

Case Study - Bangalore, India: Citizen Report Cards¹

India: Public Affairs Centre

Civil society working in tandem with government for the greater good of all.”²

BACKGROUND:

In Bangalore, three report cards were prepared through a civil society initiative in 1994, 1999, and 2003. The first report card gave very low ratings to all the major service providers of the city, creating a sense of shame in the process. However, it did not make an immediate impact; only a few of the providers acknowledged their problems and took corrective action. The second report card showed that partial improvement had occurred in some services, probably due to the actions taken by their providers and the pressure from civil society. The third report card that followed after four years revealed substantial improvement in almost all the service providers. There was not only a significant increase in citizen satisfaction with the services, but also some decline in corruption. The big question is, what caused this surprising turnaround?

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. Bangalore's residents depended on several public agencies established by the provincial (state) government for their essential services such as the city's municipal corporation which provided roads, street lights and garbage removal. While electricity was supplied by another large agency, 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 use 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.

PROCESS:

In 1993, a 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, Marketing and Business Associates. 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 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 the public services from the user's perspective; 2) what aspects of the services were satisfactory and what were not;

¹ Adapted from the Citizens Report Cards: A Case Study by Samuel Paul, Public Affairs Center, 2005.

² On the citizen report card process. [The Times of India](#), Bangalore, November 8, 1999.

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 survey covered only those households that had direct experience with the services and had interactions with the agencies so that they could provide answers to questions on these subjects. The representative nature of the sample, the professionalism and neutrality in the conduct of the survey, and the large number of respondents ensured the credibility of the findings.

Box 1: Steps in Planning and Organizing a Report Card

- I. Planning a report card:** What do you want to know? About whom? How will you use the information? How can data be obtained? How do you plan to collect the data? How will you fund the project?
- II. Choosing an Approach:** Qualitative and/or quantitative research?
- III. Sampling:** Major steps are: defining the population, census of sample, sample design, sample size, fixed vs. sequential sampling, costs of sampling, execution of sampling process.
- IV. Designing Questionnaires:** specify and rank order the information objective of the survey from most important to least important; enumerate the kinds of information needed from respondents that relate to each information objective; rank the items in each topical group in the order of their importance to the study; for each item in the group answer: why, who, how, and what; place the most interesting item at the beginning of the questionnaire by using either open-ended or close-ended questions.
- V. Piloting, Coding and Analysis:** Pre-test the questionnaire in the form of a pilot survey for quality control; Many quantitative questionnaires can be pre-coded and can be completed by the fieldworker at the time of the interview. Use strict guidelines for data collection which must be articulated to the field staff through group training and manuals. Data can be analyzed using several techniques including: averages, data ranges, frequency and mid-point. Processed data will be presented in a series of tables. The interpretation of the analysis should bring together the findings from multiple perspectives and help the audience understand the issues and problems identified.
- VI. Dissemination of Findings:** Communicate the research findings through: 1) a survey report which outlines the objectives, methodology, major findings and implications of findings; 2) media releases; and 3) interface meetings between citizens, service providers and government officials.
- VII. Institutionalizing: From Theory to Action.** Three common models are: 1) independent civil society organization undertake the initiative (India); 2) service provider themselves seek client feedback directly (UK); and 3) an oversight agency undertakes the initiative (US).

RESULTS:

The First Report Card (1994). The first report card on Bangalore 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 seven service providers covered by the survey. Dissatisfaction levels, on the other hand, were much higher, and in the case of the Development Authority were as high as 65 per cent. Public satisfaction with staff behavior 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 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 months.

Beyond the publication of the report card, the citizen group that started the initiative did not take any other follow up action. But inquiries 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 endeavor 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 report card. 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.

The Second Report Card (1999). A second PAC report card provided new evidence on the state of public services in Bangalore after a lapse of five years. The survey methodology used was essentially the same as in 1993, 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 only 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.

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 with citizen groups and media where the report card findings were presented to both leaders and staff of all the service providers. 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 report card 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 some agencies billing procedures. 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 (Karnataka) - of which Bangalore is the capital - announced the creation of a Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) in 1999 to improve the services and infrastructure of the city with greater public participation.

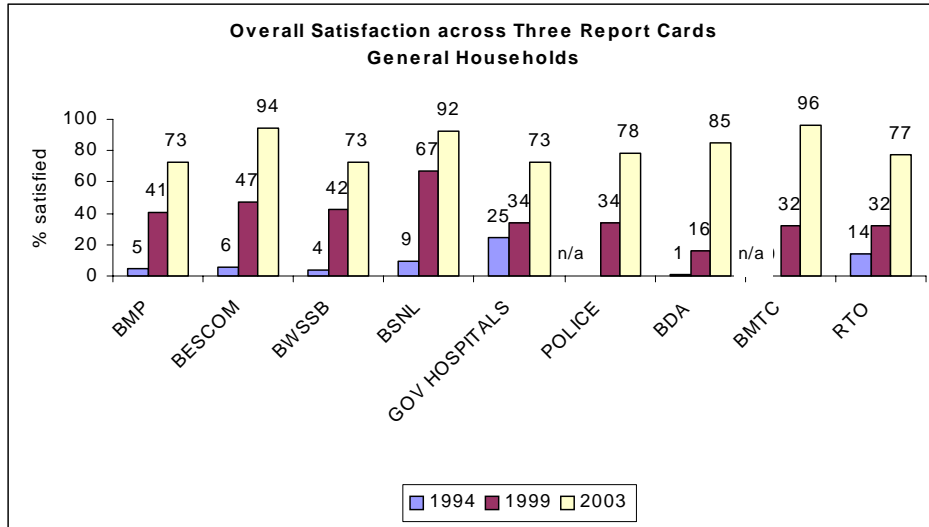
He set up BATF as a public-private partnership with several non-official and eminent citizens as members along with the heads of all service providers. In contrast to the more limited agency responses, this move by the Chief Minister raised the level to systemic responses across agencies. It created 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.

The Third Report Card (2003). A comparison of these findings with the earlier report cards will show 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. Four measures of agency responsiveness were taken: problem incidence, staff behavior, time taken to attend to problems and bribes paid or demanded. These measures reflect different aspects of quality 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.

User satisfaction among general households ranged between 96% for Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and 73% for Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Municipal Corporation (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 was Bangalore Electricity Company (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.

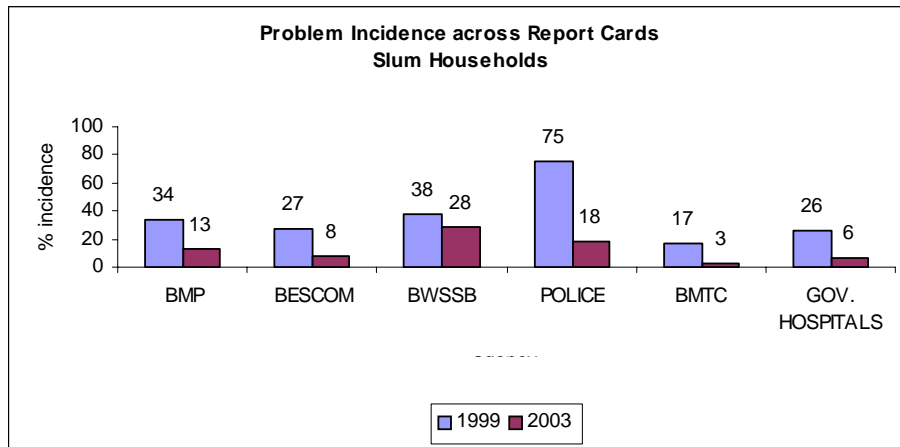
A comparison of the performance of these agencies over the last ten years revealed a significant improvement in the satisfaction of users of services. Of the nine agencies on which citizens of Bangalore provided feedback, all received satisfaction ratings above 70% this time in contrast to less than 40% in 1999 and much lower ratings in 1994. The improvement was the greatest in the case of Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) where citizen satisfaction moved up from 16% to 85%. In the cases of BWSSB and BMP, the improvement in citizen satisfaction has been less impressive. Maintaining the high levels of satisfaction that has been achieved by agencies such as BMTC and BESCOM are a challenge.

Chart 1



The improvement was the greatest in the case of BDA where citizen satisfaction moved up from 16% to 85%. In the cases of BWSSB and BMP, the improvement in citizen satisfaction has been less impressive. Maintaining the high levels of satisfaction that has been achieved by agencies such as BMTC and BESCOM are a challenge. An important next step for them is to increase the proportion of users who are completely satisfied (See chart 1)

Chart 2



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). This is not to suggest that quality of services in the slums has not improved much. 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 2).

Slum dwellers encountered problems in the course of their interactions with agencies most often while dealing with the Bangalore Police. This was the case in 1999 also. The most significant decline in problems with service has been in relation to BMTC. It is in relation to BWSSB that the decline has been of a small order, since there were a number of institutional issues that affected its service provision in the slums.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE:

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.

Demand Side Interventions

- I. The glare effect of citizen report cards** pressured city service providers in three ways: performance was under the “public scanner”; 2) inter-agency comparisons worked as a surrogate for competition;³ and 3) the chairmen of some of the agencies saw the report card as an aid and a catalyst in their efforts to reform their agencies to be more transparent and accountable and to deliver on their promises.
- II. Pressure from civil society groups.** PAC’s advocacy work was carried out through a network of civil society groups (neighborhood groups and civic and service related NGOs) in Bangalore that participated in: 1) public meetings and seminars where report cards or other civic issues were discussed; 2) engaging service providers in active dialogues; and 3) citywide campaigns.
- III. Reinforcement of pressure by the media.** The media has been a driver of change by: 1) publicizing the negative findings and improvements of service providers; 2) devoting more space to reports on the different wards of the city, highlighting their problems and focusing on their elected corporators; and 3) organizing interactive meetings with citizens and senior officials from selected groups of public agencies.
- IV. The role of donor dialogues.** Donor agencies 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.

Supply Side Interventions

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. They 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.

I. The Bangalore Agenda Task Force: A State Initiative. BATF began its work in earnest in 2000 and catalyzed a number of reforms in a number of agencies. Important reforms were on property tax that resulted in increased revenues and reduced hassles for the citizen and on solid

³ Market competition has so far affected only one service provider, namely, Bangalore Telecom (BSNL). Cell phones had begun to make inroads by the late Nineties.

waste management, sanitation and roads. 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.

II. Resource mobilization 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 BESCO from other sources. BDA was a unique case where most of the funds required for new infrastructure projects were raised from its own internal surpluses. These agencies budgets had increased by 50-100 per cent over a three year period from 2000. Upgrading of services and infrastructure though 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.

III. Role of the Lok Ayukta (Ombudsman)

The ombudsman ("Lok Ayukta") in Karnataka State 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 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. Moreover, 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.

IV. Political commitment and support

The common thread that runs through the different supply side interventions 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 1999 change in the chief ministership 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. That political commitment can vary with changes in leaders and governments does raise questions about the sustainability of reforms.

KEY CONCERNS:

The improvement in services reported above did not happen overnight. Starting with the first Report Card in 1994, the spotlight on public services had set in motion a series of actions by different stakeholders, which converged and cumulated to produce these results. Some agencies had taken remedial steps to improve their services as is evident from the report card 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. Needless to add, the same constellation and sequence of factors may not be required in other settings. It may not perhaps be easy to replicate the drivers of change that worked in one context in another. Nevertheless, the contributions made by the different interventions in Bangalore may have some lessons to offer reformers in other settings.

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 report card of 2003. 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 services. 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. 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 (e.g., improved solid waste management, simpler tax system, improved billing procedure, 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.

Some pre-conditions need to be in place to ensure the acceptability of report cards. The credibility of those who use the tool and engage in advocacy is extremely important. The exercise should be seen as impartial and independent. The conduct of the survey and the interpretation of its findings should be done with utmost integrity. In general, competent and professionally managed organizations need to act as intermediaries for this to happen. These conditions apply irrespective of whether the initiative comes from civil society or the government.

Report cards are likely to be used by civil society groups in relatively open and democratic societies that respect dissent. This is not to say that non-democratic settings cannot benefit from this tool. But its proper use is unlikely to happen unless there is strong interest on the part of the political leadership to listen to public feedback and use the findings to improve public services or other aspects of governance.

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