
Chapter 2

Engaging Citizens for Evaluation of Public Services: Critical for an Effective Service Delivery System in India

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ABSTRACT

Poverty and inequality are closely interlinked with poor service delivery or unfair practices (read corruption) in public services. Inaccessibility of the government programmes has larger impact on the poor than other sections of a society. Evaluation of Public Services is therefore, important for success of its implementation, reach and effectiveness and ensuring the desired output and outcomes. A robust method to take citizens feedback is challenging but important for improving public services. The paper discusses the challenges in assessing the performance of public services and the methodological approach for more accuracy in findings. The paper emphasizes that evaluating public services would be close to accurate if both perception and experience supported with experts' estimation is captured. Using data from two rounds of CMS-Peoples' Perception and Experience based Study, the paper highlights various issues related to availing public services and why it is important to have users' feedback for improving public service delivery system. With the Right to Public Services Act been enacted by majority of the states in India, it becomes more relevant to have Users' Feedback for improving public service delivery system. The paper concludes with suggestions on the methodological approach to be followed for capturing public service users' feedback.

Keywords: *Governance, Public services, Corruption, Users' feedback.*

Overview

Evaluation of Public Services is important for success of its implementation, reach and effectiveness and ensuring the desired output and outcomes.

Benchmarking of public services matters because it is critical for governments to know whether services are effective and efficient, who is accountable for service delivery, and whether the outcomes of service delivery are in the interests of the citizenry. It is an important framework for policy decision making as well as for improving service delivery (Grace 2013).

In developing economies, poverty and inequality are closely interlinked with poor service delivery or unfair practices in public services. According to Pavarala (1996) and Shleifer and Vishny (1993), corruption is a major hindrance to governance, development and a threat to democratization.

Globally a number of studies/surveys are conducted to capture satisfaction level of various stakeholders with regard to the public services and governance systems in various countries (Table 2.1). Reports helps policy makers to take appropriate actions to plug the gaps.

Table 2.1: Studies Undertaken Internationally to Capture Performance of Public Services

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Name of the Study</i>	<i>Countries Covered</i>
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Country Performance Assessment Ratings	29 countries (eligible for ADB funding)
African Development Bank (AfDB)	Country Policy and Institutional Assessments	52 countries
Bertelsmann Foundation (BTI)	Bertelsmann Transformation Index	123 less developed and transition countries
World Bank (IDA and IBRD)	Country Policy and Institutional Assessments	75 countries (eligible for IDA funding)
Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)	Country Risk Service and Country Forecast	170 countries
Transparency International (TI)	Corruption Perceptions Index	183 countries
Freedom House (FH)	Nations in Transit	29 countries
Global Insight (GI)	Country risk ratings	203 countries
International Institute for Management Development	IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook	55 countries
Mo Ibrahim Foundation	Ibrahim Index of African Governance	54 countries
Merchant International Group (MIG)	Grey Area Dynamics	155 countries
Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC)	Asian Intelligence Newsletter	15 countries
Global Integrity	Global Integrity Report	31 countries
World Economic Forum (WEF)	Global Competitiveness Report	131 countries

Source: Author's compilation.

Poverty and Inequality

For poor population, government support is like a lifeline. Government services support the destitute and poor in overcoming poverty and also ensures that the prevailing inequality gap gets reduced. In recent years, India has witnessed a transformation of the country's economic structure, from a predominantly agrarian economy to a manufacturing and services sector-oriented economy. The share of urban population to total population has grown from 17.3 per cent in 1951 to 31.16 per cent in 2011 (Census 2011). On average, 25 per cent of the population in many Indian cities lives in slums (Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India 2013).

Absence or inaccessibility of the government programmes has larger impact on the poor than other sections of a society. In Indian context, efforts have been made to bring down poverty and narrow the inequality by improving the 'Reach' of Good Governance measures. India being a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country, poses challenge toward ensuring the reach of government programmes and services to the remotest part of the country and to the poorest of the poor. Among measures towards improving governance has been constitutional amendments to give more administrative and financial powers to the local governments. Initiatives like Right to Information, Right to Public Services, Right to Employment, Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) office and *Lokpal* Bill (Ombudsman Bill) are some prominent measures taken towards improving access to information, strengthen accountability, and reduce political interference in delivery of public services in an efficient and effective manner. Providing Unique Identification Number to each citizen of India is another ongoing measure towards reducing diversion of benefits from real beneficiaries.

Right to Public Services Act has been enacted by 20 out of 29 states in India. This entails service delivery in a time-bound manner and accountability of the service provider in case of delay. While the Right to Information Act 2005 is a landmark effort to ensure efficiency in public service delivery system as the Act provides all citizens greater access to documents related to public services and its delivery system than was earlier possible.

With a population of 1.25 billion, the needs of India's population have no doubt resulted in over-straining of public service infrastructure. It has to some extent outpaced Indian government's ability to provide basic public services such as water, sanitation, housing, food grains, education and public health, to name some.

Diversions and unfair practices, referred as corruption, deprives citizens, especially the poor and marginalized, of their rights and entitlements. It has a direct bearing on the delivery of services, particularly basic and essential ones to people they are meant for. Lack of access to secure tenure as well as basic services constitutes the main problem and this problem is exacerbated by lack of access to other administrative services which often provide the basis of entitlement to core services including tenure and livelihoods (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Factors Facilitating/Restricting Unfair Practices in Public Services

<i>Transaction Related</i>	<i>Process-or Organization Related</i>	<i>Institutional Factors</i>
☆ Transaction intensity and dispersal	☆ Definition of responsibilities unclear	☆ Decentralization (official/political)
☆ Level of discretion to official	☆ Distribution of workload inequitable	☆ Rule of law
☆ Exposure to public view	☆ Examination of case at many levels	☆ Impartial Judiciary
☆ Availability of substitutes for product/service	☆ Complexity/opaque nature of rules	☆ Swift legal redress
☆ Degree of monopoly in supply of service	☆ Internal control systems ineffective	☆ Levels of education
☆ Possibility of excluding customer (or groups of customers) from service	☆ External vigilance ineffective	☆ Levels of urbanization
☆ Scope for collective action	☆ Framework of laws/rules constraining discretion	☆ Civil society effectiveness
☆ Size of loss relative to victim's income	☆ Organization culture, e.g., (a) proportion of direct recruits, (b) Bribing for attractive posts.	☆ Extent of internalization of nations of 'public office as trust'
☆ Bribe as proportion of total cost of transaction	☆ Intensity of interactions with citizens (e.g., police, motor vehicles)	☆ Patron-client networks
☆ Is the loss to citizens direct or indirect?	☆ Extent of utilization of ICT applications	☆ Colonial style administration (viewing citizen as subject)
☆ Control over benefits by official	☆ Percentage risk of being caught; percentage risk of conviction; probability of being awarded deterrent penalty.	☆ Competitive partisan politics
☆ Information to user about service		☆ Vigorous Press/media
		☆ Per capita income growth
		☆ Distribution of income (more equal)

Source: Centre for Good Governance, 2003.

Peoples' Perception and Experience about Public Services

The paper using the data of two rounds (2005 and 2017) of CMS Peoples' Perception and Experience with Public Services Study, discusses the importance of users' feedback, particularly those who are socio-economically poor and marginalized. Having citizens rate services can also build trust among residents about government's effort to measure its performance and satisfy the citizenry it serves (Parigi 2003). Key reasons for making Users' Feedback an integral part of appraisal of all public services are discussed below.

High Dependency on Public Services

The public services could be broadly categorized in to two- basic and need-based. The *basic services* include those, where households' interaction¹ with the

¹ Interaction with a public service includes, visit by a member of the household to the public service facility or interaction with a service provider of the concerned public service.

public service/providers is more regular during a year. These include public distribution system (PDS) for food grains, health/hospital, water supply, electricity and banking services. While the *need-based services* such as police, judiciary, housing and tax services, the interaction is not on a regular or a recurring basis. This has to be looked in context of the reference period, which is 12 months prior to the surveys conducted during each round of CMS- India Corruption Study. High level of interaction with a public service does not necessarily mean positive perception about the service. Nearly half of the respondents have the 'Perception' that corruption in general has 'Increased' in public services in the last 12 months while around 31 per cent opined that corruption in public services continues to 'remain the same'. Poor satisfaction but high dependency of the population therefore demands that citizens should have a 'voice' in evaluating the performance of public services as well (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Interacted with Public Services during Last One Year (in per cent)

Public Services	Households	
	2005	2017
PDS	68	74
Health/Hospital	54	72
Electricity	62	70
School Education	40	62
Water Supply	15	32
Land/Housing	14	25
Banking Services	10	75
Police	17	14
Judiciary	14	10
Tax services*	8	6

*Only urban.

Source: CMS-ICS 2017 and 2005.

Reasons for Paying Bribe or Using Influence

Reasons for poor public service delivery could be broadly categorized as the ones related to procedural; documentation related; payment evasion; and dependency on service provider. Users come across many difficulties such as indifferent behaviour or non-availability of staff, long documentation process or demand for bribe or work getting done only after engaging middlemen. In fact, the demand for bribe or use of middlemen are for very basic purposes and higher in services which have no competitors *i.e.* are monopolistic in nature, both in terms of service (police/electricity) as well as pricing (food grains/health). Different reasons for which bribes are paid in major public services include: PDS (to take monthly food ration, to get a food ration card); Electricity (correct inflated bills, get new connection); Water (repair/restoration of water pipe/supply); Public

health/hospital (as in-patient; get registered as Out-patient); and Police (get FIR registered; remove name as an accused). Among the reasons cited for paying bribe, it was noticed that main reasons continue to be similar in most of the public services in both the rounds of CMS Study. Users feedback to improve public services at the public services delivery level is therefore important to capture the ground reality as far as public services' performance is concerned.

Table 2.4: Key Reasons for which Bribe Paid

Public Service	Reason for Paying Bribe	Households Paid Bribe* (in per cent)	
		2005	2017
PDS	To get new ration card	46	34
	Deletion/Addition of name in ration card	13	37
	Get monthly ration	29	31
Health/Hospital Services	Getting the prescribed medicine	17	30
	As in-patient/for getting bed/services	42	26
	For diagnostic services/Pathological test	17	10
	Get medicine from dispensary/store	16	25
School Education	School Admission	13	50
	Issuance of certificate	27	10
	Avoid retention due to low attendance	6	23
	Application form for scholarship	3	14
	For free books, uniform etc.	37	4
Electricity	Change/Correction of name/address	27	7
	Correction of faulty meter/inflated bills	18	44
	New connection	25	38
Police	Registration of FIR/arrest of accused/ensure follow up	52	34
	Police verification for passport/job	11	6
	Remove name as an accused/avoid arrest	11	23
	Avoid Challan for violation of traffic rule	15	23
Water Supply	For installation of new water connection	57	33
	Installation/Maintenance of water pipeline	19	64
Banking	To take loan/loan payment	85	71
	To open account	15	32

* Percentage is out of those who experienced Bribe demand.

Source: CMS-ICS 2017 and 2005.

Economics Behind Denial of Services

One of the extremities of poor public service delivery system is denial of services because citizens deny to pay the bribe. Depriving a needy citizen of public

services, which otherwise could be available free of cost or at a nominal user fee could be considered as one of the important indicators for examining the extent of accountability in place. Non availability of public services has its impact on the economic status of the households. For instance, under an Antyodaya card in Public Distribution Card (PDS) for food grains, 15 kg of wheat is offered at a price of Rs 2 per kg. The price in open market is Rs 6 per kg, a differential of Rs 4 per kg (Debroy and Bhandari 2012). For every poor household, to pay three times per kg per month is undoubtedly a huge burden. The extra money could have been used to get some additional nutritive items for family members or for other purposes such as health, clothing or education. Moreover, it is important to understand that these additional expenditures are not limited to PDS but other essential services as well. For instance, the findings of CMS-ICS 2017, shows that to avail the services as in-patient in a public hospital, households had to pay between INR 20-2000. This for availing basic services such as getting a bed as in-patients or clean bed sheets or to get the place cleaned apart from getting diagnostic services or medicines, which otherwise would have been available free of cost. Without saying, the additional monetary burden due to corruption have an adverse impact towards improving the socio-economic status of households, which is one of the expected outcomes of good governance.

Identification Proof/Supporting Document

Lack of Identification proof/supporting document is often considered as one of the key reasons for diversion of benefits or inaccessibility/denial of public services to the migrants. However, CMS ICS 2017 brought out that nine out of every ten respondents across 20 states have one or the other identification document, which is a healthy sign and a step towards ensuring better reach of government schemes and benefits. However, having a citizen identification document is not a sufficient condition to avail benefits under government schemes, unless it is made after proper authentication process.

Table 2.5: Possess Identification Document

	<i>Biometric Identification</i>	<i>Voter ID Card</i>	<i>Food Ration Card</i>	<i>Bank Savings Account</i>
Households Possess an identification document (in per cent)	90	94	85	89

Source: CMS Study 2017.

Audits by the government agencies in India such as Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) as well as third party independent evaluation by independent evaluating agencies brought out that many 'ghost' beneficiaries take away the benefits from real ones. By ghost is meant those who do not exist physically but only on paper/official documents. This is a major challenge and policy makers in India have taken measures to eliminate this problem. Among these include, providing Unique Identification Number (also known as *Aadhaar*) to each resident of India.

With mobility and migration of people on an increase, both *Aadhaar* and the biometric methods are of great significance for good governance (Rao 2012). Direct transfer of monetary benefit, called as DBT (direct benefit transfer) such as subsidy, scholarships, tax refunds in the bank accounts is another important measure. For direct cash transfer to the beneficiaries, having a savings account is a necessity. However, families without any identification document such as families living on streets, slums or migrating frequently from one place to another may continue to get excluded. Feedback from this section of population is therefore important to assess the 'real' success of such development programme's reach and outcomes.

Digitalization of Public Services

E-governance aims to empower people through giving them access to information and services. National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) vision statement says, "Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets, and ensure efficiency, transparency, and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man" (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology 2006). Digitalization brings with it some challenges as well. With poor computer literacy among majority of the population, availing online services is only for a small section of India's population. As per Census 2011, only 3 per cent of the households have computer with internet connectivity; even after including those accessing online services from an internet café or having mobile phones with internet facility, may not be more than 10 percent. However, with this percent of online users in a country of 1.25 billion, the concern with the online services is about safety of financial transactions due to the hacking of personal confidential information is a major concern for most of the online service users. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data shows that incidence of cyber-crimes (IT Act + IPC sections) is increasing with increase in use of computer and internet; from 3,477 cases in 2012 to 12001 cases in 2016 (NCRB, 2016). Users' feedback should therefore include both offline users covered through face-to-face interviews as well as through social media tools such as Facebook, twitter or through e-mails and online surveys. Feedback on time taken to avail a service, either over the counter or online is equally important, as most important factor influencing the respondents' level of satisfaction, at 36 percent, is the amount of time required to get the service (Bussell 2012). It will be therefore important for government to look for ways to maximize reach and minimize time for service delivery through users' feedback before gauge improvement in public service delivery system.

Conclusion

Users' feedback on a regular basis and follow-up action on feedbacks within a given time frame is the need of the hour. Among various ways of users' feedback apart from users' interviews include, social accountability mechanisms such as Social Audit which needs to be institutionalized across development programmes.

On methodological aspect, capturing only 'Perception' will be more generic and could be misleading because perception is believed to be an accumulation of impressions, based on one's past experiences or solely on the basis of word of mouth *i.e.* as shared by neighbours and friends (TII-CMS India Corruption Study 2008). Perception may be seen as an inflated or exaggerated version of Experience. In other words, capturing 'Experience' of those people (households), who have interacted with a particular public service, during a given reference period, is a must to be more accurate and less ambiguous.

Evaluating public services by just experts' opinion as mostly practiced in most of the global studies is widely felt as not reflecting the real picture because it is mostly exaggerated personal opinion and not based on rigorous estimation. Expert evaluations are severely biased for many reasons, accounted primarily to the nature of the group of international business experts involved in the evaluations (Sik 1999).

Ideally, assessing performance of public services would be close to accurate if it is a combination of Perception, Experience of Users and Opinion of Experts. However, more weightage should be given to 'Experience' as users' feedback is important for improving public services, because it acts as a "feed to move forward". Formulation of National Evaluation Policy (NEP), making evaluation of all programmes and public services constitutionally mandatory through regular feedbacks from Users will help the concerned ministry/department to improve their service delivery. This in turn will improve the overall performance of the government and further strengthen the motto of the government- *Minimum Government and Maximum Governance*.

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