director of Macro Infotech as well as BMP officials to generate greater publicity. PAC drafted a press release and sent it to the BMP and later published in all popular leading dailies.

- **Information dissemination to resident welfare associations:** PAC worked closely with various resident welfare associations in Bangalore and provided information kits to these groups to enhance their participation. Each group was responsible for informing citizens in their respective areas. The feedback from each area, after compilation, was submitted to concerned authorities in the BMP for further improvements to the programme.

**Interventions across Karnataka** - In order to enable large number of voters to participate in the EPIC programme, PAC felt the need to publicize the information systematically throughout the state. PAC sought to disseminate information to thousands of voters through various NGOs across the state. An information kit was developed in the local language and sent to various organisations. The campaign involved more than 200 organisations spread out over 21 districts and lasted more than three months. Seminars and workshops were organised by the Centre to provide essential information and to motivate the organisations to take up similar initiatives in their respective areas.

- The media publicity campaign was very effective in sensitising the press. Almost all the leading daily newspapers carried this information as a regular feature. As a result, the turn out of voters at DPLs almost doubled. Macro Infotech confirmed a greater than 40 percent increase in turnout compared to the initial launch phase, and attributed the increase to information dissemination through the print media.

- PAC gave financial assistance to a few groups such as the Malleswaram Swabhimana Initiative, which actively disseminated information in their ward by displaying notices in more than 200 apartments. This also resulted in a noticeable increase in citizens’ participation.

- The interest expressed by many groups belonging to different districts of Karnataka was encouraging enough for PAC to conduct a two-day training programme on Civil Society
*Initiatives for Good Governance*, with a focus on electoral interventions. The Centre, in association with Sumangali Seva Ashram, also trained groups in about 12 districts of Karnataka in 2003.


### Background & Objective

Although the Supreme Court verdict of March 2003 upheld the constitutional right of the people to gain information about electoral candidates’ backgrounds and history, PAC believed that the Election Commission guidelines for the disclosure of this information would remain toothless unless they were properly complied with and information actually disseminated to voters. This hypothesis was put to the test in the two city municipal councils on the outskirts of Bangalore, K.R. Puram and Mahadevpura, both with populations under 300,000 and where city council elections were held in August and October 2003, respectively. PAC undertook a quick assessment of how the EC guidelines were implemented in these elections and presented the findings to the Commission for further action. The main objective of the campaign was to publicly scrutinise the veracity of information disclosed by candidates in their affidavits and disseminate that information among voters to enable them to make an informed choice.

### Partner

Sri Sadguru Seva Samsthe, a local NGO, carried out activities pertaining to elections as planned by PAC in K.R. Puram and Mahadevpura.

### About the Campaign

K.R. Puram - PAC made the following observations:

- Most of the contesting candidates were either ignorant about or indifferent toward the EC guidelines.
- Almost all the notaries failed to comply with some of these basic rules, and a few even added their seals before candidates had signed their affidavits.
- 30 out of the 170 candidates in the elections did not bother to declare the value of their assets, either fully or in part.
- 12 individuals did not sign the affidavits or did so improperly. One among this group even won a seat.
- Returning officers had not ensured that affidavits were complete and duly signed and notarised.
The PAC team concluded that the Election Commission’s guidelines for the declaration of candidates’ information were seriously breached in the K.R. Puram elections.

Also, PAC noticed that the authorities did not make much effort to publicise candidates’ background information. Affidavits were bunched up on notice boards in the municipal office and the Taluk office. To support citizens’ right to know, the Centre, in partnership with local civic groups, started a campaign to disseminate comparative information on candidates in several wards in K.R. Puram and to challenge cases of false and incomplete information.

PAC also reported the lapses to the Karnataka State Election Commissioner soon after the election, along with suggestions on how to improve the level of compliance with the EC guidelines. The Commissioner agreed to take prompt action against the erring Returning Officers and the notaries. Some of his actions were publicised in the press.

**Impact**

- As a result of feedback given by PAC after the K.R. Puram CMC elections, the State Election Commission made a serious effort in the Mahadevpura elections to ensure that the procedures for candidates’ affidavits were fully complied with.
- PAC’s analysis of the Mahadevpura affidavits showed that most of the information required had been furnished by the candidates except for a few missing details about assets. The notaries had also properly attested the documents and the Returning Officers had done their jobs well.
- For the first time, PAC was also able to get the City Police Commissioner to quickly verify the criminal backgrounds of the candidates.
- The PAC findings and proposals had reverberations on elections.

Mahadevpura - The Public Affairs Centre launched a massive campaign in Mahadevpura CMC from October 15 through 17, 2003. Shree Sadguru Seva Samste, a local NGO, joined hands with PAC and proved especially helpful in the dissemination of information on candidates. This was done by means of leaflets distributed in all the wards of the CMC. Announcements were also made through loudspeakers in all the wards at the time of dissemination. On the polling day, 15 well-trained teams of two volunteers each conducted exit polls in almost all the wards where the leaflets were disseminated.
all over the country. After the flouting of the disclosure guidelines in these two elections, the Central and State Election Commissions, as well as the media and civil society groups, geared up in many places to take collective action to uphold the citizens’ right to information.

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<td>The Election Commission of India conducted a nationwide revision of the voters’ lists from November 17 through December 8, 2003. The revision was conducted simultaneously in all states across the country (except those going to the polls in November and December). The purpose of PAC’s information campaign during the summary revision was to utilise the medium of radio to broadcast details about the summary revision. The campaign was a week-long intensive effort from December 1 through 8, 2003. Through radio promotions and information pamphlets, the campaign aimed to motivate citizens and voters to check the voter’s list and include their names on the electoral rolls. Telephone helplines were also set up to assist citizens during the revision.</td>
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**Background & Objective**

**Partner**

PAC collaborated with Radio Mirchi and other partner organisations including the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) in Ahmedabad, the Catalyst Trust in Chennai, and Ms. Vinodini Lulla in Mumbai and Pune to organise an awareness campaign on the summary revision. Simultaneously, PAC also collaborated with Radio City 91 FM to organise a similar campaign in Bangalore and K.R. Puram. PAC’s local partner in K.R. Puram was Shree Sadguru Seva Samsthe, with which it had already worked during the CMC elections earlier that year.

**About the Campaign**

- **Ahmedabad**: ADR volunteers distributed brochures across the city including well-known shops, residential/housing societies, vantage points, schools and colleges. Brochures were also mailed to 124 well-known companies in Ahmedabad and 43 companies outside the city with a cover letter addressed to the respective managing directors.

- **Bangalore**: Four young volunteers visited 32 colleges and disseminated brochures under the *College Awareness Campaign* from December 1 through 3. Though feedback from volunteers suggested that, by and large, students appeared unconcerned about enrolling, some did contact PAC for further information on how to register.

- **Chennai**: Information booklets were distributed at the Catalyst
Trust’s Citizens’ Centres. The organisation also published a news item in its monthly magazine, *Kudimakkal Murasu*, about the Voter’s Guide booklet and its availability at the Catalyst Trust office. Similarly, *The Hindu* and *Dinamani* published articles about the contents of the guide and its availability at the CT office.

- **K.R. Puram:** SSSS volunteers conducted door-to-door campaigns to distribute 8,000 handbills in 16 wards.
- **Mumbai:** 10,000 brochures were distributed free of cost at traffic signals and railway stations in the suburbs of Mumbai by a direct marketing firm called Just One on One. The *Mid-Day* newspaper published relevant portions of the Voter’s Guide for its readers.
- **Pune:** 6,000 brochures were distributed at all the Food World stores in the city.

### Follow up

While the campaign drew considerable interest in all cities, citizens faced the following problems in their efforts to get their names included, deleted or corrected in the electoral rolls:

1. Lack of adequate publicity
2. Short supply of relevant forms
3. Non-availability of English forms
4. Lack of responsiveness of election officials

A memorandum highlighting these problems was sent to the Chief Election Commissioner at the time, Mr. J.M. Lyngdoh, urging him to address these issues and constraints, and to initiate corrective action.
13. **14th Lok Sabha Elections - Campaign For Free, Fair and Informed Elections, 2004**

### Background & Objective

The widespread disenchantment and apathy among urban voters, the lack of information regarding candidates’ antecedents and the role of the 3 M’s (Money, Muscle and Mafia power) are the main impediments identified by PAC in the electoral system. To overcome these challenges, PAC launched a nationwide campaign during the 14th lok sabha elections in 2004. The objective of the nationwide voter awareness campaign was to enhance voters’ participation and to motivate them to make informed choices in elections.

### Partner

1. TV channels (Sony, SET Max, HBO, AXN, Zee, Discovery, Star India, Aaj Tak, MTV, ETV and Star Vijay) aired promotions prepared by PAC.
2. Websites (MSN India and Indiatimes) displayed promotions and voter motivation messages.
3. Brand-Comm, a communications consulting company headquartered in Bangalore, coordinated and supported the entire campaign.
4. Radio (Radio City 91 FM in Bangalore and Radio Mirchi in Ahmedabad, Chennai, Delhi, Indore, Kolkata, Mumbai and Pune) urged listeners to vote.
5. Several corporate groups, such as CII and NASSCOM, sent mass mails through their corporate networks.
6. Resident welfare groups in Bangalore and district-level civil society groups supported the campaign.

### About the Campaign

The campaign had two main components:

1. A national multi-media voter awareness and motivation campaign urging voters to simply “go out and vote” during the lok sabha and vidhana sabha elections.
   - The theme of the campaign, “Vote Today, Don’t Curse Tomorrow”, was used by the media as a motivating slogan for voters to cast their votes.
   - A nationwide media campaign was launched and a series of promotions featuring celebrities were aired on national and regional television channels such as Sony, SET Max, HBO, AXN and Zee as well as regional TV channels. PAC also partnered with Radio City 91 FM in Bangalore and Radio Mirchi in seven major cities in India, airing...
programmes with "Vote Today, Don’t Curse tomorrow" acting as the main message to voters.

- National icons like cricketer Rahul Dravid, cine-star Mr. Aamir Khan and Kannada film star Ramesh Aravind endorsed and participated in the campaign, being featured in TV and radio promos, as well as other publicity material.
- Advertisements, editorials and opinion polls were utilised through frequently visited websites such as MSN India (msn.co.in) and Indiatimes (indiatimes.com).
- Posters and hoardings were displayed at vantage points.

2. Information on candidates’ antecedents was disseminated to voters in lok sabha constituencies in Karnataka. PAC strived to promote informed choices among the citizens vis-à-vis the election of candidates. This initiative gained greater significance in the context of the landmark Supreme Court verdict on mandatory disclosure of candidates’ antecedents in March 2003. PAC partnered with 18 resident welfare associations and civil society groups to disseminate information leading up to the vidhana sabha constituency elections in and around Bangalore.

Impact

- The collective efforts of various groups have resulted in the extremely visible success of the voter motivation and awareness campaign. Both national and regional television programmes aired the promotions five to eight times per day. Radio Mirchi promotions, as well as MSN India and Indiatimes advertisements, editorials, banners and opinion polls made the campaign a success.

- PAC had developed a microsite on its website with the help of Mahiti (an organisation helping NGOs with information technology in Bangalore), complete with details of antecedents of candidates from Bangalore standing for election, information on how, when and where to vote, how to use electronic voting machines, what to do if someone casts his or her vote in your name, etc. The MSN and Indiatimes websites displayed links to the PAC microsite. The run up to the elections witnessed a three-fold increase in visits to the PAC website.

- Mass e-mailing through corporate networks reached more than 3,500 companies.
- Endorsements from popular icons lent further credibility to the campaign.
PAC was successful in bringing together a large number of groups across the state in the endeavour for free and fair elections. These civic groups were mostly working on specific issues such as HIV/AIDS, women’s empowerment, micro-credit, disabilities, etc. This was probably the first time that many of them had expanded their ambit of work and participated in governance reforms. The campaign was an ideal platform to impart training, and it also served as a good capacity building exercise for PAC.

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<th>14. Special Summary revision of the Voters’ List - Register to Vote, 2004-05</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Background &amp; Objective</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Following the special summary revision of the voter’s list in 2004-05, PAC carried out an information campaign through various media. It also conducted an information audit to check the efficacy of the electoral process.</td>
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<td><strong>About the Campaign</strong></td>
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| • In the summary revision of 2004-05, PAC carried out an information campaign through various methods, such as helplines, radio, cable TV networks, leaflets, neighbourhood newspapers and mass e-mails.  
• A street play called *Sath Praje* was organised in association with Some-Poorna, a group of young engineering professionals concerned about social issues, to motivate the youth of Bangalore to actively participate in the electoral process.  
• PAC also carried out an implementation audit of the revision process in order to obtain first hand information on the workings of registration centres. Feedback from the audit was given to the authorities to help them understand the realities on the ground and take corrective action.  
• The Centre also organised an open house meeting on December 3, 2004 to sensitise people to the various initiatives taken up by the BMP and PAC, discuss their results, and invite suggestions from groups on how to improve the existing electoral system. |
| **Impact** |
| Perhaps as a result of the effective intervention, the BMP sought suggestions from the Centre and took various initiatives such as encouraging online registration, setting up post offices to function as registration centres, and setting up help desks and control rooms to provide information to citizens. As a result of these initiatives, there was a threefold increase in the number of registrations. |
### 15. Elections to Gram Panchayats - *Parinamakari Panchayati* Campaign - 
**Strengthening Community Participation in Rural Governance 2005**

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<th><strong>Background &amp; Objective</strong></th>
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<td>Elections to Gram Panchayats in Karnataka were held on February 25 and 27, 2005. This provided an opportunity for PAC to explore creative interventions to strengthen governance at the local level. It was also the first rural local body elections to be held after the State Election Commission of Karnataka ruled in favour of extending electoral disclosure to the Panchayats. Toward improving the quality of Panchayat polls, PAC conducted a campaign with its local partners in about 20 Panchayats spread over eight districts in Karnataka. The objective of the programme was to build the capacities of the partner groups working at the grass roots level to enhance the quality of Panchayat polls and to demand better rural governance. Four programmes were conducted:</td>
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<td>• Verification of electoral rolls</td>
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<td>• Scrutiny of contesting candidates’ affidavits</td>
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<td>• Training women candidates to file nominations</td>
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<td>• Organising Mukha-Mukhis, public meetings where the contesting candidates declare their past achievements and their future plans for a particular village</td>
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<th><strong>Partner</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Spandana (Shimoga), Sadhana (Bangalore rural), Nagariaka Seva Trust (Dakshina Kannada), Consumer Forum (Udupi), Prag Jyothi (Bidar), Disha (Davangere), Prajna (Mysore), Volunteers (Chamrajnagar), Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktha Okkuta (Mangalore), and Bellandur Panchayat (Bangalore South) partnered with PAC in carrying out the above mentioned activities in their respective districts.</td>
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<th><strong>About the Campaign</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>The campaign was divided into two phases:</td>
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<td>• <strong>Capacity building:</strong> PAC conducted a capacity building workshop at the PAC office on February 11, 2005 on strengthening Panchayat elections through the four programmes mentioned above, and on how to carry out these activities in partnership with local groups in their respective areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Verification of the voter’s list:</strong> Access to the voter’s list was easy and groups were able to obtain the information immediately. A random, house-to-house verification of the voter’s list in selected villages brought to light a number of issues, such as the exclusion of names, instances of duplicate entries and the</td>
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continued presence of names from migrant communities (such as rock cutters) on the list in spite of their having already migrated. The exercise also unearthed several anomalies on the voter’s list, including names of deceased persons.

- Training of women candidates to file nomination for candidacy: Groups trained women members of self help groups (SHGs), many of them illiterate, on how to properly complete their affidavits. This training spurred interest among many SHG members, some of whom went on to contest in (and win) elections.

- Scrutiny of affidavits of contesting candidates: Partner groups scrutinised affidavits to check the level of compliance with the process, to analyse profiles of candidates, and to publicise information to enable voters to make informed choices. However, the exercise turned out to be a failure due to major problems experienced in obtaining the affidavits from the concerned Panchayats, Taluk offices and Deputy Commissioners’ offices.

- Mukha-Mukhis, public meetings with the candidates: Almost all the partner groups were able to organise Mukha-Mukhis in their respective Panchayats. The large turnout and the quality of debate and discussion were encouraging. The promises made by the candidates during these public meetings were recorded so that people could follow up later. The programme suffered a blow in Bellandur, however, where certain candidates and their associates prevented PAC from conducting public meeting with other contesting candidates.

Follow up

PAC organised an evaluation workshop on March 18, 2005, where the groups shared their experiences about the campaign and made a brief presentation to Mr. B.G. Nanda Kumar, Secretary of Karnataka’s State Election Commission, to update him on the different initiatives taken up by the various groups. Based on their experiences during the elections, they recommended a number of measures to improve transparency and citizens’ participation in the electoral process. Recommendations included improving communication between various authorities and the public during the revision of electoral rolls, increasing participation on the part of eligible voters by correcting errors on the electoral rolls, providing intense training programmes for the Returning Officers prior to the elections, and introducing electronic voting machines and helpdesks at various Panchayat offices to assist citizens. PAC compiled the suggestions from participating groups and forwarded them to the State Election Commission for further action.
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<th>Background &amp; Objective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grama Panchayats, the lowest tier in the Panchayati Raj system in Karnataka to which the elections were held earlier was the entry point for PAC to engage CSOs at grass root levels in elections to these panchayat raj institutions. Zilla and Taluk Panchayats constitute the upper two tiers of governance and elections held to them later was an opportunity for PAC to expand its activities related to promoting informed choices involving local organisations.</td>
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<th>Partner</th>
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<tr>
<td>Navodaya (Bangalore south), HELP (Chitradurga), Sarvodaya (Bagalkot), Nagarika Seva Trust (Dakshina Kannada), Consumer Forum (Udipi), Prag Jyothi (Bidar), Disha (Davangere), Prajna (Mysore), Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktha Okkuta (Mangalore), Janakalyana Mahila Abhivruddhi Samsthe (Shimoga) and Namma Dhwani Community Radio (Kolar) partnered with PAC in carrying out the above mentioned activities in their respective districts.</td>
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<th>About the Campaign</th>
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<tr>
<td>• In continuation of its efforts to strengthen governance at the rural level, PAC began the task of engaging CSOs in ten districts of Karnataka during Zilla and Taluk Panchayat elections in December 2005.</td>
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<td>• The programme aimed at collecting the affidavits of contesting candidates in selected places and organising and distributing this information in order to make voters aware about their candidates.</td>
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<td>• Upon PAC's request, the SEC had instructed the Deputy Commissioners of all the districts to cooperate with public interest groups and provide them with the required information.</td>
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<td>• The SEC had also conducted the much required training programme to its Returning Officers utilising the state-of-the-art technology available at the Administrative Training Institute at Mysore, as suggested by PAC after evaluating its own campaign during Gram Panchayat elections held earlier.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Despite these efforts, the concerned officers continued to be uncooperative to these groups in many places. However, the highly motivated groups' constant persuasive efforts yielded the much-required information.</td>
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<td>• The groups have successfully carried out the dissemination of candidates' information, which has created demand from the surrounding villages and taluks to replicate these efforts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
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<td>• The Mukha-Mukhi programmes also proved to be an enlightening forum for the voters in these places. Such meetings have successfully revealed the ignorance of some of the contesting candidates and helped voters to be cautious of such candidates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The learning from these exercises is being compiled and will be forwarded to the SEC for further action.</td>
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