

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NOTES

PARTICIPATION & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Note No. 91 February 2004

Citizen Report Card Surveys

- A Note on the Concept and Methodology

This note provides a short summary of the concept and key phases involved in implementing a citizen report card (CRC) survey. CRCs are client feedback surveys that provide a quantitative measure of user perceptions on the quality, efficiency and adequacy of different public services. They have been applied to numerous contexts in different regions. Beyond the process of executing a survey, CRCs involve efforts at dissemination and institutionalization that make them effective instruments to exact public accountability.

1. Introduction

Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) are participatory surveys that solicit *user* feedback on the performance of public services¹. But they go beyond being just a data collection exercise to being an instrument to exact public accountability through the extensive media coverage and civil society advocacy that accompanies the process.

CRCs originated in 1994 in Bangalore, India, through the work of an independent NGO – the Public Affairs Center. The idea was to mimic the private sector practice of collecting consumer feedback and applying it to the context of public goods and services. The surveys derive their name from the manner in which data is presented. Just as a teacher scores a student's performance on different subjects in a school report card, CRC data aggregates scores given by users for the quality and satisfaction with different services like health, education, police, etc...or scores on different performance criteria of a given service, such as availability, access, quality and reliability. The findings thus present a collective quantitative measure of overall satisfaction and quality of services over an array of indicators.

By systematically gathering and disseminating public feedback, CRCs serve as a “surrogate for

competition” for state-owned monopolies that lack the incentive to be as responsive as private enterprises to their client's needs. They are a useful medium through which citizens can credibly and collectively ‘signal’ to agencies about their performance and pressure for change.

2. Application Contexts

Citizen Report Cards are used in situations where demand side data, such as user perceptions on quality and satisfaction with public services, is absent. Starting from their original context of evaluating urban services in Bangalore, CRCs have been applied in different geographic and sectoral contexts – the common theme being to use a survey that captures consumer data in a comparative manner to demand responsiveness.

Some of the actual applications include (i) using CRCs as a basis for performance based budget allocations to pro-poor services (Philippines), (ii) cross-state comparisons on access, use, reliability and satisfaction with public services (India), (iii) supplementing national service delivery surveys (Uganda), and (iv) governance reform projects (Ukraine and Bangladesh).

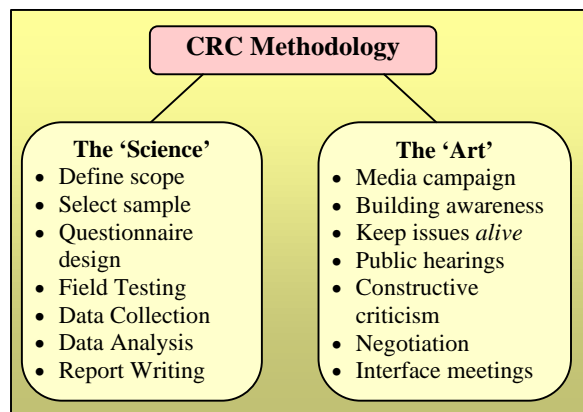
The success of these initiatives has varied, depending in large part on the ability to negotiate

change, the degree of participation, and the presence (or absence) of a political champion. In general, an effective CRC undertaking requires a skilled combination of four things: i) an understanding of the socio-political context of governance and the structure of public finance, ii) technical competence to scientifically execute and analyze the survey, iii) a media and advocacy campaign to bring out the findings into the public domain, and iv) steps aimed at institutionalizing the practice for iterative civic actions.

3. Key Phases

A CRC initiative is a process that goes beyond the execution of a survey. It is part ‘science’ - the technical aspect of running an efficient and credible survey – and part ‘art’ – the challenge of mobilizing an advocacy strategy that can foster debate and generate results (see fig.1).

Figure-1: Running a CRC initiative



Participation of different stakeholders occurs at various stages - (a) in the design of questionnaires where the performance indicators and key issues are developed through focus group discussions with citizens, (b) during the survey execution, where qualitative interviews are used to support questionnaire data, and (c) during dissemination where a variety of NGOs are brought in to use the data for advocacy and reform.

Overall, a CRC initiative goes through 6 key stagesⁱⁱ that are described in more detail below.

3.1 Identification of Scope, Actors and Purpose

First, among a cluster of actors, or stakeholders to be identified, the most important is *to be clear on the scope of the evaluation*: a sector, industry, or

unit of service provision. Criteria vary with contexts: agencies receiving the largest amounts of public funds, agencies most directly related to the poor, agencies with sensitive mandates like security and policing, agencies plagued with high volume of anecdotal complaints from users, etc.

Second, administration of a report card initiative is a technical exercise. Therefore one needs to *identify credible policy institutes or NGOs who can undertake the exercise*ⁱⁱⁱ. Ex-ante respectability of the intermediary organization directly affects the ex-post credibility of the findings. In some cases, external involvement such as that of the World Bank can add to the credibility, while in other cases, it can be counterproductive.

3.2 Design of Questionnaires

First, following the identification of stakeholders, *focus group interactions to provide inputs to design questionnaires* are necessary with at least the two constituencies – the providers of service and its users. Providers of service can indicate not only what they have been mandated to provide, but also areas where feedback from clients can improve their services. Similarly, users can sound out initial impressions of the service, so that areas that deserve extensive probing can be catered to. After the questionnaire is designed, it will be necessary to *pre-test* it with similar focus groups before a full-scale launch.

Second, the *structure and size of the questionnaire need to be defined*, keeping in mind that there is a trade-off between detail and time. Mechanisms to make the sessions mutually convenient to the enumerator and the respondent have to be worked out. A useful practice is to break the questionnaire into different modules^{iv} that are answered by different members of the household. Demographic statistics of the respondents (sex, age, family size, ethnicity, etc.), and income/expenditure patterns should also be included in a separate module.

3.3 Sampling

First, the *sample size has to be determined*. Usually, the larger the sample size, the better, but this has to be weighed against budgetary, time, and human resource constraints. The key is to aim

for greater representativeness rather than a plain expansion of numbers^v.

Second, after an appropriate sample size has been determined, the *sampling frame has to be decided*. Allocations will have to be made for different geographic regions. The standard principle is to use multi-stage probability sampling with probability proportional to the size of population. It is useful to ensure that at least one sample precinct is assigned to all geographical regions covered. Sample households (the ultimate unit of analysis) are then chosen from each precinct.

Third, within sample households, *sample respondents have to be chosen*. Usually, the head of the family is approached for answers, but on the whole respondents should be of different genders and ages. If questionnaires are lengthy and broken into modules, s/he may assign other members to answers different modules. This is also important since different household members use different services.

3.4 Execution of Survey

First, one must *select and train a cadre of survey personnel*. Survey personnel or enumerators should be thoroughly informed about the purpose of the project and be skilled in questioning respondents with courtesy and patience. Like with the questionnaires, the work of enumerators has to be pre-tested, with preliminary feedback used to modify questions or the tactics for questioning. If multiple languages are being used, instruments should be re-translated back to English (or the primary language) to check for consistency.

Second, to ensure that recording of household information is being done accurately, *spot monitoring of interviews at random should be undertaken* in phases after a proportion of interviews are complete. Then, after completing each interview, enumerators should *go over the information collected and identify inconsistencies*. Once the record is deemed satisfactory, it is inputted into standardized data tables.

3.5 Data Analysis

This is the output stage, when all inputted data is consolidated and analyzed. Typically, respondents rate or give information on aspects of government

services on a scale, for example, -5 to +5, or 1 to 7. These ratings of representative users on the various questions are then aggregated, averaged, and a satisfaction score expressed as a percentage. This is what will be read like a 'report card'. All data should be subjected to standard error analysis and tests of significance.

3.6 Dissemination

First, the *findings of the report card should aim at being constructively critical*. It may be unhelpful if the goal is solely to embarrass or laud a service provider's performance. This is why, it is important to *share the preliminary findings with the concerned service provider* itself. An opportunity for its authorities to respond to some of the serious criticisms must be made, and genuine grievances on their part, such as staffing or budgetary constraints should be fed back to the report to alter the tone of recommendations.

Second, the *post-survey publicity strategy has to be developed*. Findings should be launched in a high-profile press conference with wide coverage. Other options are to prepare press kits with small printable stories, media-friendly press releases, and translation of the main report into local languages. Making the findings widely known and available makes it difficult for the concerned agency to ignore them.

Third, following the publication of the report cards, *interface between the users and the service providers* ideally in a town-hall type setting is recommended. This not only allows the two parties to constructively engage in a dialogue based on evidence, but also puts pressure on service providers to improve their performance for the next round. If more than one agency is being evaluated, these settings can foster a sense of healthy competition among service providers. A direct interaction between the two concerned parties is also a way to ensure an operational link between information and action.

Fourth, new developments in *information technology (IT) should increasingly be used* to solve old problems of accountability. Through web-sites and discussion boards on the internet, the reach of the findings of reports cards can not only be widened, but they can also solicit the

engagement of literate and informed tax payers in solving public problems.

3.7 Institutionalization

CRC initiatives, especially those that arrive as one-off experiments, will serve little long-term purpose unless *implementation is followed by efforts at institutionalization* on a sustained basis. How these efforts are to be institutionalized should thus be a concern warranting some thought right from the outset. Institutionalization is also important to exploit the usefulness of credible report cards in full by making them more than psychological pressure tools on service providers.

Ideally, governments can use report cards for performance-based budgeting and link public opinion with public spending. This is what has been done by the Department of Budget in the Philippines, which is in fact contracting out the CRC exercise to independent CSOs.

Alternatively, CRCs can be adapted to create ‘governance rating systems’ in a decentralized setting – an experiment attempted in Bangladesh and in Ukraine’s People’s Voice Project^{vi}.

Service providers and ministries can in turn link CRC findings with their internal management and incentive systems. The second Bangalore CRC in 1999 for instance, catalyzed numerous responses from providers such as the setting up of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force by the state government that closely monitors the feedback from the CRC, the initiation of training programs on customer responsiveness by the Bangalore Development Authority and the Water Board, and the introduction of regular consumer satisfaction surveys by the Karnataka Electricity Board^{vii}.

Institutionalization efforts depend heavily on political commitment^{viii}. That being said, CRCs often provide the needed impetus for reform-minded politicians to tackle bureaucratic inertia and vice-versa.

4. Concluding Remarks

CRCs are increasingly being used as tools for civic engagement to demand better governance. They are not without their limitations though. For one, they depend on strong media support and external financing. The effort and time required to

stimulate action both from public officials and from citizens could easily become daunting given the unpredictability of different actors. And even methodologically, there are limits to comparing different services or regions based on user perceptions on account of varying expectations.

Yet, with the effective combination of citizen, political and bureaucratic action, CRCs could be the ideal catalyst for mobilizing demand for accountability and reform, and for moving ordinary people, including the poor, from ‘coping to voice’ and from ‘shouting to counting’.

This note was prepared by Swarnim Waglé, Janmejaya Singh and Parmesh Shah of the Social Development Department of the World Bank. It draws on Samuel Paul (2002): *Holding the State to Account: Citizen Monitoring in Action*, Books for Change, Bangalore, and the Filipino Report Card on Pro-Poor Services, The World Bank, 2001, as well as numerous discussions and presentations by the authors. For further references visit www.worldbank.org/participation.

ⁱ It is important to note that CRCs are not ‘opinion polls’ - feedback is taken not from the general public, but from only the actual users of public services.

ⁱⁱ These generally take 3 to 7 months to implement.

ⁱⁱⁱ Usually, the survey execution is out sourced to a market research agency with adequate market research and statistical survey analysis skills e.g. ORG-MARG (India) or the Social Weather Station (Philippines).

^{iv} Another useful strategy is to use ‘*rotating interviews*’, i.e. ask about the first 3 services to the first household, the next 3 to the following one and so on.

^v On occasion, if the number of actual ‘users’ of a less regularly used service, like the police, are too low in the sample, then ‘*booster*’ interviews to increase representativeness can be undertaken. These involve purposive sampling of users through ‘exit interviews’.

^{vi} For more information see the People’s Voice website at - <http://www.icps.kiev.ua/eng/projects/pvp>.

^{vii} For more details of the impacts of the Bangalore CRCs see Ravindra, A.: *An Assessment of the Impact of Bangalore Citizen Report Cards on the Performance of Public Agencies*, Draft Paper, November 2003.

^{viii} This was clear in the Bangalore context where the Karnataka State Chief Minister’s role in countering resistance from the bureaucracy to be held accountable, was critical in leading to reforms.