In post-independence India, the most visible symbol of power was the ubiquitous Khadi - that splendid fabric popularised by Gandhi which went on to epitomise the resurgence of national pride and resilience. Though the moral purity associated with khadi went on a dismally tailspin during the last 50 years, the starched white variety of the same remained the favourite of the political elite across all conceivable ideological barriers. Things have changed in the new millennium. Since the last two months, in the two states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in southern India, khadi has been replaced by jungle fatigue as the new power dress code. The trigger - the kidnapping of a film icon by a forest brigand and a poacher on the run. As political will and responsiveness went in to a state of rigor mortis, the kidnapper became the arbiter of justice and an espouser of good governance.

The 'ransom list' which came out from the deep jungle reads like a charter for rights and articulates systemic faults and abuses. It is a sad irony that in a mature democracy an outlaw can metamorphose into a Messiah just because the institutional checks and balances have become weak.

An unfortunate casualty of the kidnapping episode is the Government of Karnataka who saw some commendable work done going under a cloud. The Bangalore Agenda Task Force set up as a public -civic partnership is fast producing ground results (p.8). Recent setbacks notwithstanding the good work should roll on. More good news on the same line. A recent survey on the health systems for the urban poor has resulted in some concrete actions being planned (p.2). The exercise has once again proved the potency of Report Cards as a powerful catalyst for identifying strategies for improvements.

Elections are widely acknowledged as the key processes for a healthy democracy. That's if they are held fair and square. Unfortunately, the credibility of elections is not that high given the wide extent of reported anomalies and dwindling participation by an indifferent electorate. Over the last few years Public Affairs Centre has been focussing on making the electoral processes transparent and representative. As a build-up to the forthcoming elections to urban local bodies, PAC is planning a campaign on electoral reforms (p.10)

Thanks to his crusading efforts to roll back corruption, Mr. N.Vittal, Central Vigilance Commissioner, is a household name in India. We had great pleasure in inviting him to deliver the first PAC Lecture at Bangalore on September 29, 2000. A brief extract of his address is included in this issue. We wish him the very best and hope the highly creative strategy of e-shame (putting up the names of all tainted officials in the Internet) continues to provide the perfect antidote to the venomous spread of corruption in the land.

Gopakumar

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RESEARCH

HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS FOR THE URBAN POOR

With thirty maternity homes, thirty seven urban family welfare centres (UFWCs) and fifty five health centres funded by the world bank under the India Population Project –VIII (IPP-VIII), the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BMP) emerges as the major provider of family planning and maternal /child health (MCH) care services for the urban poor in Bangalore. The IPP centres and UFWCs focus mainly on health and nutrition education, antenatal/ postnatal care, family planning, immunisation mother and child, nutritional care of children up to the age of five and medical treatment of minor ailments and act as referral units for the maternity homes. Whereas, the maternity homes focus on delivery and Medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) and laboratory tests in addition to providing antenatal/ postnatal care, family planning non-surgical care for children needing specialist attention and minor gynaecological procedures. It must be noted that all the services at all the three facilities are supposed to be provided free of cost. Independent reviews and stakeholder consultations in the past have significantly highlighted the alarming levels of corruption at BMP maternity homes; this is a cause of major concern as with the termination of World Bank assistance in the year 2001, the IPP facilities are going to be integrated with the existing system of the BMP for routine operation and maintenance. This aspect was discussed by various groups working with the urban poor in Bangalore and there was a strong demand to carry out a User feedback survey to empirically assess the quality of care, particularly that of the service delivery process at the IPP health centres and maternity homes.

As a follow-up to this, PAC undertook a comparative survey of maternity homes, IPP Centres and UFWCs all over the city in partnership with five city based NGOs. A total of 500 patients and 77 staff of these facilities were interviewed. Following sections briefly describe the results of the survey, designed on the lines of a Report Card study, carried out by PAC.

> IPP health Centres are on the whole rated better than the UFWCs and Maternity Homes. For similar services provided by all three the rating is the highest for IPP Health Centres and lowest for Maternity Homes.

> While only 39% of the patients were given the medicine free of cost at the maternity homes, 61% and 63% were supplied the medicines free at the UFWCs and IPP Health Centres. Money was demanded for the medicines from 11% of the women at the maternity homes while only 4 and 3 % reported being asked to pay money for medicines at UFWCs and IPP Health Centres. The average amount paid for medicines was higher at Rs. 94 at maternity homes than Rs. 30 paid at UFWCs. But the least amount was paid at IPP Health Centres (Rs. 15). Interestingly, all doctors, nurses and other staff at all three types of facilities say free medicines are given to all patients all the time.

> Patients are generally quite satisfied with the behaviour of the staff at all the facilities (with 73% of the women reporting being always satisfied and the rest either never or sometimes satisfied). The satisfaction is however significantly greater with the staff of IPP Health Centres.

> Patients at the maternity homes have to wait for about 35 minutes to be attended to. The waiting is marginally less at UFWCs at 28 minutes. The wait at the IPP Health centre is the least at 23 minutes. Doctors, nurses and other staff at all the three kinds of places have quoted not more than five to ten minutes as the waiting period for patients.

> The most distressing finding concerns the prevalence of corruption. While none of the facilities seems corruption free, maternity homes stand out in terms of the severity of the problem. Payments are demanded or expected by staff for almost all services, but most of all, for delivery and seeing the baby. The proportions of people paying bribes vary from one service to another. On the whole 90% of the respondents reported paying bribes for one service or the other at maternity homes at an average of Rs 700 per head. Nearly 70% pay for seeing their own babies! One out of two pay for delivery.

> If a poor woman paid for all services, it would have cost her over Rs. 1000 for a delivery. It is reported that a nursing home might give her hassle free and better quality service for Rs. 2000. A rough estimate of the bribes being
paid in all these facilities may be between Rs one and two crores annually. A similar estimate based on the finding that 90% of the women pay an average of about Rs 700 at the Maternity Homes would put the total amount of bribes paid at about Rs 1.6 crores. The annual emoluments of the staff at the 30 maternity homes also amount to about Rs 2 crores.

Most of the staff denies the practice of corruption. They do complain about the constraint of facilities, and shortage of staff, supplies and resources. Doctors emphasised the need to improve the awareness of patients, especially with respect to the need to be regular in their visits.

The evidence presented above clearly points to the need to urgently reform the municipal health care facilities for the poor in Bangalore. At the core of the problem is the highly unsatisfactory state of the services of the maternity homes. If the present conditions continue, the newly created IPP centres will also deteriorate and become part of the pool of corruption and low quality that characterise the system.

The findings of the study were shared with other NGOs and resource persons to consider the various options available to improve these institutions. The group after fully endorsing the findings articulated five themes for immediate action:

- Setting up a Board of Visitors to function as an effective oversight mechanism to monitor the activities of the Maternity Homes.
- Creation of a Patient's Charter to publicise the services offered, time frames, fees, grievance redressal mechanisms etc.
- Setting up a Health Fund through contributions to be used for maintenance and improvements of the facilities.
- Handing over the management of Maternity Homes and Health Centres to interested NGOs.
- Operating Help Desks in these centres to help women in distress.

We are happy to report that these recommendations have found positive resonance with the Bangalore City Corporation and steps are on to operationalise most of the recommendations.

(For further information on this, please contact Ms. Sheila Premkumar or Mr. Cyril Vas at PAC)

SPECIAL FEATURE

FIGHTING CORRUPTION

N. Vittal, Central Vigilance Commissioner, Government of India

[ Excerpts from the First Public Affairs Centre Lecture delivered on September 29, 2000 at Bangalore ]

Corruption is not the exclusive characteristic of the bureaucracy. We have corruption in politics, we have corruption in judiciary, we have corruption in bureaucracy, we have corruption in cricket and we have corruption in business. In fact, like God is supposed to be present everywhere, corruption in India is present everywhere. The issue before us today is not to merely catalogue the sorry tale of corruption but also to explore how we can tackle the issue of corruption. In my approach to tackle the issue of corruption, I am guided by five concepts. The first is a concept articulated by Bertrand Russell who said that every opinion becomes respectable if you hold it for a sufficiently long time. The second is the concept of Victor Hugo who said that nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come. The third concept is that of Alex De Tocqueville that the inevitable becomes intolerable the moment it is perceived to be no more inevitable. I believe that corruption can be tackled. After all Hong Kong has done it through the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). Rudy Giuliani in the context of crime in New York showed that zero tolerance of crime can bring results. In the Manipuliti movement of Italy, the magistrate showed that Mafia can be tackled. Lee Kwan Yew built up Singapore as a model of rectitude over three decades. The magistrates in France also tried to check corruption. So it is not as if that corruption is an unalterable and inevitable fact of modern society and we have to live with it. It can be tackled.

If our strategy has to be effective in fighting corruption in bureaucracy we must tackle the issue of corruption in bureaucracy as a part of an overall...
strategy to tackle corruption in all sectors of Indian society. The three pillars of governance under the Constitution are the judiciary, executive and the legislature. As CVC, I am only concerned with the executive and that too the bureaucratic executive. The political executive is not under the purview of the CVC. At the same time I realise that corruption in the other elements in the society also will have to be tackled. I think it will be proper on my part to at least tell the truth and make certain suggestions. I hope this will not be interpreted as the CVC exceeding its limits. As a concerned citizen of the country who is also concerned with implementing effectively the charter given to CVC I am placing before the country certain ideas which can be debated. A forum like the Public Affairs Centre is an appropriate forum for discussing these larger issues from the citizens’ point of view.

We should also take note of the fact that the common citizen himself also contributes to the prevailing sense of corruption. At one level it may be helplessness. I have been saying that corruption is like AIDS. AIDS comes out of uncontrolled sexual behaviour. Corruption is uncontrolled financial behaviour. Normally it is exploitative corruption which I call as financial rape. This happens when a common citizen goes to any office and finds that he has to grease the palms of the public servants to get things done. What is interesting is that many officials who have held important positions in life find that they become powerless once they become common citizens. I know the case of a former Director General of Anti-Corruption who had to pay fifty rupees to the clerk in the Municipal Corporation to see that his deceased mother’s name was properly corrected in the municipal records of Bangalore.

Where do we begin? What should be the basic principle? I think the basic principle must be that a strategy of carrot and stick. People should be motivated by the sense of enlightened self-interest. We must make everybody and each of the players in the corruption game realise that it is in integrity that the welfare of the society and the benefit of all resides. It is interesting that the World Bank is now identifying how when it comes to economic development a country run by a corrupt regime attracts less foreign direct investment than one which is perceived to be less corrupt. According to the estimate of the UNDP report on South Asia 1999, if India’s corruption level comes to that of Scandinavian countries, the GDP will grow by 1.5% and the foreign direct investment will go up by 12%.

We may now consider the issue of political corruption. Can we make the politician realise that it is in his interest to have a corruption free government? Normally in our system the politicians act only under two conditions, (i) when there is no alternative, the TINA factor or (ii) where the final advantage in terms of electoral gains. How to ensure that politics does not become a profession for making quick money? This will call for serious soul searching and national debate.

No political party must be permitted to contest the elections unless it has got the latest annual accounts duly audited by an auditor as may be prescribed by a notified agency like the Election Commission, the CAG or the Supreme Court etc. No political party must be permitted to contest the elections unless it has cleared its income tax dues and has got the requisite certificate from the income tax authorities. Complaints regarding corrupt practices during elections can be looked into by the Election Commission even before the date of polling. The Election Commission has an excellent communication system to receive complaints of this type and can immediately take action so that there will be a healthy check and deterrent effect on corrupt practices during elections.

Effective Governance as I understand means effective rule of law. It means a situation in which every organisation performs the tasks allotted to it
and that too effectively. As I see it, effective governance will depend on the following factors:

There should be absolute clarity of the roles of public servants which include the responsibilities of organisations also. There should be transparency in the operations so that the citizen is clear about his rights and the processes by which he can get the promised services from the various public organisations. There should be accountability which means that in case of failure to deliver and discharge the responsibility by concerned officials in the public organisations, they will be punished. There has to be efficiency and productivity in operations. In other words, there should be minimum delay in all-public transactions.

The role clarity of the bureaucracy has to be enhanced. To bring in changes in the bureaucracy what we need therefore is greater transparency of information. There is already Freedom of Information Bill before the Parliament and greater access to government decision making process and access to information will empower the citizens. The experience of the CVC for example in putting on its website was a serendipitous experience of understanding how removal of the cloak of secrecy from a traditional area like departmental inquiries in which the charged officers’ names were generally was not known brought a paradigm change. This in turn has helped not only to build public confidence that there are systems which try to bring the discipline of law even at the highest levels in the bureaucracy but at the same time, if there are delays, they will immediately be highlighted and pressure will be put on disciplinary authorities to see that action is expedited. Another positive spin off of that experience was that if some of the charged officers were in sensitive positions, they could be removed to less sensitive posts. The website experience showed that delays and secrecy are the two reasons why corruption and inefficiency flourishes in our system. If we want to bring better and more effective governance, we will have to focus on these two aspects.

(The full text of the speech will shortly be available online at www.pacindia.org)

GOVERNANCE & MEDIA: Innovative Use of Radio in Enhancing Participation

Though decentralisation has been structurally operating in India, lack of proper information on the local bodies, especially on the rights and entitlements continues to be a major lacuna. In an effort to change this disabling environment, an innovative experiment was undertaken in the district of Mysore in Southern India using the most popular media tool available – the radio!

However, radio in India is a state monopoly and hence is not actively pursued by non-state actors for any effective advocacy strategy. But thanks to the rapid proliferation of TV channels, radio is fast losing it’s clientele and this as a blessing in disguise has radically changed the way the media bureaucracy operates. This new found proactiveness found very pleasant echoes in the Mysore experiment. The choice of radio was a deliberate one and hinged around the following USPs:

- The infrastructure is already well laid out and the radio network reaches out in to all nooks and corners
- The state owned All India Radio is estimated to have a potential listenership of 98.5% of the population
- Radio cuts across literacy barriers, non-intrusive in nature and portable.

The experiment commenced in January 1998 and extended over a period of two years. As a first step, a reconnaissance survey was conducted in a few villages to elicit critical information regarding the content, timing and character of the information. The survey indicated that evening time would be most appropriate and a little bit of entertainment would spice up the delivery of information. Based on these inputs, it was decided to package all necessary information in the form of a serialised drama with some permanent characters and a number of transient ones. The programme was set in a fictitious
village (Mellahalli) with a few permanent characters like an elderly man, his daughter-in-law, his college going grandson and the village school teacher who is the chief narrator. Thirteen episodes were designed and these were then aired between 6.50 and 7.35 PM every Monday. The episodes dealt with the following:

1. Philosophy of decentralisation: The first episode centres on contextualising the concept in the light of the day to day problems of the rural population. For instance, the first episode starts with an old man stumbling on the road and hurting his leg, which leads to a discussion on the bad state of roads, lack of street lights and more importantly, the lack of any medical services at the village level.

2. History of decentralisation: One of the characters wonders how the process of decentralisation started and the teacher then explains the history of decentralisation.


4. Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act (1993): The focus here is the 1993 Act in Karnataka with its special provisions like reservation for women; the episode also has a lavani (folk song) on Panchayats.

5. Panchayat Elections: The daughter-in-law is encouraged to stand for elections and following this, information on who can contest elections, the size of constituencies etc is provided.

6. Functions & Duties of Panchayats

7. Standing Committees: The poor quality of the local pond water is the topic of discussion in this episode which moves to how the standing committees of the Panchayats are expected to take care of these problems.

8. Reservation in the Panchayat System: A play on bonded labour provides the trigger for this episode which goes on to discuss various provisions in the Act to provide reservation to women and weaker sections in the society.

9. Gram Sabha: The episode begins with the announcement of Gramsabha in the village and the villagers disparaging the system as being not useful. The teacher then go on to explain the potential and motivates the villagers to attend the meeting.

10. Gram Panchayat Meetings: Details of how meetings are called, what is a quorum, what is an agenda etc., are discussed.

11 & 12. Role of Women in Panchayats - Concept & Reality

13. Summing up & Interactive Session:

Impact

Impact assessment was carried out through two distinct processes. One, by constant constant feedback from registered viewers and the other through focus groups. Consolidated responses revealed the following:

菱 A number of listeners felt that their elected representatives had become more prudent and responsive regarding their duties and functions as the villagers had begun questioning them.

菱 One of the respondents had questioned the need for release for grants under the MP’s area development fund where the works were taken up without the involvement of decentralised institutions.

菱 A number of elected representatives felt that this method has great training potential.

菱 Some of the respondents felt that now they could take their elected representatives to task for not delivering the services as they had a clear understanding of the duties of their elected representatives. They also threatened not to re-elect the non-performers!
To supplement this, an open book examination was conducted for both the focus group and registered listeners. A set of questions was given and the respondents were required to answer and send back the answer scripts. The objective here was to reinforce the message as well as to assess the post broadcast level of awareness regarding the Panchayats. The quality of the answer scripts was excellent and the response rate from rural listeners was much better compared to that from the urban sample.

To sum up...

This innovative experiment has yet again demonstrated the ingenuity of committed individuals to make a change. Five factors emerge as key ingredients responsible for the success of the programme.

1. The strategy of linking the decentralised institutions to contextual problems led to a demand from the community for more information.

2. The non-intrusive nature of radio and its ability to reach people in their homes made the transfer of information effective.

3. The programme also created a forum wherein the respondents could not only air their grievances but seek solutions to their problems, receive objective information and learn from success stories where people’s participation has made a difference.

4. By using radio as the medium, the exercise could tap into an existing infrastructure with extensive coverage thus making this method cost-effective.

5. The format of presentation as dramatised episodes kept the interest of the listeners alive and ensured sustained audience.

(For more information on this project, contact: Ms. Kripa Ananth Pur, 
#14, I main, Vijayanagar I Stage, 
Mysore, India - 570017. 
Tel: (91) 821 510762)

CITIZEN CENTRES
Putting Citizens’ at the Centre

The Catalyst Trust, a not for profit citizen’s group based in Chennai (Madras) has set up Citizen Centres all over the state of Tamil Nadu. As a first step, these centres will function as information banks on various themes like voters lists, register of ration cards, citizen charters issued by various departments etc. A major initiative undertaken on this line is the publication of a book entitled “Thattikettaka Thagavalgal” or Information to establish your rights.

The book is divided into three main sections. Section I gives information on various schemes that are useful especially for the poor. There are income generation schemes, employment schemes, issue of free books to school children schemes, women’s schemes and many other schemes. Not only are details on the scheme itself provided but names and designations of the officials or offices to be contacted are given too.

The second section presents citizen charters brought out by the various departments of the Government for the benefit of citizens and also to infuse a certain amount of accountability in the officials. The information and statements in the charters are summarised and excerpts given where required. This section informs people of standards set by the various departments and gives them a yardstick by which to measure the efficiency of various agencies. These charters are from a selection of departments that are important to citizens such as education, Public Distribution System, electricity, public welfare dept etc.

The third and last section contains concise summaries of certain Acts passed by the government that are relevant for the public. These include GO’s that instruct officials to provide information to citizens on things such as monthly receipt and issue of commodities at PDS outlets free of charge, voters list by part on a nominal payment etc. It also has a copy of the Act that allows citizens to not fill in their caste in admission forms for schools and transfer certificates as well. Also included is the Act that specifies that the education tax collected by the government should be earmarked exclusively for the maintenance of schools and provision of drinking water to them.

(For further information, contact: Mr. A.K. Venkat Subramanian, Trustee, The Catalyst Trust, 2/380, I Main Road, A.G.S. Colony, Kottivakkam, Chennai 600041. Email: catalysttrust@eth.net)
THE BANGALORE AGENDA TASK FORCE: Measuring the Progress

In a unique and ambitious experiment of its kind in the country, the Government of Karnataka(GOK) constituted Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) in November 1999 to make Bangalore finest/best city in India by 2004 A.D by upgrading information systems; enhancing internal capacities of civic agencies by introducing efficient revenue generation model, fund based accounting system to expand resource base; creating an accountable system of monitoring public projects and an administrative framework that is responsive, efficient and proactive by stimulating corporate and industry involvement.

BATF organised a one day summit in January 2000 which was attended by politicians, representatives of the private sector, local governing agencies also called stakeholders-The Bangalore City Corporation (BCC); Bangalore Development Authority (BDA); Bangalore Water Supply & Sewerage Board (BWSSB); Bangalore Telecom (BT); Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCT), Bangalore Police (BP)& Karnataka Power Transport Corporation (KPTC) and other eminent citizens. During the summit, these civic agencies spelled out their short term plans which were to be completed by June 2000.

In a Review meeting organised in July 2000, the agencies highlighted their achievements. Among the short term success stories that stood out were the implementation of Self Assessment of Property Taxes by the BCC, distribution of sites and opening of outer ring road by the BDA; computerised billing by Telecom & KPTC.

There was strong endorsement for the programmes initiated by BATF in coordination with the stakeholders. Bangaloreans feel that there has been a change for better- an independent survey commissioned by BATF indicated that 74% of Bangaloreans felt that there had been an improvement in the functioning of stakeholders;69% felt that they have become more citizen friendly in their interaction with people (up from a lowly 34% in January). BATF Chairman Mr. Nandan Nilekani acknowledged the critical role of the Government and Citizen support which were valuable for corporate initiatives with a focus on do-ables, creating internal champions to propel a initiative from within, capacity building of the organisation, building cooperation and team spirit for effective and qualitative delivery of services.

GRAFT REPORTING

News Scan Database Report on Corruption in Bangladesh

“A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself”

- Arthur Miller

Transparency International Bangladesh, a national chapter of the Berlin based global coalition against corruption, has created a startling database on the extent and spread of corruption in Bangladesh. The database based on nine national newspapers and spread over a period of six months (January - June, 2000) gives a graphic account of corruption. The survey explored the following types of corruption:

a. Bribery
b. Misuse of resources
c. Abuse of power
d. Refusal to provide services / perform duties
e. Embezzlement
f. Extortion
g. Fraud
h. Nepotism
i. Influence peddling

To corroborate and validate the news reports, TIB used a three-pronged strategy:
- If the news was published as headline in two dailies
- If the news was published at least in three dailies
If an investigative committee was formed to investigate the story by the order of Prime Minister / Concerned Ministry.

Salient findings from the database is discussed below:

- Corruption in Law Enforcement Agency: Police department emerges as the single most corrupt public agency with 254 reported incidents; among these, 123 were related to abuse of power and 51 on bribing.

- Corruption in Finance: Fraud, embezzlement and abuse of power are the most common forms of corruption.

- Corruption at District Level: Dhaka tops the list with 221 reported cases; Chittagong follows with 78.

- Level of the Officials: Individually, first class officials were found to be more corrupt with 399 reported cases.

- Victims of corruption: With nearly 500 reported cases (37%), government emerges as the most vulnerable victim of corruption! Citizens come next with 420 cases.

- Financial loss in reported cases: During the study period (January - June 2000) 655 cases had clear indication of financial losses.

Education sector stands out with a reported Taka. 2305.48 crore or US$ 2.14 billion. The loss in Local Government amounted to Tk. 2111.23 crores. It is interesting to note here that a World Bank Study on the state of corruption in Bangladesh mentions that without widespread corruption Bangladesh could achieve 2-3 percentages point of additional GDP growth and a double per capita income. In 1997-98, the total GDP of Bangladesh was equivalent to US$28.67 billion; against this the current reported loss due to corruption (US$2.14 billion) accounts for 7.46% of the GDP.

- Action taken against reported cases: Action was taken against only 453 cases out of the 1345 reported cases. Significantly, action taken by the Bureau of Anti Corruption was on a much lower scale than that of the concerned department.

A comparison with a similar analysis conducted in 1997 reveals some interesting trends:

(For further information, contact: Transparency International Bangladesh, 121 C (3rd Floor), Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh. Email: info@ti-bangladesh.org Website: http://www.ti-bangladesh.org)

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CAMPAIGNS

Protect your VOICE, your VOTE
A Campaign for Electoral Reforms, Transparency & Probit

"Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote!" - George Jean Nathan

Over the last four years, PAC has been working to promote transparency and greater citizen participation in the election process. Towards this end, PAC had initiated electoral awareness experiments and campaigns during parliamentary, assembly and municipal elections through partnerships and networking. Realising the need to pull in the learnings from similar endeavours across the country, PAC organised a conference on civil society interventions in the electoral process in November 1999 in order to address this need with the following objective in mind:

- Facilitate mutual exchange and learning of experiences & insights pertaining to electoral interventions amongst the participant groups
- Identify strategies for scaling up of the interventions to cover more number of city constituencies
- Identify pertinent issues and problems that merit in depth review & reform

The November workshop identified the following critical areas for advocacy and citizen intervention: streamlining & simplifying the process of revision of electoral rolls to make them accurate; stimulating choices based on information of both parties & candidates; control the role & impact of money and muscle power and creating mechanisms for greater voter participation with a focus on the forthcoming nation wide elections to urban local bodies in the year 2001. The participants also strongly voiced the need for a comprehensive review of electoral laws and procedures and also for the conduct of field surveys to validate the conceptual fault-lines.

Based on the review of electoral laws and procedures and after field testing some of the identified critical themes, PAC has identified four issues as corner stones for a national campaign:

ELECTORAL ROLLS:
The electoral registration process must be made simple and accessible in order to motivate and encourage eligible voters.

- The availability and acceptance of electoral rolls must be extended from the present range level offices of municipal corporations/ Election offices to the Ward offices, Post offices, polling stations and Public Sector Banks.
- The lengthy and cumbersome electoral registration, deletion, objection and correction forms in use at present should be simplified and made voter friendly.
- Presently, the electoral rolls are revised on the instructions of Election Commission of India (ECI) whenever it deems necessary. There should be a mandatory ongoing summary revision every year for a specified period say in the month of January every year irrespective of elections or intensive revisions.
- The qualifying dates for registration should be four times a year i.e., 1st January, 1st April, 1st July, and 1st October to facilitate eligible and new voters to fully participate in the electoral process.
- It is recommended that the intensive revision be combined with the census operations every 10 years. This would benefit the state exchequer and the problem of supervision of enumerators during intensive revision could also be effectively delegated and monitored.
- It is recommended that the election commission should access information on deaths of registered electors. Intimation of the deaths by the families, hospitals, registrar of births and deaths should be made obligatory and submitted to Election offices at periodic intervals.
- Bulk registration of new voters by citizen groups/resident organisations should be
allowed at the time of revision of rolls or
two to three weeks advance of elections
allowing time for verifications.

MONEY AND MUSCLE POWER:
• The election expenses for local bodies
should be regulated and public should have
access to information on candidates, parties
and their sources of funds.
• There should be mandatory and regular
audit of expenditure of political parties and
candidates.
• We recommend for state funding of urban
local bodies elections to curb the use of
money and muscle power.
• Findings of a survey commissioned by Times
of India indicated that 83% of citizens feels
that there are excessive posters in the city
with 31% holding political parties responsible
for this menace. Some of the alternatives
we recommend for effectively dealing with
this problem are - Ban posters completely;
allow local authority to provide designated
space for posters; charge a fixed amount for
every poster, and impose heavy fines for
unauthorised posters.

CANDIDATES
• In keeping with the spirit of the 74th
amendment Act, a candidate should have
lived or worked in respective ward for a
certain mandatory minimum period of
residence in order to qualify to contest in a
local body election.
• The background information collected by the
election commission about candidates should
be published /relayed in mass media such as
newspapers, TV inviting any objections from
electors of respective wards/constituencies
against the candidate.

This would then compel political parties to
support or nominate only the right candidates
with good track record and credibility.

CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS:
• The Election authorities should be given
authority and power to order arrests of
candidates violating election laws similar to
the power enjoyed by Income tax
department to prosecute tax evaders.

• Electronic Voting Machines (EVM s) should
be used to curb mal practices like booth
capturing especially in sensitive booths. In
Karnataka, EVMs were introduced in
Bangalore North & South and Mysore
constituencies during Assembly/Parliamentary
elections during September 1999. 64 % of
voters interviewed during a survey
commissioned by Times Of India felt that
EVM s will be useful, 41% more convenient
to voters, 67% were of the opinion that with
EVM s results would be faster; 39% said it
would lead to less rigging & booth capturing
and 38% felt that fewer counting errors
will occur if EVM s are deployed.
• Tendered votes should also be counted along
with other votes to make it more effective
and practical. What is the effect /use of
tendered vote if it is counted/ considered
only if dispute arises? It can be used as
evidence to prove impersonation and nullify
elections.

WHAT CAN CITIZEN/NEIGHBOURHOOD
GROUPS DO?
• Citizen Panel comprising of eminent
residents of the ward/area should be
formed in each ward to probe
candidates background, criminal
record if complaints are received
about a candidate and address voter
grievances.
• NGO Forums should be created in
wards to facilitate interactions with all
the candidates with the voters and
create awareness.
• Civic/neighbourhood groups could be
encouraged to publicise and facilitate bulk
registration of voters, especially from
apartment blocks well before elections.
• Lobby with the State Election Commissions
to take the help of professional media
agencies/Voluntary organisations for more
effective and innovative mass communication
campaigns for voter awareness and
education.

(We welcome ideas and suggestions on this
campaign and look forward to effectively
network with interested groups. For further
information, please contact: Ms. Smita
Bidarkar, PAC)
Public Eye aims to stimulate creative interactions and lively debates on various themes related to good governance. We welcome like-minded individuals, public interest groups and citizen associations to share information and perspectives through this forum. Please send your contributions to:

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