

CITIZEN REPORT CARDS¹

Summary

Citizen report cards (CRCs) are participatory surveys that solicit user feedback on the performance of public services in order to raise awareness and ultimately address problems. A key feature of the CRC method is that survey results are placed in the public domain, for example through the use of media and public meetings, making it an effective instrument to promote transparency, responsiveness and public accountability.

What is it?

CRCs are a tool to engage citizens in assessing the delivery of priority public services, such as health care, water, schools and public transport. The survey can be used as an overall assessment of a public agency or to measure client satisfaction with specific services or issues, such as access, availability, quality, reliability, responsiveness or transparency of the service provider. When used periodically, CRCs can also serve to establish benchmarks and monitor change over time.. They can serve to solicit practical suggestions for improving services and, in some cases, identify and expose serious problems of mismanagement or corruption.

According to the Public Affairs Centre (<http://www.pacindia.org>) in India, a pioneer in the development of CRC methodology, an important guiding principle is to introduce market-type incentives to the functioning of public services. Public agencies are often monopolies that face no competition and consequently lack incentive to be responsive to clients' needs. CRCs reflect public opinions about service delivery performance in a way that isolated complaints or anecdotal evidence cannot. By systematically gathering and disseminating user feedback, the report card process provides the information and pressure needed to spur public agencies into action.

CRCs can be conducted by a wide range of actors, including civil society groups, donors or public agencies. Local media are frequently important allies in the process.

The World Bank (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143380-1116506267488/20511066/reportcardnote.pdf>) cites the following requirements for an effective CRC undertaking:

- A commitment to gather credible data on clients' perceptions;
- Constructive and solution-oriented rather than confrontational advocacy;
- Competence, professionalism and credibility of the group which undertakes the CRC exercise;
- Commitment by the public agency to engage in process, take on criticism and suggested changes;
- Active involvement with the media to ensure that the findings are widely disseminated and debated.

How is it done?

Key steps in implementing a CRC are:

1. Identify scope, actors and purpose

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- Clearly define the purpose of the CRC exercise. Very often CRCs are undertaken in response to a priority problem or expressed citizen dissatisfaction with an essential public service.
 - Recruit credible partners (NGOs, policy institutes, academic institutions, specialist polling firms) that have the technical capacity to undertake/assist with the exercise.
 - Determine which specific sector(s) or unit(s) of service provision will be examined.
 - Determine which segments of the population will be sampled.
2. Design the survey
 - Hold Focus Group Discussions involving both users and service providers to identify key aspects and issues to be assessed.
 - Determine the structure and size of the questionnaire(s). Some CRC initiatives have designed questionnaires tailored for different groups (e.g. citizens, service providers, state officials , etc.).
 - Decide on an appropriate sampling design, size and scope.
 - Pre-test the questionnaire.
 3. Implement the survey
 - Select and train personnel to administer the survey.
 - If possible, conduct random spot monitoring of interviews and completed questionnaires to ensure proper process and accurate recording of information.
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 4. Analyse and disseminate findings
 - Aggregate and analyse survey findings.
 - Summarize key findings in a format that can be easily understood by the general public. Ensure wide public dissemination so that the findings cannot easily be ignored, including postings, community meetings, and mass media coverage.
 - Make use of a variety of methods to reach out to media, such as press kits, press-releases and the translation of the main report into local languages.
 5. Organise evidence-based deliberation and dialogue
 - Organise public meeting to discuss findings, detect problems and deliberate on potential solutions.
 - Convene a joint meeting between users and service providers to present findings and analysis and put pressure on service providers to improve their performance.
 6. Follow-up and institutionalisation
 - Follow-up as necessary to encourage action and change on the part of concerned service providers.
 - Take steps to institutionalize periodic surveys as a source of feedback on the performance of service providers. (In Bangalore, for example, the Public Affairs Centre conducted a CRC survey three times over ten years and was able to measure a considerable change in service provision in that period).

Benefits

- The CRC process stimulates discussion on the performance of public agencies and raises public awareness of issues of service quality.

- By soliciting user feedback, CRCs encourage citizens to pro-actively demand more responsiveness and accountability from service providers; In many cases, CRCs have led to enhanced responsiveness and reforms to improve the quality of services.
- The findings from CRCs can help line ministries and planning departments to prioritize budget allocations and monitor service delivery.
- CRCs promote constructive dialogue and partnerships by bringing together citizens, CSOs, service providers and government officials in face-to-face meetings.
- The CRC process can contribute to building “social capital” by uniting communities around issues of shared concern.

Challenges and lessons

- Conducting a large survey of service users can be costly and time consuming. In addition to skilled human resources and a dedicated organisation to sustain the process, it may require external financial support.
- Organisation undertaking a CRC initiative for the first time may require training in survey and interview techniques to make it a professional and credible exercise.
- In country contexts where governments are intolerant of criticism or closed to dialogue, CRCs are unlikely to be effective. Even in the context of relatively open and democratic societies, policy makers and service providers may feel threatened by the CRC exercise. It is therefore important to try to engage public institutions in a constructive and solution-oriented manner from the outset. Hold training and teaching sessions with government to help garner their support and ease fears.
- It is important to ensure that interface meetings between users and service providers don't become forums for making personal attacks. Proper preparation and facilitation is required to ensure that they remain constructive and focus not just on laying blame but on resolving identified problems..
- There can be institutional resistance/lack of will to act on CRC findings and implement reforms. Sustained follow-up and pressure may be required to translate CRC findings into actual reforms.
- The effectiveness of CRCs relies, in large part, on the broad public dissemination of findings. It is therefore important to engage with media actors from the outset. In countries where the media is censored or controlled by government, findings can be disseminated through public meetings and posting.
- The CRC process can contribute to citizen disillusionment if the quality of services is not perceived to improve. It is important that the public remain informed (through meetings and seminars) about the constraints public agencies face and cautioned against expecting too much too fast.

CASE STUDIES

Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore, India (<http://www.pacindia.org>)

CRCs originated in 1993 in Bangalore, India, where they were used to assess the city's deteriorating public services. The results showed very low ratings of all the major service providers in the city. The exercise was repeated in 1999 and 2003 to monitor change. In addition to improvements in service delivery, the exercise resulted in the increase of “social capital” among user community members. The initiative led to the formation of over 100 citizen groups and a unique state-citizen partnership to catalyze and assist service providers to upgrade their services and responsiveness. CRCs have now been replicated in other cities across India and around the world. The Bangalore experience is well-documented. See for example:

- Citizens Report Cards: A Case Study (http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143141-1116501474243/20507527/CRC_Case.doc)
- Making Voice Work: The Report Card on Bangalore's Public Services (<http://www.worldbank.org/html/dec/Publications/Workpapers/WPS1900series/wps1921/wps1921.pdf>)
- Citizen Report Cards on Public Services, Bangalore, India (http://www.pafglobal.org/publications/Bangalore_CRC_background_and_history.pdf)
- Local Governance and Pro Poor Service Delivery (http://cfapp1-docs-public.undp.org/eo/evaldocs1/eo_doc_408022222.pdf)
- An Assessment of the Impact of Bangalore Citizen Report Cards on the Performance of Public Agencies ([http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoclib.nsf/b57456d58aba40e585256ad400736404/d241684df81fce2785256ead0062de10/\\$FILE/ecd_wp_12.pdf](http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoclib.nsf/b57456d58aba40e585256ad400736404/d241684df81fce2785256ead0062de10/$FILE/ecd_wp_12.pdf))
- India: A Citizen Report Card on Karnataka's Governance (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143333-1116505690049/20509270/karnataka.pdf>)
- Report Cards as an Aid to Public Accountability in India, pages 209-215 of Transparency International's 2001 Corruption Fighters Toolkit (http://www.transparency.org/tools/e_toolkit/corruption_fighters_tool_kit_2001)

Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund Project

A CRC methodology was used by the Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund in Bangladesh to assess the space for participatory governance at the local level. The CRC process brought together citizens, local government authorities and civil society organisations in public meetings where citizen assessments of local government performance in areas such as tax collecting, financing and accounting, public participation in budget process and project development were discussed. The report cards showed low levels of government responsiveness to citizen demands and needs. Annual CRCs have now been institutionalised by the local government and have resulted in a greater transparency and accountability, higher levels of citizen participation and improved services.

- Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund Project (<http://www.undp.org.bd/library/publications/Bangladesh%20Case-WBI.doc>)
- (<http://www.undp.org.bd/projects/prodocs/SLGDF/Quarterly%20Progress%20report%20of%20SLGDF%20of%201st%20quarter-2007.pdf>)

CRCs to assess national health services delivery in Uganda

(<http://heapol.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/21/2/101#SEC5>)

CRCs as a basis for performance-based budget allocations to pro-poor services in the Philippines (http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14875_FilipinoReportCard-web.pdf) and (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143333-1116505690049/20509283/Filipino+Report+Card+on+Pro-chapter7-report-cards.pdf>)

The Peoples' Voice Project in Ukraine was set up to support NGOs in the project to assess and improve municipal services delivery:

<http://www.pvp.org.ua/eng/news/chronology/>

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/14662_Ukr-Ppls-Voice-web.pdf

A pilot CRC in Ethiopia was carried out covering water, health, sanitation, education, and agricultural extension services.

http://www.capabilityapproach.com/pubs/4_5_Bekele.pdf

A CRC in Kyrgystan was carried out in 2008 on citizen assessments of water, irrigation, education, and health services. Analysis of the results is not yet complete.

<http://www.developmentandtransition.net/index.cfm?module=ActiveWeb&page=WebPage&DocumentID=712>

Transparency International in Bangladesh has used CRCs as a tool to fight corruption in the fields of health and education. More information can be found on pages 216-220 of Transparency International's 2001 Corruption Fighters Toolkit

(http://www.transparency.org/tools/e_toolkit/corruption_fighters_tool_kit_2001)

RESOURCES

- Access an on-line learning module on how to implement a CRC at:
(www.citizenreportcard.com)
- Citizen Report Card Surveys: A Note on the Concept and Methodology, World Bank Social Development Notes No. 91, February 2004
(<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143380-1116506267488/20511066/reportcardnote.pdf>)