Holding the State to Account

Lessons of Bangalore's Citizen Report Cards

Samuel Paul

Public Affairs Centre
Bangalore
2006
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Published by:
Public Affairs Centre
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ISBN : 81-88816-07-8

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Price : Rs. 60.00
       US$ 15.00

Cover Design by:
Wilson Pais

Printed at:
Image Graphics
Bangalore
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INTRODUCTION

There is a conspicuous imbalance in the thrust of the reforms under way in India since 1991. The primary focus of the reformers so far has been on macro economic management and the creation of an enabling environment for economic activities such as trade and industry. The equally important function of the state in terms of the provision of essential public goods and services that matter to the people is yet to receive serious attention from the government. Government’s response here has been to increase public spending to solve the problem, while largely ignoring the issues of outcomes and accountability in public services. This is unfortunate, given the fact that the vast majority of government personnel are engaged in the design and delivery of services, especially at the state and local levels. Needless to add, the failure to reform this function adversely affects the lives and productivity of millions of ordinary citizens, including the poor. Economic liberalization is no doubt essential for growth and employment, but it will not go far in the absence of efficiency and accountability in the wider array of public infrastructure and services for which government is directly responsible.

Reform of public services is by no means an easy task. The monopolistic nature of service delivery and other related imperfections invariably lead to inefficiency and non-responsiveness in public agencies. Furthermore, the tasks of linking each and every service to specific outcomes and managing large bureaucracies are indeed complex. Those who operate on the supply side of services are not always able to observe and monitor the actual outcomes in the field. Often, outcomes are difficult to quantify and the incentives to track outcomes are weak in any case. It is in this context that citizens, as users of services, can act as a valuable source of information to fill this gap. User feedback on services can shed light on the outcomes being generated and on how accountable service providers are. Scholars have analysed user feedback and confirmed the validity of this hypothesis (Deichmann and Lal 2003).
There is no unique way to define the outcomes of government’s policies and services. Often, policy makers report outcomes in terms of physical achievements, outputs, and growth rates. Thus, the outcome of a road transport service may be represented by the passenger kilometers run or the tonnage of goods carried. Sometimes, the rate of return or the surplus generated by the service may be shown as the outcome. While each of these measures captures aspects of outcomes, a summative measure of outcomes needs to reflect the quality and other attributes of the service that gives satisfaction to its users.

User feedback, when impartially gathered and analysed, can be used by policy makers and public administrators to resolve problems that may not get exposed through their internal monitoring of the physical progress of programmes and services. Civil society institutions too can generate such information on their own and use the findings to demand better outcomes and increased accountability from the state and its agencies. It is by no means a substitute for government’s own monitoring of outcomes. But it certainly can complement the government’s efforts and act as a cross check on the official evidence in important services that matter to the people. As noted above, when a government or its service providers are indifferent, user feedback can be deployed by civil society groups to nudge the state to improve its services to the people.

The term “user feedback” may sound novel to many in government and policy circles who may question its relevance to the functions they perform. In reality, however, government seeks and responds to user feedback without ever using this term. Whenever new policies or laws are introduced or changes are made, governments receive representations from those affected and often respond to them. Organised interests such as trade, industry and labour unions are well known for providing such feedback and seeking remedies for the problems they face. In respect of public services, there are no organized groups to “voice” the problems of those affected. There is no orchestration of voice as individual citizens are unable to pool the
information they possess and use its power to demand better services from the provider agencies. Government could have stepped in to fill this gap, but that seldom happens (Paul 2002).

A citizen report card (CRC) is an innovative way to remedy this gap. It is a tool that enables citizens to give a grade to the service providers on whom they depend for the delivery of essential services. Grades put the provider agencies under the scanner and the inter-agency comparisons that follow can potentially act as a proxy for competition. CRC findings often provide diagnostic information that are not captured through government monitoring.

CRCs have been experimented with in India as well as several other countries by the Public Affairs Centre for over a decade now, and the evidence shows that civil society groups and governments can use this approach to improve the outcomes and accountability of public service providers (Paul 1995, Balakrishnan and Iyer, A 1998, Paul and Sekhar 2000). In this paper, we propose to narrate the experience of using CRCs in Bangalore where the feasibility of this approach was first tested in relation to the major public services in the city. The Bangalore case is of special interest as the evidence pertains to the lessons of three CRCs spread over a period of 10 years. It is the replication of such micro level initiatives across the country that could lead to increased public awareness and demand for change, and eventually make governments more accountable. CRCs have also been tried out in rural areas and at different levels of government (Paul et. al 2004). It appears to be a versatile tool that can be applied in all public contexts where user feedback can be an aid to achieving improved outcomes and accountability. When civil society groups initiate a CRC, it has the potential to empower them in their dialogues with the government and its service providers (WDR 2004, Ravindra 2004, Goetz and Gaventa 2001). When a government on its own seeks user feedback, its monitoring function and motivation to be responsive may get strengthened in the process.
SECTION 1

CRCs IN BANGALORE

Bangalore was a city with a population of over four million in 1993. It was a growing industrial city and was turning into India’s hub of information technology in the early nineties. A quarter of its population was poor, most of them living in slums spread throughout the city. As in other Indian cities, Bangalore’s residents too depended on several public agencies established by the provincial (state) government for their essential services. Thus the city’s municipal corporation provided services such as roads, street lights and garbage removal, while electricity was supplied by another large agency. Similarly, water, transport, telecom, health care, and urban land and housing were the responsibility of other large public service providers. A common feature of all these services was that they were monopolistic or dominant supply sources. People had little choice in terms of alternative suppliers. This mattered even more to the poor as they could not afford some of the high cost options that richer people could tap in the event that public service providers failed. Thus when electricity failed, the rich could turn on their generators. They might use private vehicles when public transport failed. Such options were seldom feasible for the poor. The poor suffered from yet another handicap, namely, their lack of influence and voice to get their problems solved at the agency level. Collective action by citizens to address these problems was also difficult to organize and costly in terms of time and resources.

It was against this background that the small citizens’ group in Bangalore launched a survey of citizens to gather feedback on the public services in the city. The actual survey work was carried out by a market research firm that supported this initiative. The survey costs were met through local donations. The survey was launched after the group assessed the service related problems being faced by the people through focus group discussions. Structured questionnaires were designed in light of this knowledge and pre tested to ensure their relevance and suitability for field level interviews. The survey covered
nearly 1200 households selected from among the middle class and low income (slum) households. Separate questionnaires were used for interviewing these two segments. But the objectives of the survey in both cases were to find out (1) how satisfactory were the public services from the user’s perspective; (2) what aspects of the services were satisfactory and what were not, and (3) what were the direct and indirect costs incurred by the users for these services. Satisfaction was measured on a rating scale (1 to 7) and aggregated to yield averages for its different dimensions. Trained investigators conducted the field interviews. The results obtained from an analysis of the data were used to rate the different service providers in terms of the quality of the service, corruption and overall user satisfaction. A structured summary of these ratings across the agencies involved was called the “citizen report card on public services”.

The first report card on Bangalore (1994) revealed several interesting patterns about the city’s public services. It showed that the satisfaction levels of the middle income respondents did not exceed 25 per cent for any of the service providers covered by the survey. Dissatisfaction levels, on the other hand, were much higher, and in the case of the Bangalore Development Authority was as high as 65 per cent! Public satisfaction with staff behaviour in these agencies was a mere 25 per cent and over a quarter of the people had to make three visits or more to the agencies to solve their problems. The problem resolution was 57 per cent when all agencies were taken together. On an average, 14 per cent of the respondents had paid bribes to the agency staff and 50 per cent of them claimed that bribes were demanded by the staff. Many households incurred additional costs because of the investments they had to make to compensate for the unreliability of the services (eg., generators to cope with power outages).

The feedback from the sample of low income households was also similar. Over 70 per cent of them had to make three or more visits to the agencies to solve their problems. Nearly a third of them had to pay bribes. Their problem resolution rate was much lower
than that of the middle class households. Yet, their satisfaction with the service providers was not as low as in the middle income sample, perhaps because of their low expectations from services. The report card from both the middle income and low income households presented a picture of highly unsatisfactory and non-responsive service providers in the city (Paul 1995).

The report card findings were widely publicized through the press in Bangalore. The government and the service providers were also kept informed of the full report card. Citizen groups were invited to debate the findings and propose ways and means to deal with the problems being highlighted by the report card. Newspapers played a major role in creating public awareness about the findings of the report card. A leading paper, The Times of India, published the findings about each of the agencies every week, a feature that continued for a few weeks.

Beyond the publication of the report card, the citizen group that started the initiative did not take any other follow up action. But enquiries began to reach the leader of the group on how this work along with advocacy for reform could be scaled up. The growing public interest in this endeavour persuaded the leader of the group to establish a new non-profit body called “Public Affairs Centre” (PAC) in Bangalore in 1994 to expand and strengthen this work in the country. One of its early activities was to respond to the requests for advice from three of the city’s service providers covered by the CRC. One of them was the worst rated agency which sought PAC’s help in further probing into its problems and finding remedies. Though the report card did not provoke all the service providers to take immediate steps to improve their services, it is creditable that three out of eight agencies initiated action and sought help from PAC on their own. Another interesting initiative that followed was the creation of a joint service provider- civil society forum with the support of the municipal commissioner. It acted as a forum not only for dialogue on the city’s services, but also as an instrument to generate new reform ideas and experiments (Paul 2002).
PAC prepared a second report card on Bangalore’s public services in 1999. It provided new evidence on the state of public services in the city after a lapse of five years. The survey methodology used was essentially the same as in 1994, but the sample size was increased to 2000 households. The results showed a partial improvement in public satisfaction with most of the agencies, but the satisfaction level was still below 50 per cent even for the better performers. A disturbing finding was that corruption levels in several agencies had increased. The low income people continued to visit agencies more often than their middle income counterparts to solve their problems. The report cards indicated a clear link between petty corruption and inefficient service provision. The finding on corruption showed how difficult it is to root out the non-transparent and arbitrary procedures and mind sets of many agencies. But the two report cards demonstrated how such phenomena could be tracked and highlighted through credible methods and used to bring the agencies under a “public scanner” (Paul and Sekhar 2000).

The follow up actions in 1999 differed significantly from those in 1994. Well before the public dissemination of results, PAC presented mini report cards to the major service providers in the city on a one on one basis. This was followed by a seminar for the management teams from selected agencies to exchange their experiences with reforms since the first report card. The objective of this exercise was to learn from each other. The deliberations showed that agencies other than those who sought its help were also engaged in improving their services in different ways. The final event was a public meeting where the report card findings were presented to both leaders and staff of all the service providers with citizen groups and media also present. Leaders of the agencies addressed the gathering and explained to the public their plans to deal with the problems highlighted in the report card. This event and the report card findings were widely covered in the news media.

Though the CRC of 1999 showed only partial improvements in the city’s services, it was clear that several of the service providers
had initiated action to improve service quality and respond to the specific issues raised in the first report card. One example is the improvements in billing procedures and dissemination of information in some of the agencies. Another is the increasing use of joint forums with users to improve the responsiveness of staff. But within a few months of the second report card, the new Chief Minister of the state of which Bangalore is the capital announced the creation of a Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) to improve the services and infrastructure of the city with greater public participation. He set up BATF as a public-private partnership with several non-official and eminent citizens as members along with the heads of all service providers. In contrast to the more limited agency responses, this move by the Chief Minister raised the level to systemic responses across agencies. It created a forum where all the stakeholders could be brought together both to solve the city’s problems and to tap ideas and funds from the private sector. It was the first time that a Chief Minister had launched an initiative to improve services in response to citizen feedback. BATF began its work in earnest in 2000 and catalysed a number of reforms in a number of agencies. An important reform was the reform of the property tax that resulted in increased revenues and reduced hassles for the citizen. Solid waste management, sanitation and roads were other areas of visible improvement. BATF also prepared a simpler version of the report card to monitor the progress of the different city agencies. Over a three year period, its report cards (based on public feedback through interviews) showed a positive response from the people to the reforms and some improvement in the working of most of the city’s public agencies and their services (Nilakeni 2003).

The third citizen report card on Bangalore was brought out in 2003. The survey covered a sample of over 1400 households. The methodology used was essentially the same as in the previous CRCs, except that the rating scale used in assessing satisfaction was modified in light of past experience. This change is briefly mentioned in the section below where the findings of the CRC of 2003 are discussed as part of the comparative analysis of the three CRCs.
SECTION II

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

In respect of public services, impact can be gauged only though the improvements in services, measured in terms of their quality, reliability, adequacy and other features. This can be a stupendous and costly task, given the multiplicity of services and the complexity and size of the agencies involved. It is why public agencies typically report on things like number of doctors, hospital beds, public taps, etc., as a proxy for outcomes. An alternative is to approximate true outcomes through an indirect approach that draws on an assessment of services by a sample of users as explained in an earlier section. We summarise below the evidence on outcomes that has thus been gathered through user feedback on the services at different points in time in Bangalore. We begin with the findings of the third CRC on Bangalore (2003). A comparison of these findings with the earlier report cards will show whether there has been any improvements in the city’s public services.

A person’s satisfaction with an agency’s services reflects his/her overall assessment of that agency. Full satisfaction with an agency implies a higher rating of its services than partial satisfaction. Satisfaction can be measured for different dimensions of the quality of a service or agency. We present below three measures of agency responsiveness, namely, problem incidence, staff behaviour, and bribes paid or demanded. These measures reflect different aspects of quality and responsiveness as experienced by the users of services. An increase in the proportion of users who are satisfied with a service/agency is an indirect indicator of an improvement of that service/agency.

The findings presented below are divided into two parts: the first pertains to general households (mainly middle income), and the second to low income or slum households. The acronyms of the agencies covered by the report cards are listed in the box below.
Feedback from General Households

Overall satisfaction: The satisfaction of the middle income citizens of Bangalore with the different services ranged from 73 to 97 per cent in 2003. Chart 1 shows the user satisfaction levels (measured by the proportions of users who are fully or partially satisfied) for the nine agencies.

Chart 1

Overall Satisfaction 2003
General Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>% Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMP</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESCOM</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWSSB</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSNL</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICE</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMTC</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVT HOSPITALS</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTO</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Box: Completely Satisfied, Partly Satisfied]
User satisfaction among general households ranged between 97% for BMTC and 73% for BWSSB, BMP and Government Hospitals. Agencies did vary, however, in respect of the proportions of people who have given a rating of "completely satisfied". While BMTC had the largest proportion of satisfied users, it is BESCOM which had the largest segment of users expressing "full satisfaction". The fact that a number of agencies have significant segments of users who are partially satisfied suggests that much could be done to improve upon what has been achieved till now. It also signals that improvements in services are being experienced by larger proportions of people (greater spread) even though the quality standards achieved by agencies may not be anything close to perfection.

**Improvements in services between 1994 and 2003**

The comparison of user satisfaction presented below calls for a word of explanation. Comparability of data over time is a problem as changes invariably occur in the survey setting and the methods used. In the present case, the survey methodology used in the second and third report cards was fine tuned in the light of experience, especially with regard to the rating scale. To ensure comparability of the data between periods, the chart below uses the evidence from all respondents who had interacted with one agency or another. The data for all agencies are aggregated for each report card. For 2003, the column represents the proportion of users that is fully satisfied with a service. This is compared with the proportion of users in the upper end of the scale, namely, "very satisfied" and "satisfied", in 1994 and 1999. A comparison of these categories with "completely satisfied" is defensible though the former slightly exaggerates the level of satisfaction in 1994 and 1999. In other words, the data given against 2003 is a more restrictive measure of user satisfaction. Despite this limitation, the chart shows that the average user satisfaction increased by over 40% between 1999 and 2003. Focus on the upper end of the scale is appropriate also because it sets a goal for the service provider to achieve, namely, giving full or high satisfaction to the user.
Chart 2

Satisfaction with Public Services Across CRCs

The chart above indicates a trend of across the board improvement over time in user satisfaction when all the agencies are taken together (a weighted average). The chart below shows how the individual agencies have performed in terms of this indicator. Not surprisingly, some have done better than others.

Chart 3

Satisfaction with Public Services Across CRCs

Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BWSSB</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESCOM</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSNL</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt Hospital</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTO</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart 3 above presents the satisfaction ratings of seven agencies across the three CRCs. Here again, while the rating for 1994 and 1999 includes those users who interacted with service providers and are either very satisfied or satisfied, that for 2003 gives only those who are completely satisfied. The chart shows that agencies have varied in terms of complete satisfaction. This probably reflects the complexity of the agency tasks and the nature of reforms attempted.

It is important to understand what lies behind this change. Does the improvement in satisfaction reflect real changes that might have occurred in the quality of services, responsiveness of the service providers, and efficiency of service delivery? Did the need for interaction with the agencies significantly decrease? What actions might have been taken by the government and its service providers to achieve such positive outcomes? The comparative charts below provide some answers to these questions.

**Problem incidence:** People are likely to be more satisfied when they have fewer problems in getting a service or while interacting with an agency. The extent to which users of services experience problems has come down in 2003 in comparison with 1999. (see Chart 4). Fewer problems mean fewer interactions with the agencies. This usually happens when more people experience relatively more reliable or hassle free services. Since this aspect was not quantified in 1994, it is not possible to say whether the same pattern existed between 1994 and 1999.

**Chart 4**
Reduction of problems is an important reason for improved satisfaction. It is likely that the reduction in the frequency of routine problems translates into fewer interactions with citizens, thereby reducing the scope for delay, harassment or corruption.

Chart 5

Satisfaction with Staff Behaviour Across CRCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart above indicates a positive change in staff behaviour for all the agencies taken together. It is difficult to imagine that people who gave low ratings in the past to the same staff would applaud them now without valid reasons.

Corruption: An important question is whether service improvement has been accompanied by a reduction in corruption. Evidence on this is given in the chart below. Despite some improvement in the services, corruption seems to have increased between 1994 and 1999. But compared to the report card of 1999, the findings of CRC 2003 for general households show that corruption in the agencies has come down. We suspect that this reflects a reduction in the bribes demanded and paid by people in routine transactions. Streamlining of procedures and systems and increased transparency may well have contributed to this outcome. This does not imply that all pockets of corruption have been eliminated. In specialized areas such as building permits and approvals of various kinds, corruption may still be substantial,
but this survey was not designed to unearth them. The findings definitely support the premise that simpler procedures and improved efficiency in routine operations such as self assessment of property tax by the City Corporation, simplified land transfer by the Urban Development Authority and the like, as well as measures such as IT enabled billing systems in BESCOM (the Electricity Company), served to reduce harassment and extortion citizens faced in the late nineties.

Chart 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Corruption Incidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback from Slum Households

**Slum dwellers satisfaction with services:** While the poor (slum dwellers) also indicated substantial improvement in satisfaction with services, their ratings are significantly lower, with four of the six agencies receiving satisfaction ratings above 70%. The poor do not use the entire range of services shown against the general households (middle income).
The ratings given by slum dwellers ranged between 93% for BMTC and 64% for Bangalore Police. Overall, a relatively smaller proportion of slum dwellers were satisfied with most services in comparison with general households.

**Problem Incidence in services:** This is not to suggest that quality of services in the slums has not improved. Feedback from slum dwellers indicated that service quality in terms of availability of water in public toilets and regularity of garbage clearance had improved substantially. Problem incidence has also declined and compared well with that reported by general households (see chart 8).
In 1999, slum dwellers encountered problems in their interactions with agencies most often while dealing with the Bangalore Police. This has come down significantly in 2003. Problem incidence is lowest in BMTC and hospitals. It is in relation to BWSSB that the decline has been of a small order, largely due a number of institutional issues that affected its service provision in the slums.

**Satisfaction with staff behaviour:** In most agencies, satisfaction with staff behaviour had increased between 1999 and 2003 (see Chart 9 below).

![Chart 9](image)

In spite of the relatively higher frequency of incidence of problems, users who interacted with BWSSB gave its staff the highest rating. Although Bangalore Police received the lowest rating, significant improvement over 1999 was reported even in this case. But in the case of BMP, where overall satisfaction was comparatively lower, satisfaction of slum households with staff behaviour has turned out to be surprisingly high.

**The Corruption score:** The slum household survey also shows a decline in the proportion of people that have paid bribes. The proportions have declined from 33% in 1994 to 25% in 1999 and 19% in 2003. In this regard, the experience of the poor is similar to
that of the middle class. But the proportions are higher for the poor than for the middle class households. The corruption incidence thus continues to be higher on the poor than on the rest of the population.

In summary, the CRC findings discussed above show that a significant turnaround has taken place in Bangalore’s public services over a ten year period. The improvement in public satisfaction levels reported above has cut across all the major service providers. This improvement is reflected in the feedback provided by both middle and low income households. The positive changes reported in the quality dimensions of the services are consistent with the higher overall satisfaction ratings of the different agencies.

There is a surprising degree of internal consistency among the foregoing findings. If through various reforms, streamlining, etc., most agencies have managed to reduce the problems or hassles that people encounter during their interaction with agency staff, the scope for petty corruption would tend to decline. This is an unusual finding and has major implications for corruption control strategies. Improvement of services and reduction of problems in the course of interactions tend to reduce the scope for corruption. Similarly, when the problem incidence declines, the overload on agency staff tends to go down and this in turn may enable them to serve the remaining customers better. This perhaps explains why users have given much higher ratings for staff behaviour in 2003 for most agencies.
SECTION III

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Many observers believe that the improvement in services reported above did not happen overnight. Starting with the first Bangalore CRC in 1994, the spotlight on public services had set in motion a series of actions by different stakeholders that converged and cumulated to produce these results. Some agencies had taken remedial steps to improve their services as is evident from the CRC of 1999. How these and other factors interacted and cumulated to achieve this turnaround in Bangalore is not easy to measure and explain. Nor is it possible to attribute the precise contribution of each of these factors to the turnaround. Since these changes occurred over a decade, other factors such as levels of income and education of citizens would have improved and these in turn might also have contributed to the positive outcomes noted above\(^3\). But a quick check of the data did not reveal any major shifts in income or education. The information technology sector, known for its higher income and education levels, has certainly grown in Bangalore, but it represents too small a population segment to have had a major impact on the average income and education levels in Bangalore. In the present analysis, we assume, therefore, that the improved service outcomes in the city could not be attributed to changes in long term variables such as per capita income and education.

The drivers of change in Bangalore can be divided into two categories: One set of factors operated from the demand side, and the other from the supply side. Demand for better services tends to operate from outside the government system. Citizen demands and media pressure are some examples. In a real sense, all demand side factors act as external catalysts. They have no direct role in the design or delivery of services. These external pressures can be sustained, however, only in open, democratic societies that tolerate dissent and debate.
The supply of services, on the other hand, is the business of government itself. The factors that cause supply responses to happen therefore tend to be linked to government and are largely within its control. Governments could take action on their own, or they may act in response to demand side drivers of change. The interaction between the demand side and supply side factors that caused positive service outcomes has been a special feature of the past decade in Bangalore. In terms of sequence, demand side forces were the first to appear on the city scene. The supply responses came later.

Demand Side Interventions

The glare effect of citizen report cards

The Bangalore report cards exerted pressure on the city’s service providers in three ways. First, the focused information on their performance from the citizens’ perspective (CRCs) put them under the “public scanner”. Since such information was new to them, and much of it was negative, it had the effect of “shaming” the poor performers. Evidence from the corporate world shows that measuring and quantifying work and outputs tend to make organizations pay more attention to what is being measured. Something similar seems to have happened in the Bangalore agencies too. The chairman of the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) recalled his reaction after the first report card that gave his agency a low rating: “For the first time, there was a feedback from the public on the performance of agencies. My curiosity was triggered by the fact that in the rankings the report card assigned to the various agencies, I found the BDA had got the first rank from the bottom. I thought I should do something about this”. A similar motivation is evident in the initiative some agencies took after the first CRC to contact PAC for its advice and assistance to improve services. Public agencies tend to be sensitive to adverse publicity, especially in a democracy.

Second, inter-agency comparisons seem to have worked as a surrogate for competition. Though each service provider is a monopoly
and its area of activity is distinctive, the CRC challenges this power by permitting an inter-agency comparison of certain common attributes. Users, media and civil society groups see delays, bribery and non-responsiveness as negative features in any service provider. The fact that the chairmen of some of the agencies called PAC to find out where they stood in the second CRC before its findings were released also shows that organizations do pay attention to how the public views them. They wanted to know not only whether their ratings have improved, but also whether they are ranked higher or lower than others. This, despite their objection to inter-agency comparisons in public!

This sense of competition can percolate down even to the lowest levels in a public agency. After the CRC of 2003 was announced, a conductor in a public bus (BMTC) in Bangalore is reported to have proudly told a quarrelsome passenger: “Don’t you know that PAC has rated our transport service as the best among all the services in the city”? That the report card’s message had gone down to the conductor’s level is instructive. It means that the leadership of the agency has spread the word among its employees. The incentive effects of inter-agency comparisons cannot be overemphasized.

Third, it appears that at least the chairmen of some of the agencies saw the report card as an aid in their efforts to reform their agencies. Though the feedback on their agencies was negative to begin with, these leaders took a positive view of the exercise. They used the CRC findings to goad their colleagues to take action to improve the services. It shows that a CRC, when prepared impartially and professionally, can be used to encourage the more proactive among the public leaders to move ahead on the reform front. A recent assessment of the Bangalore CRCs reports that several agencies characterised report cards as a “catalyst”(Ravindra 2004). One of the agency leaders stated that PAC’s work on satisfaction levels and quality of services using feedback had a profound effect on him as a public manager. Some agencies have adopted the practice of preparing their own report cards, affirming the value of user feedback as an internal management tool.
BMTC, Bangalore’s public transport company, has widely disseminated its report card rating, including in its advertisements.

The CRC work did not end with the dissemination of its findings. The dissemination was followed up with advocacy for more responsive and efficient agencies. It was the repeated report cards (three in ten years) and the subsequent public advocacy work together that seem to have made a cumulative impact on the government and citizens of Bangalore. This work was done along with many other civic groups and NGOs in the city. Their education and networking abilities were part of the outcome of the advocacy work. After the public meeting held in Bangalore in connection with the second CRC of 1999, a leading newspaper, the Times of India said in an editorial “—— PAC, in creating this forum, has opened doors, even windows, for a healthy tete-a-tete with our service providers. The honesty on display was remarkable. —— this is the spirit of democracy in action. Civil society working in tandem with government for the greater good of all.” In the Bangalore context, the CRCs and the associated advocacy thus acted as a stimulus to reform and responsiveness in the service providers. While its precise contribution to the turnaround in services is difficult to measure, it is reasonable to conclude that it activated the demand side and signalled the need for change to the service providers well before the positive findings of the report card of 2003.

**Demand pressure through civil society groups**

As noted above, PAC’s advocacy work was carried out through a network of civil society groups in Bangalore. In fact, the number of such groups increased significantly since the time of the first report card. There were two types of organizations in the network. Neighbourhood groups called residents associations have a direct interest in all the service providers. Then there are public interest groups that work citywide, but on specific civic or service related issues. There were only about 20 such active groups in Bangalore in 1994. By 2000, their number exceeded 200. Most of them are civic
groups with local members, local resources, and with no staff of their own. This is a different breed from the conventional NGOs one comes across. Not all of them are dynamic groups, but many did participate in the campaigns and meetings organized by PAC. The demand pressure created by them can be divided into two types: First, their participation in public meetings and seminars where report cards or other civic issues were discussed became an effective means to voice people’s concerns about the services and to demand improvement in agency performance. A case in point is the public meeting held soon after the second CRC (referred to above). Their distinctive contribution was to engage the service providers in active public dialogues as opposed to the closed personal meetings with officials that were customary in all agencies. Some of the service providers began to take a cue from this and organized their own forums where the civil society groups were invited to dialogue on the problems being faced by them. The electricity board, the Water and sanitation board and even the Police have worked with such forums. The interactions between organized civic groups and the service providers have grown significantly in the past decade (Balakrishnan and Manjunath 2004).

Second, the citywide NGOs have made a different kind of contribution to these dialogues. Their focus on specific issues and their city wide campaigns have given greater visibility to the demand side pressure on the agencies. PAC has assisted and partnered them in most cases, thus strengthening the city’s “social capital”. One NGO undertook advocacy work linked to property tax reform. Another examined the municipal budget and engaged the city corporation in a debate on service efficiency and public expenditure. A third worked on the improvement of solid waste management and offered new ways to improve this service. The common thread running through these diverse interventions was their signal to the service providers that their activities were being watched and assessed in a systematic fashion. In different ways, all these civil society groups were demanding better services and accountability from the government and its agencies.
Reinforcement of pressure by the media

The print media in Bangalore played an unusual role by adding their weight to the pressure for better services. In 1994, all that the newspapers had done was to publicise the negative findings of the report card or other similar critical assessments. Investigative reports on civic issues were few and far between. But the scene changed since then as some of the newspapers decided to devote more space to public service problems and related civic issues. Some of the newspapers sought PAC’s advice and technical inputs for their new initiatives. One newspaper began a series of reports on the different wards of the city, highlighting their problems and focusing on their elected corporators. This was followed by another innovative campaign that newspapers seldom undertake. A leading newspaper organised interactive meetings in different parts of the city where citizens were invited to voice their specific area related problems in the presence of senior officials from a selected group of public agencies. A large number of public officials were thus exposed to the issues of the localities and stimulated to respond with answers. These meetings, of course, received much publicity in the newspaper. The remedial actions taken were also subsequently reported in the press. This public process clearly put increased pressure on the agencies to be more transparent and accountable and to deliver on their promises.

The role of donor dialogues

It is well known that international donors can work on both the demand and supply sides of the problem under discussion. Their work on the supply side such as approval of loans and grants, technical assistance, etc., are more visible and better known. But in Bangalore, there is some evidence that major donors have exerted pressure on the demand side too. Since much of this happened behind closed doors, it is difficult to offer documentary evidence in support of their contribution. But in personal communications, World Bank officials, for example, have confirmed how in their dialogues with the government, they have lent support to the importance of user feedback.
and to the need to view civil society pressure as an aid to accountability. These signals may well have reinforced the demand pressure on the agencies in addition to the different sources discussed above.

As noted above, these four factors are demand side interventions and hence can be credited with adding to the external pressure on the service providers to deliver better services to the people. They have worked both in sequence and in an interactive mode. Thus the first report card stimulated media publicity as well as civil society activism. By the time of the second CRC, civic groups and PAC were working together interactively.

Supply Side Interventions

*Entrepreneurial Responses by Agency Heads*

Until 1999, the modest improvements in services that occurred in Bangalore and reflected in the second CRC can be attributed to the actions taken by the agency leaders on their own initiative after the first report card in 1994. A specific problem that agencies such as Bangalore Telecom and BWSSB (water board) addressed was problem of excess billing. Streamlining and computerization of the billing system reduced errors and the need for customers to keep visiting these offices. Reform of the grievance redressal procedures was another aspect that agencies such as BMP attempted. The BMP Commissioner also took the lead in creating a new forum called “Swabhimana” (self esteem) for interaction between his officials and civic groups on important local issues. The electricity provider (BESCOM’s predecessor) initiated periodic meetings between citizens and the agency staff and these occasions to inform the people about the reforms being planned. Even BDA which received the lowest satisfaction ratings launched training courses for its lower level staff who interfaced with customers. With PAC’s help, BDA also prepared report cards on its new layouts to gauge the problems being experienced by the residents.
A common feature of all these interventions by agency heads is the initiative from them. They responded, despite the lack of political commitment and support at the level of the Chief Minister at that time. In a real sense, they were entrepreneurial responses, well within the purview of the authority and resources of the agencies. In almost all cases, they were responding to the first report card’s findings. These leaders saw the CRC as an aid to their endeavour to reform the system rather than as a threat. Though PAC did not directly propose these ideas, it is important to note that the PAC Team had discussions with them, often at their request, on these subjects. But it is only in very few instances that PAC provided any formal advice or support to the agency heads. The foregoing discussion clearly demonstrates that actions to improve services can be taken by well motivated and enterprising agency leaders even when their political masters are disinterested in reform.

**The Bangalore Agenda Task Force: A State Initiative**

The scene changed for the better in 2000 when the new Chief Minister of Karnataka created a new body called the “Bangalore Agenda Task Force” (BATF) to work with the major service providers in a partnership mode. This happened a few months after the release of the second CRC and showed the government’s determination to deal with the problems being experienced by the public. BATF consisted of several prominent persons from the private sector and the professional world along with the chairpersons of seven service provider agencies. This public-private partnership was authorized to mobilize funds and expertise to assist and stimulate change in the functioning of these agencies, and to involve the public in appropriate ways in the process. It provided a forum for the service providers to test and experiment with reform ideas, seek assistance and give a public account of their plans and outcomes. This was indeed an institutional innovation that could potentially stimulate the service providers to adopt better practices and be more accountable. BATF launched a series of six monthly summits where citizens were also
invited to listen to these plans and achievements. The main contributions of BATF can be summarized as follows:

- The private donations mobilized by BATF enabled the service providers to experiment with new systems, practices and infrastructural options. Government funds would not have given them the degree of flexibility that private funds did. The speedy introduction of the new fund based accounting system in BMP would not have occurred without the money provided through the BATF.

- BATF’s practice of getting the service providers to make public statements on their plans and outcomes acted as a force for increased public accountability. The summits where these public commitments were announced were attended by citizens as well as the Chief Minister who also questioned the heads of agencies on their plans and achievements. BATF thus played the role of a public monitoring forum, creating greater openness and a sense of public participation. BATF also brought out report cards on the progress of its own work.

- The professional expertise that BATF brought in the course of its work enabled the service providers to work on new options they might not have considered. The private funds raised by BATF were used in part to finance such selective technical assistance. Some projects such as road building did not need BATF’s technical support. The property tax reform, on the other hand, required the finetuning of criteria, preparation of a manual, workshops for citizen orientation, etc., that needed careful planning and attention to detail. These tasks benefited much from BATF’s inputs. Teaming up with BATF experts speeded up the process and goaded BMP staff to move forward faster.

- All these contributions were made possible by the support and commitment provided by the new Chief Minister to BATF. His participation in the summits (twice a year) and willingness to
solve tricky problems of coordination between some of the service providers in the course of these meetings were a testimony to his commitment.

BATF had no legal or administrative authority over the public agencies with which it worked. It did not approve their budgets or oversee their programmes or projects. Its influence stemmed solely from its partnership and catalytic mode of operation, reinforced by the political support behind it. It provided strategic inputs and assistance to the agencies that found them valuable and timely.

Resource mobilisation by the agencies

A parallel development since the BATF was set up was a visible improvement in the resources available to the seven service provider agencies. New projects and expansion of infrastructure did call for more resources. There is clear evidence that the leaders of the different agencies mobilized additional resources through a variety of sources. In the case of BMP, its roads and related infrastructure programme was financed by a loan from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation. Similar loans were accessed by BMTC, BWSSB and BESCOM from other sources. BDA was a unique case where most of the funds required for new infrastructure projects was raised from its own internal surpluses. The budgets of these agencies had increased by 50-100 per cent over a three year period from 2000. Upgrading of services and infrastructure through increased borrowing could have been attempted in the preceding years too. But it took the proactive support of the state government and the catalytic role of the BATF to make this happen in a short period of time.

Role of the Lokayukta (ombudsman)

The ombudsman ("Lokayukta") in Karnataka State (of which Bangalore is the capital) played an indirect role in enhancing accountability in the agencies. He has powers not only to investigate grievances from the people about public agencies, but also to initiate
investigations into the operations of the agencies on his own. In Bangalore, the ombudsman has been active on both fronts, even since his appointment in 2000. His raids on public offices and the subsequent actions taken to penalize public officials who indulged in corruption have given much adverse publicity to many agencies and departments of the state government. His integrity and courage have been lauded by civil society, the media and political leaders. Although it is difficult to prove this, many observers believe that the ombudsman’s actions have had a “deterrent effect” even on agencies that have not been investigated by him. Strong support from the Chief Minister was a major factor that made it possible for the ombudsman to function fearlessly. Through the BATF, the Chief Minister nudged and stimulated the public agencies to perform better. Through the ombudsman, he created a sense of fear among the agencies that corruption and sloth will not be tolerated. These two approaches were mutually reinforcing.

**Political commitment and support**

The common thread that runs through the different supply side interventions (except the first) discussed above is the political commitment and support of the Chief Minister of the state. This was a weak factor during the period 1994-1999. The change in the chief ministership in 1999 made a decisive difference. The new chief minister was a leader committed to improving public services and infrastructure. He was determined to find answers to the citizen dissatisfaction with essential services and industry’s dissatisfaction with infrastructure. It is why he took the initiative to set up an innovative partnership called BATF. He then signaled the public agencies to mobilize more resources and facilitated their efforts. He appointed a new ombudsman known for his integrity and willingness to deal with corruption and other abuses of power in the government. These were wide ranging actions that could not have been achieved without political commitment at the highest level. The boldness of the chief minister was in no small measure due to the strong majority he had in the legislature. Political commitment is a product of the
leader’s vision and the stability of his government. Both these factors were much weaker in the 1994-99 period.

That political commitment can vary with changes in leaders and governments does raise questions about the sustainability of reforms. In 2004, a new coalition government took over the reins of power in Karnataka. Coalition politics has already led to the dismantling of BATF and a weakening of the political commitment for reform that was at work in Bangalore. A new CRC may well show a deterioration in the city’s services at this time. In the absence of the erstwhile champions, it is the civil society groups that are once again taking up the cause of public services and corruption. That progress has been achieved for a period is no guarantee that the process will go forward in a linear fashion. It underscores the critical role of civil society institutions as monitors of governance and catalysts for reform. Civil society initiatives and demand for accountability are essential for coping with the vagaries of political commitment.

The foregoing discussion highlights the contributions made by a variety of interventions that reinforced one another in the Bangalore context. It is their joint influence that is reflected in the CRC of 2003 (See the charts above). As noted above, the precise influence of each of the factors is difficult to quantify. An agency head, for example, could take credit for the turnaround in his/her agency. But the fact remains that without the support or pressure from the other factors mentioned above, the agency head may not have taken the necessary actions. Some drivers of change like the political commitment of the Chief Minister would have worked as an enabling condition. The assistance provided by BATF may have brought better ideas and more citizen friendly practices to the agency (eg., improved solid waste management, simpler tax system, improved billing procedures, etc.). Report cards and media publicity would have acted as external catalysts and speeded up the change. The service improvement for which the agency takes credit may not have happened in the absence of the joint influence of all these drivers of change.
SECTION IV

CONCLUSIONS

1. The internal monitoring mechanisms of government are seldom able to effectively track the outcomes of its policies and programmes. Some aspects of outcomes are best known to the users and beneficiaries of programmes and services. This source of information is rarely used by government. In this paper, we have shown how service providers and their supervising authorities can learn a great deal about the quality and adequacy of their services by listening to citizen feedback. Citizen report cards offer a valuable tool to gather such feedback in a systematic and representative manner from the users of services. The diagnostic information and benchmarks provided by CRCs separates this tool from the conventional feedback from people through protests and complaints against public agencies. Furthermore, they highlight both positive and negative features of services, and hence present a balanced view of the realities on the ground. When government's own monitoring is incomplete or weak, CRCs can fill the gap and act as a useful aid to policy makers and managers. In fact, CRCs can provide an independent check on government's internal monitoring data. They can be an important aid also to the regulatory agencies of government for enhancing the quality of public governance.

2. The relevance of this tool for the poor cannot be overemphasized. It is difficult and costly for poor people to make their voice heard in powerful and large public agencies. Often their voice may not be correctly represented by their leaders or mediating organizations. Even public hearings tend to be confined to those who are nearby and who could afford the time to participate. The survey methods used by report cards, on the other hand, permit the poor to make their voice heard directly and with minimal bias. CRC findings can empower the poor by giving them information that they can use in their interactions with service providers.
3. When a government and its service providers are non-responsive or perform poorly, the only option left is for civil society to demand greater accountability. CRCs in conjunction with advocacy can then become a tool for civil society to stimulate government and its service providers to respond to the systemic problems being experienced by the people. The Bangalore CRCs summarised in this paper show how this has been accomplished. CRCs work only from the demand side and hence there is no guarantee that such positive impacts will occur in every case. What is clear is that the diagnostic value of this tool to policy makers and agency leaders and the glare effect it can cause may persuade them to become more responsive to the people.

4. Though a CRC on public services can be conducted as a technical exercise, the dissemination and advocacy work that follows will benefit a great deal from the involvement of the local civil society institutions in the process from the start. Citizen groups and other civic associations, NGOs and the media can play a useful role both in supporting the initiative and taking it forward through advocacy and dialogue. In Bangalore, consultations with NGOs working with the poor helped sharpen the survey’s focus on their problems. Public-private partnerships acted as an effective vehicle for catalyzing reform and improving services, once the government took a positive stance in favour of change. But the precise form and pace of reform may vary from one place or one country to another. The Bangalore experience shows that it took almost a decade to improve service outcomes. In India, where political commitment can never be taken for granted, it is citizens who need to remain vigilant and continue to exert pressure on the state to be accountable and to perform.

5. A major share of public expenditure is devoted to the delivery of essential services for ordinary citizens. This is true of citizens living in both urban and rural areas. The outcomes of a significant segment of government’s policies and programmes can therefore
be understood and measured with the aid of user feedback of the kind that resulted in the CRCs of Bangalore. Needless to say, public expenditure that does not directly impact on the people cannot be tracked or assessed in this manner. Many reforms and policies that aim to make the economy more competitive or to improve the government’s internal housekeeping may have to be assessed in other ways. But let us begin with the easier and more significant part where user feedback can assist us in assessing the outcomes of public services and programmes that matter most to the people.

Notes

(The author is grateful to Deepa Narayan, Suresh Balakrishnan, Shekar Shah, Sita Sekhar, M. Vivekananda and K. Gopakumar for their advice and assistance in the preparation of this paper. The author alone is responsible for any errors that remain. And earlier version of this paper was presented at the Shanghai Conference organised by The World Bank 2004. A revised version was published in the Economic and Political Weekly, January 28th 2006).

1 The proportions of the “satisfied” and “dissatisfied” do not add up to 100 as there was an in between category that was “ambivalent”.

2 This is because all those who come under “satisfied” may or may not be “completely satisfied”.

3 There are two ways in which changes in income and education levels can impact on service outcomes. First, citizens can become more aware and hence more demanding when they move up the income and education ladder. Service providers may become more responsive under such conditions. On the other hand, when people become more demanding, they may also apply tougher standards in judging services. This may result in services being rated more stringently than would be the case when people are less demanding and aware.

4 Understandably, this happens when the ratings are respectable. Those who get low scores keep quiet, though they may use the occasion to stimulate their staff to improve their organizational performance.

5 See Times of India, Bangalore, November 8, 1999.
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ISBN: 81-88816-07-8