

No. 103

**ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF
MUNICIPAL SERVICES FOR THE POOR IN
AHMEDABAD: THE REPORT CARD PROJECT**

Mihir R Bhatt

November 1999

Working Paper No. 103

**ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES
FOR THE POOR IN AHMEDABAD: THE REPORT CARD
PROJECT**

Mihir R Bhatt

November 1999

Mihir R Bhatt
Foundation for Public Interest
803 Sakar Four Building
Opp Town Hall
Ellisbridge
Ahmedabad 380 006

ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES FOR THE POOR IN AHMEDABAD: THE REPORT CARD PROJECT

CONTENTS

SECTION 1 - BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
1.1 The Actors	1
1.2 Background to the problem	2
SECTION 2 - THE PROJECT	3
2.1 Project objectives	3
2.2 Historical Development	3
2.3 Current Project Status and Future Prospects	7
2.4 Project Finances	7
SECTION 3 - THE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PROCESS	7
3.1 Knowledge and information	7
3.2 Transfer and dissemination	8
3.3 Learning	9
3.4 Use and impact	10
3.5 Replication	11
SECTION 4 - LESSONS LEARNED	11
4.1 The potential of robust and systematic data	11
4.2 The potential of organised communities to use data	11
4.3 The process used to generate information is important	11
4.4 Dissemination needs to be constructive and tailored	11
4.5 The importance of identifying common interests	11
BIBLIOGRAPHY	12

SECTION 1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 The Actors

a. *The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)*

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) was established in 1972 as a trade union of poor women from the informal sector. Today it is the largest single union in Gujarat with a membership of over 200 thousand, including urban and rural women who are home-based workers, hawkers and vendors and those who provide other services or manual labour. These women constitute 93 per cent of the labour force of the unorganised sector in India, and SEWA's main goals are to organise these women workers for full employment and self-reliance. Some 40 thousand members of SEWA live in Ahmedabad's 18 poorest wards, and in view of the range of problems from which poor urban women suffer, SEWA's strategy revolves not just around employment issues, but embraces constructive struggle and sustainable democratic development. SEWA is thus both an organisation and a movement.

SEWA promotes women's economic organisations, including 84 co-operatives and 181 village-based producers' groups called DWCRAs groups. In addition, SEWA has its own SEWA Co-operative Bank operating in Ahmedabad city and in four districts of Gujarat. It is a recognised bank and the only financial intermediary for AMC's Parivartan Project¹. SEWA has also promoted social security organisations in the field of health, childbirth and child care, and has its own communication organisation called Anasuya Trust. The Mahila Housing Trust (MHT) of SEWA has been active in promoting rural housing finance needs, infrastructure investments in housing and shelter and capacity building of the urban poor, and finally, SEWA also runs direct action campaigns to highlight issues such as sanitation and cleanliness in Ahmedabad, the minimum wage, the promotion of child care, and the problems of home-based workers, water vendors, hawkers, and forest workers.

By paying a membership of Rs 5 per year, any self-employed woman in India can become a member of SEWA. Every three years, members collectively elect their representatives to a new

¹ The Parivartan Project, or Slum Networking Programme, is a city-wide slum upgrading initiative in Ahmedabad. The pilot project for the programme, in the slum of Sanjay Nagar, is the subject of another CLIC Case Study also available in this series.

Trade Council made up of *agevans* or worker-leaders. This council of 393 leaders then elects an Executive Committee, which is made up of 25 elected members, who in turn elect the President, a Vice President, two Secretaries and a General Secretary. Each year SEWA measures its performance, and in 1998, for example, it was found that:

- Of all SEWA's members, nearly 50 thousand had increased their income by a total of over Rs 30 crores, in addition to bringing about improvements in their working and living conditions through union action.
- A total of 35,223 women in producers' groups increased their income by over Rs 10 crores.
- In the SEWA Co-operative Bank, 87,263 women saved and deposited nearly Rs 2 crores.
- There were 43,553 members in Ahmedabad city, including *agarbatti* (incense) rollers, garment workers, vendors, hawkers, rag-pickers, construction workers and head loaders.
- SEWA Bank expanded its housing finance services with the help of the central government's Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO), thus providing loans for new housing, house repairs and monsoon-proofing, loans which totalled Rs 3.67 crores per year.

b. *The Foundation for Public Interest (FPI)*

The Foundation for Public Interest (FPI) was established in 1974 as a development planning action team of professionals that aim to promote the interest of the public, which in the case of India effectively means the interests of the poor, who make up the majority of the population. To attract more attention, investments and resources into poor communities and areas, FPI has emphasised bringing innovative, informed, insightful and empowering ideas into the public domain. During the past two decades, FPI has built a total of 14 institutions in diverse areas such as consumer centres, handloom co-operatives, youth agencies, women's self-help groups, area development groups and an organisation focusing on disaster mitigation. For each one of these organisations, information sharing and learning are key activities.

In the outlook of FPI, empowerment of the poor is the final goal of information, communication or learning processes. It is believed that if the poor have access to accurate, usable, system-wide and self-managed information on the city, they can regain some power over their living conditions. Thus FPI's work in urban areas is increasingly focusing on these key issues, exploring evidence and searching for new solutions to how information can be used by and for the poor in cities. So far it has become apparent to FPI that it is important to provide access to the information in ways that enable poor citizens to become active producers rather than passive users of information on

urban poverty, including basic services, and secondly that information should be used to improve the dialogue between the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and poor residents of the city.

In the 1970s, FPI was already concerned with assessing the financial and operational performance of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), including its hospitals, dairies, transport services and annual budget. This information was discussed in public meetings and disseminated through print media, and FPI also initiated a state-wide debate about citizens as consumers, their right to information and to influence public policy. Gradually, FPI expanded its work and became more involved in poor rural areas, but in the 1990s, local groups, non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), the AMC, donors and bilateral agencies began to demand that FPI shift its focus back to urban areas where many issues were of great concern.

Today, FPI focuses on community capacity building, especially of the urban poor. This includes performance rating of municipal services, infrastructure investments, action planning workshops for communities, accounts and accountability related inputs and project-to-policy linkages. The subject of this case study, the report card exercise, is also being developed by FPI in smaller towns, producing a newsletter called *Nagar Vikas Dagar* for local leaders, and making active efforts to understand vulnerability of the urban poor in Ahmedabad and other cities. At the national level, FPI is part of a small team that is working on urban governance issues, and currently FPI has a staff of six professionals, plus access to a pool of additional experts throughout the country. FPI is governed by a Board of Trustees, has an Honorary Director and has programme and support units. The Community Capacity Building Facility provides an umbrella under which many of the above activities are carried out.

c. *The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation*

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) gained the status of municipal corporation in 1951 and is one of the leading urban authorities of India, innovating in many areas of urban governance and planning. Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the Iron Man of India, started his political career in this city, and many of the city's administrators have moved on to international agencies and multilateral organisations to apply on a larger scale what they learned in Ahmedabad. AMC has 43 election wards and 129 municipal corporators, and is run by the Municipal Board of Municipal Corporators. It has three statutory committees: the Standing Committee, the

Transport Committee, and the Education Committee (in addition to 13 other committees). With a total area of 190 square kilometres, AMC's annual revenue is Rs 380 crores, and the Corporation has maintained a balanced budget for many years, thanks to its main source of income, octroi.

1.2 Background to the Problem

Though India has a strong tradition of urban planning and analysis, the assessment of the performance of urban plans and services has received less attention. Even plans and initiatives that are widely welcomed at the outset are frequently undermined when their performance is perceived to be limited. Even when performance is measured, assessments are often characterised by being isolated and limited, attracting attention to one-off problems such as a leaking sewer, low water pressure, or flickering street lights. City-wide, systematic and organised rating on a defined scale is generally not done either by municipalities, NGOs, or community groups.

In addition, an explicit focus on municipal services is also rare in urban sector studies and work. Housing rights, access to land, sites-and-services, construction methods, costs and design, and housing finance are frequent topics of analysis, but municipal services such as water, sanitation, street lights, street paving, and solid waste collection are often neglected. It is these services which give real and qualitative meaning to tenure, finance, construction and other aspects of urban life for the poor. "Without water, no toilets. And no toilets, no investments in shelter," said a local resident of Melady Nagar slum in Ahmedabad, when asked why he had not invested in improving his shelter even when a water pipe was installed in his unit. Feedback on service performance is also rare, especially in a systematic manner. Where feedback is achieved it tends to be from better-off groups, and rarely from the poor women who constitute an estimated 70 per cent of active voters and 50 per cent of the municipal service users in Ahmedabad. Without feedback, improvement or alterations in service provision are not possible. Thus the AMC continues to allocate resources in the same pattern, assuming that its money is well spent.

It is in this context that the Foundation for Public Interest resolved to focus on developing a methodology to effectively assess the performance of public services used by poor women in Ahmedabad, with that initiative becoming known as the report card, in other words a series of reports assessing the standard of municipal services available to poor communities. In addition, Ahmedabad is one of the important cities on the historic, economic and demographic map of India, and is home to a range of innovative urban partnerships, some of which were officially recognised at Habitat II in Istanbul, receiving

Habitat Best Practice Honours. The performance rating card of municipal services is one of these innovative urban partnerships, with the initiative being of significance because it is city-wide, service specific, systematic, and quantitative. In addition, it has consequences that are political (poor services lead to low political standing and popularity), financial (most central government and donor resources are attracted in the name of the poor), economic (no service satisfaction, no cost recovery), and social (poor services lead to poor health, poor school attendance among children and repeated illness).

SECTION 2 THE PROJECT

2.1 Project Objectives

- To determine how a certain section of society, particularly poor self-employed women, rank municipal urban services
- To determine how the report card methodology could be used as a governance tool by the poor and their organisations
- To determine if women, who are the direct and frequent users of most basic services, especially water and sanitation, would rank urban services

2.2 Historical Development

The beginnings of the report card project in Ahmedabad can be traced to a workshop organised by the Public Affairs Centre (PAC) in 1995 to share the methodology and the outcome of the performance rating of public services in Bangalore. Based in Bangalore, PAC was founded by Dr Samuel Paul, who after working with the World Bank, returned to India to work on issues of urban governance. Since 1995, PAC has grown from a small, three-member group to considerably expand its activities and budget. Among the member of its Board of Trustees is the Centre for Environmental Planning Technology, one of the organisations that FPI initiated.

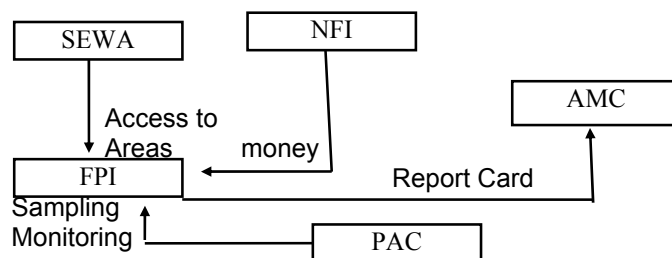
The 1995 workshop, funded by the National Foundation for India (NFI), a leading grant-making body committed to innovative urban poverty projects, resulted in the decision to explore how the performance rating report card method could work in more cities with different groups of NGOs. As a consequence, FPI developed a proposal for assessing the performance of municipal services by poor women residing in poor wards in Ahmedabad. FPI decided to make several major changes in the performance rating methodology used in Bangalore, and from a city-wide exercise which resulted in the averaging out of problems experienced in severely underserved areas, FPI modified it into an exercise that covered only the poorest wards of Ahmedabad. Secondly, the focus shifted from general citizen

assessment of services to that of a specific group that has critical needs, namely poor women. Half of the citizens in Ahmedabad are poor and almost 80 per cent of them are without minimum access to basic services, in addition, women consistently deal directly with services, but have little say in their design or performance. Many poor women also work at home, and improved services often means improvements in working conditions, thereby enabling the possibility of more income and better health for these women and their families.

To implement the initiative in Ahmedabad, FPI decided to team up with a membership-based organisation that could provide access to a large pool of informed and articulate members, and that would also act upon the outcome of the rating exercise for the benefit of its members. Thus, SEWA was selected as a team member. For community level habitat issues, SEWA has a case-to-case complaint referral service, called SEWA Chowk, where each complaint related to the AMC is taken up by the local organiser and presented to AMC authorities. However, a city-wide and service specific picture of performance and satisfaction was not available with SEWA. Such information was judged to have great potential for planning systematic, system-wide responses, organisational expansion plans, membership expansion and initiatives to influence public policy. On these grounds SEWA agreed to become involved in FPI's report card project.

Initially, a SEWA–FPI partnership planning meeting was held where it was decided that FPI would lead the report card project. Later, it was expected that FPI would jointly conduct the exercise with SEWA taking the lead role, and it was also envisaged that SEWA, from year-to-year, would internalise the exercise, deal with AMC directly and institutionalise the report card process, while FPI would monitor the standard and quality of the outcome. The proposal was then submitted to the NFI, and drawing lessons from the Bangalore experience, NFI made its comments and the proposal was modified and approved. Finally, PAC also agreed to provide assistance in questionnaire design, sample selection, monitoring the quality of the survey exercise, ensuring the quality of analysis, and sharing the outcome with a wider audience.

The institutional arrangements for the report card initiative were as shown in the following diagram:



Working mainly with SEWA's urban organisers in the union wing of Ahmedabad and with MHT, with periodic inputs from SEWA Bank, the first activity of FPI, the PAC team and SEWA organisers was to review the Bangalore questionnaire in a one-day workshop held at the FPI office. Subsequently, the questionnaire was modified to suit SEWA's needs and the AMC context, for example, AMC provides a wider range of services than other comparable authorities, and the modifications also included a greater focus on how efficient services would make working conditions more productive. The questions were then translated into Gujarati, verified with SEWA members and modified. Fifty forms were then field tested by an FPI-PAC team for two days in four locations in Ahmedabad, and in a one-day meeting at SEWA, the outcome and process were discussed with SEWA organisers, some non-SEWA community residents and a group of possible surveyors. Based on the outcome, the length of the questionnaire was reduced, the sequence of questions was changed and explanatory notes were included for each section. FPI then prepared a revised questionnaire that was sent to AMC officials at central and zonal levels for comments. The outline was also shared with the Government of Gujarat's Urban Development Department, PAC, HUDCO and NFI. Comments, when received, were incorporated in the questionnaire.

Once the questionnaire was finalised, FPI conducted a three-day training session at its office for the survey team. Five men and five women, drawn from FPI, SEWA and the communities participated. The PAC representative and Gallop (India) were invited to join the training to ensure the quality of the methodology used and data collected. The team visited possible locations, AMC offices, FPI, SEWA offices and the training team, and the team also conducted a pilot test in the field to estimate time and cost per questionnaire. Accordingly, the team worked out a 20-day schedule for the survey, while another team worked with AMC and SEWA and identified 12 wards that were: (a) poorly served by the selected services, and (b) had a sizeable population of SEWA's poor self-employed women members. The wards included: Asarva, Chamanpura, Bapunagar, Saraspur, Behrampura, Amraivadi, Rakhial, Maninagar, Khadia, Gomtipur, Rajpur and Manekchowk. Together these areas cover about 60 square kilometres and had a population of about 100,000 low income households. These 12 wards were then visited and a third team took up the list of members from these 12 wards and with the random sampling method suggested by PAC and Gallop (India), selected 1,200 names for the survey.

The actual survey was done in 20 days, with each day beginning with a preparatory team meeting, area and process orientation, review of the previous day's activities, and the plan for the day. The 10-member team was reformed into five teams of two individuals each, one man and one woman, with each team meeting up periodically to discuss any problems. In addition, the PAC team conducted a random inspection of the survey, verified the survey information and the quality of information, and monitored the pace of work. In the evening, all five teams met and gave the forms to the PAC teams, who reviewed them and suggested corrections, changes or a revisit. The interview schedule was also shared with the AMC main office and zonal officers as well as with SEWA's trade committees and a hand out was given to the interviewee with information on whom to contact to learn about the outcome of the study.

After the survey, a two-day break was taken and the team met again at FPI to review the process, record their impressions and document any other comments. AMC was invited to this session but remained absent. Then the collected data were sent to PAC to process and an FPI representative was sent to PAC in Bangalore for a week to learn about the special features of data feeding and the highlights of analysis process. On her return, she informed the rest of the FPI team about the method of analysis and explained the outputs of the analysis. The team, other FPI members, SEWA organisers, SEWA office holders and selected other NGOs were invited to discuss the impressions of the survey team, analyse the data, and make their suggestions. In addition, a leading economist was invited to give a



presentation on the current urban economics of the city of Ahmedabad. This session helped put the information in the local socio-economic context.

On the basis of the survey data, a report was then written which was circulated to AMC, PAC and SEWA for comments. SEWA emphasised the importance of including qualitative information and separating the recommendations according to ward and occupational group, while PAC found the report weak in terms of the quality of editing and writing. As a result, PAC was invited to help in rewriting the report, and later, a professional was invited by FPI to assist, though this turned out to be a costly and lengthy procedure. Finally, FPI designed, developed, conducted and analysed the performance rating of municipal services and the outcome was presented to SEWA and the AMC's Standing Committee, Town Planning Committee, and Water and Sanitation Committee in the form of a report card.

A shorter version of the report card was also written by FPI and shared with a group of surveyed interviewees. From their comments, a visiting student intern from Berlin Open University was assigned to photo-document the levels of services. With these photos and the main findings, an overhead presentation was prepared, which over time, was given to a range of audiences, including the AMC commissioner; AMC officials; Regional Water and Sanitation Group for South Asia (RWSG-SA), New Delhi; elected members of AMC; readers of *Anasuya* (in Gujarati and Hindi), SEWA's fortnightly publication; the visiting World Bank infrastructure division director; the visiting Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from the USA; officers of *nagarpalikas* (small towns); the Urban Development Department, Government of Gujarat; the Urban Development Department, Government of India; the Chairman and Executive Officer of HUDCO; staff of the Human Settlements Management Institute (HSMI), New Delhi; and staff of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok. At the city level, the Gujarati version of the report card was systematically shared with SEWA members, SEWA Executive Committee, SEWA trade committees, MHT and related organisations.

In addition, the findings of the survey and the process were modified into training materials and incorporated into the programme of MHT housing clinics, a forum that was especially developed by FPI for building the capacity of SEWA members and other community members. These clinics are conducted by MHT for those SEWA members who live in slums selected by the AMC to receive services under the Slum Networking Parivartan programme in Ahmedabad. Thus the main final products of the survey were thus (1)

written reports; (2) information brochures; (3) journalistic articles; (4) visual exhibitions and posters; and (5) training materials. The focus of each product was modified depending on the audience to tailor the information so that it could mean the needs of the various target groups, and thus simultaneously influence both public policy and public opinion. Box 1 summaries some of the findings of the report card exercise.

BOX 1 The findings of the Report Card in Ahmedabad

- Households in the surveyed communities lived in an average dwelling area of 175 square feet, with an average household size of 6.6 members. About 52 per cent of the respondents owned their homes.
- The women participants in the survey were engaged in various economic activities such as vending, *bidi* (cigarette) rolling, *agarbatti* rolling, construction labour, paper picking, garment making and such like, thereby making up part of the urban informal sector of Ahmedabad. Respondents earned an average of Rs 500 per month as personal income, with the average family income reported to be Rs 1,750 per month, well below the poverty line.
- It was found that poor women in Ahmedabad commonly use the following services: food and civil supplies, water supply, sewerage, public toilets, garbage disposal and electricity. Regarding physical infrastructure, the most crucial services for the women included water supply, sewerage, public toilets and garbage disposal, which are all provided by the AMC.
- Water from the municipal supplies was used by a total of 88 per cent of the surveyed women, out of which only 33 per cent were satisfied with it. The main reasons for the dissatisfaction were: irregular supply, distance of the source from the house, long queues (as many as 25 people) for drinking water, and the poor quality of water. For the city as a whole, AMC was providing 125 litres of water per head per day, while in the area covered by the report card project, it ranged from just 10 to 28 litres per head per day.
- Regarding sewerage facilities, 91 per cent of the respondents made use of them and 47 per cent were satisfied with the service provided. The continuous overflow of gutters and poor maintenance (in terms of time and quality) were the two major reasons for dissatisfaction. Out of 63 per cent who used the community toilets, only 25 per cent were satisfied with this service because toilets were not cleaned daily, they were in unusable condition (continuously overflowing), and lacked a water supply connection.
- Another important service for the maintenance of hygienic conditions in the slums is garbage collection. This service was available to only 65 per

- cent of the respondents. Only 40 per cent of them were satisfied because irregular clearing of garbage led to accumulation of decomposed waste and poor hygienic conditions around the garbage heaps or bins. Other services such as education and medical services were also judged to be negatively effected by this.
- Only 6 per cent of respondents had contacted AMC to complain about the poor performance of their services. The other 94 per cent had not contacted AMC or any other agency because of lack of information, guidance, negative experiences in the past, and the inconvenience of having to contact agencies within certain hours of opening. Those who had contacted AMC and other agencies were highly discouraged due to poor behaviour by staff, the time required to register a complaint, as well as delays in solving the problem. A total of 26 per cent of the surveyed women had paid 'speed money' (Rs 50 to Rs 1,000) to solve problems related to the urban public services.

The response of the AMC to the findings of the performance assessment was surprisingly positive. Both the Municipal Commissioner and zonal level officers received and reacted to the survey findings, and the Commissioner, Keshav Verma, did not contest the results and instead accepted the information and demanded that FPI clearly elucidate the steps to be taken by AMC and suggest follow-up action. Also, the then Deputy Municipal Commissioner, P. U. Asnani, was more specific and demanded that the data be disaggregated by zone, services, communities and constituencies. In addition, a presentation of the findings to Ahmedabad's Municipal Councillors (30 out of 129 attended) was made with the aim of enabling the Mayor and his team to appreciate how the report card could potentially be used to harness political benefits. The zonal officers, however, were more reactive and pointed out that the main reasons why services were poor was because: (a) the poor abused and misused the services; and (b) there was political interference in responding to service needs. They also said that there was not enough money to improve the existing services, but there was money to invest in new services.

In response to the positive request by the Municipal Commissioner of AMC for direction and suggestions from FPI, FPI decided not to go to the press and instead negotiate step-by-step improvements with AMC. Both parties were interested in securing real improvements in the quality of services and so progress was made. Firstly the support of the municipal councillors was gained, and secondly, the research findings were given credence by their being used by AMC in their proposals to the Regional Water and Sanitation

Group for South Asia (RWSG-SA), HUDCO, the World Bank, and the Government of India Economic Sector Work document that guides investments in Five-Year Plans for specific sectors. With this exposure and mainstreaming of survey findings, it thus became easy for AMC to act upon the information of the performance rating.

As a result, FPI made an effort to link the rating with annual AMC budget allocations, gaining the formal agreement of the AMC. It was also agreed that an outside group would be created, including AMC, FPI, SEWA, the Centre for Environmental Planning Technology (CEPT), Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) and others, to conduct the exercise every year before the preparation and submission of the AMC budget. This was intended to help AMC decide sectoral, ward-wise and special allocation decisions, and the annual exercise was also intended to enable improvements to be charted over time. RWSG-SA decided to help design this trend mapping and provided the technical inputs, however, the Municipal Commissioner became recognised for his progressive approach and work in Ahmedabad and was recruited by the World Bank, leaving Ahmedabad for Washington DC to be in charge of South East Asia. Since then the proposal for annual performance assessments has been circulating in AMC for over 18 months.

The data produced by the performance survey was also intended to inform the work of SEWA, and hence SEWA organisers and the FPI survey team jointly reviewed the outcome of the rating exercise, deciding to set up a Compliance Table in SEWA Chowk in order to effectively record the opinions of its members. The outcome was shared with SEWA



members through Anasuya and an exhibition held to celebrate SEWA's 20 years. The exhibition was attended by over 100 thousand people, including 80 thousand urban and rural members of SEWA. In addition, the report card methodology was used by SEWA in its 1998 annual meeting to assess the performance of SEWA itself. Thus the 'Report Card of SEWA Members on SEWA Services' was conducted as an internal exercise.

At FPI, the outcome of the report card initiative has been used as an advocacy tool in several national and local forums, including with *nagarpalikas* in Gujarat; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Gujarat Jelsewa Training Institute (GJTI); Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board (GWSSB); the Municipal Finance Board; and the Asian Development Bank. The methodology has also been replicated by FPI to develop the Report Card of Street Vendors of Radhanpur Towns, the Report Card of Recipients on Malaria Relief, and the Report Card of the Corporate Sector on the Government of Gujarat's Cyclone Relief of 1998.

2.3 Current Project Status and Future Prospects

As indicated above, although the idea of conducting an annual performance assessment of services has still to be approved by AMC, the results and methodology arising from the report card initiative are still being widely utilised in Ahmedabad and beyond. In MHT, housing clinics are conducted where the information on service levels, levels of satisfaction, the nature of poorly performing services, and possible individual, collective and city-wide actions are shared with slum dwellers and members. Also at FPI, the methodology has been used in a follow-up project called Building City-Nagarpalika Linkages, in which six *nagarpalikas* in Gujarat were selected, local slums identified, slum dwellers contacted, and public services rated by them. The outcome was documented in a report which was disseminated to the local community, local NGOs, the local authorities, the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board, and the City Managers' Association of Gujarat. A report on the project was also published in FPI's newsletter, *Nagar Vikas Dagar*, which reaches all the *nagarpalikas* and other carefully selected 250 urban sector governments organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations in Gujarat. The response from specific *nagarpalikas* and other readers has been very encouraging.

2.4 Project Finances

The total cost of report card assessment of municipal service performance was Rs 300 thousand, and was mostly financed by the National

Foundation for India, with additional resources from FPI. Further initiatives to disseminate, replicate or utilise the report card exercise were not funded by the NFI.

SECTION 3 THE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PROCESS

3.1 Knowledge and Information

One of the most significant features of the report card project that determined what information was collected and disseminated was the huge demand for systematically collected knowledge, data and information on public services expressed by various sectors and groups. For example, members of the MHT housing clinics made one of the strongest articulated demands to know how services performed in the better-off wards of Ahmedabad, such as Ellisbridge. They were shocked to learn that in residential colonies the street lights worked throughout the year and the lamp posts were repaired within 48 hours of damaging monsoon winds. Another latent demand that was articulated during the housing clinics was to "visit the Commissioner". The Housing Clinic participants wanted to meet the man who had all the power to improve the performance of services across the city. In addition, the other factors that influenced the type and content of the knowledge, skills and information generated were the objectives of the project itself, and its desired output/outcome, which was a change in service levels, quality and municipal policy.

During the project period, a range of knowledge, information and skills was transferred among the NGOs involved, community residents, and the AMC, mainly regarding the performance of municipal services, but also regarding the methodology for conducting the assessment exercise. For the preparation of the report card, the community provided the most important knowledge (theoretical and practical understanding) which was related to the performance of the municipal services. The women from the survey areas participated in focus group discussions, provided their individual inputs for the design the report card format, visited FPI to understand the research methodology, reviewed the questionnaire and helped design the interview schedule. The community also provided FPI with information through critical comments on data outputs, drafts of brochures, and methods of interaction with the AMC. Fundamentally, the women members of SEWA also provided the information (facts or data) to FPI on levels of services, for example, days when water taps worked; the number of toilets with doors; the last time the toilets were cleaned; the time it takes to launch a complaint; or the number of visits needed to resolve a complaint. Thus the various types of

information generated by the community were fundamental to the success of the report card project.

In turn, FPI provided the community with information on the city of Ahmedabad, basic municipal services, their ongoing performance, and how service levels impact the poor. Also transferring information to the community on how AMC functions, ward numbers, names of zonal officers, contacts, complaint forms and formats, and transferring skills to the community such as how to develop questions and questionnaires, formulate a survey schedule, decide on survey methods and present data, both through written and oral presentations. Significantly, the type of information and knowledge collected and disseminated by the report card project was jointly decided upon. Though in many ways it involved mainly statistical and 'hard' information, FPI worked to ensure that such data would not alienate the community from the exercise, emphasising the importance of the process, as well as the findings.

3.2 Transfer and Dissemination

The report card project demonstrates use of a wide range of dissemination channels and methods, ranging from face-to-face interviews, the training of trainers, topical photo exhibitions, handouts at meetings, speeches at public meetings, formal overhead projector presentations, focus groups, discussion groups, and various written documents. For example, the provision by FPI to the community of information on the city of Ahmedabad and its services was mainly done through charts in the preparatory and design group meetings, with training materials used in the housing clinics, leaflets handed out in meetings, brochures circulated at consultations, articles published in the Anasuya newsletter, exhibitions and a series of presentations. FPI also transferred information to the community on how AMC functions through the questionnaire, analysis meetings and housing clinics where leaflets, talks and charts were used. In addition, the project organised actual site visits to the AMC main office, specific slum or service locations, and to NGOs.

Much of the written information was disseminated in the form of brochures, research reports, training materials, flip charts, photo-sheets, exhibitions, and a poster series. Each format was chosen with care, keeping in mind the final user, forum, timing, specific interest, topicality and the need for a constructive approach. For example, the municipal councillors were informed in a presentation in the Gujarati language and performance data were analysed by political constituency. The impact was immediate. Similarly, in the event organised by the City Managers'

Association, the overhead presentation format was designed to highlight the critical action areas for city officials. School children were also selected as a target audience and presented the information in a series of one-photo one-fact posters.

The main resource required for effective information and communication is time. If the dissemination event is known in advance, if the audience is known as well as their topic and interest, information can be adapted and tailor made to needs. Further, there is frequently a need to eliminate certain unsuitable issues or change the sequence of information presentation for maximum impact, for example, information referring to 'bribes' paid to AMC officials to ensure that community complaints were resolved was eliminated from the first presentation made to young AMC officers, instead being presented as 'speed money'. In another case, during a housing clinic, the participants were invited to arrange the sequence of the framed posters according to their own priorities, which needed no additional resources except a few minutes of their time. However, this greatly increased the impact of the dissemination presentation.

It is also important to take full advantage of any opportunities that arise for dissemination, for example, in preparation of the water sector document for the Five-Year Plan, the Government of India held a joint consultation with the World Bank, in which FPI was also invited to participate. Having a channel available, FPI made a presentation called 'Performance of Water Services in Ahmedabad: AMC's Agenda', where the report card on water services was presented. Faults or defects were presented as an Agenda for Action. Both the presentation and criticism were well received. In making such a choice of what to present and where, flexibility of resources is useful. For example, a dissemination event need not require special organisation but can instead involve the recognition of a suitable event organised by others which can be used as a platform to disseminate information. FPI has faced situations where specifically organised dissemination events have been thinly attended, and subsequently, resources have not been available for public policy advocacy efforts or to attend other public meetings of great significance to the project.

In the report card project, two points were kept in mind in managing the flow of information with community residents. Firstly, organisations like FPI generally extract information from communities, intending to eventually use it to develop a project that is meant to benefit these communities. At times, even this does not materialise, and often communities realise this but feel too meek to react, making them reluctant partners. Sometimes communities realise what is taking place, but they contain their anger. To avoid this exploitative approach, during the report card

project, FPI made it a point of having immediate and speedy two-way exchanges of information. If information was collected from a community focus group, then another related or even unrelated, but meaningful, piece of information was immediately exchanged with them. For example, if the community provided information on municipal staff behaviour, then FPI would provide information on AMC budget allocation, or a newspaper clipping on low levels of water services during the summer. Sometimes, minutes of previous meetings with them or on relevant issues were useful in these exchanges. The second point FPI adhered to was to let the information-giving group know how the information was used. If these two points are addressed, issues related to upward or downward flow of information are virtually solved, as the two become balanced.

FPI also learned through the report card project that an ideal 'inclusive' channel for dissemination is hard to find. There is pressure from participation experts and community experts to make information exchange processes open, inviting, accessible and inclusive. FPI found that it is important to endeavour to include most interests and groups and ideas, but a process that is inclusive to all ideas and all individuals is not possible all the time. The process must include more ideas and additional individuals from time to time, as the need arises. In fact, it is far more effective to have a series of targeted and well-prepared 'inclusive' events for dissemination. For example, presenting the report card at an event that included both the AMC administration and the AMC elected wing would have been counterproductive; both have to be informed separately, and only later, selected individuals from both the groups may be invited to participate in a third event where they jointly discuss issues. In addition, it is also necessary to know how to exclude individuals and ideas that are not helpful to the process, group or community. Now enough is known about how to democratically and positively take an idea or interest or individual out of the process. 'Universal Inclusion' may be a democratic ideal, but it is not suitable for universal application.

The selection of the location for transfer or dissemination is also important, especially when dealing with community residents. Often it is advocated by participation experts that dissemination must take place in the community, with the disseminators 'going native', sitting on the floor with the residents. In many cases, this may be necessary, but in the report card project FPI learnt that these gestures, however genuine, have their limits. It must be remembered that local people generally know who you are and why you are there. At FPI, it has been found that it is better to

forthrightly let others know who you are - urban, middle class, professional - and then show your intention not to dominate the process. When there is a partnership with the community to achieve a common goal, it is important that the partners know each other as they are. The professionals, such as FPI members, must interact with and learn about the community, but the community must also understand what FPI is, what it does and such like. This means that venues for information exchange with community residents need not always take place in the community, and instead those who participate in any meeting need to be informed about the location beforehand to pre-empt possible intimidation. If this is achieved, the transfer of information or skills or knowledge can take place anywhere, be it in a hut or the class room a leading academic institution. Housing clinics, for example, were held in the Hotel Rivera on the banks of the Sabarmati River, the FPI office in an old house, and in MHT office in an old town house in Madalpur village in Ahmedabad. Location does matter, but its importance must be set within context.

3.3 Learning

From the processes surrounding the design, implementation and dissemination of the report card project and its findings, several stakeholders groups emerged as learners. Community members in the survey area received information to enable them to realise that the issues related to the performance of basic services are widespread and a matter of concern for all poor citizens. For example, they learned that complaining about one public toilet that is not working is important, but the impact is much greater when the community unites to complain about 100 toilets that are not working, being able to provide data indicating which toilets are out of order and for how long. Residents also learned about the power of information, for example, the AMC states that 12 kilograms of DDT are sprayed around public toilets in specific locations, but the survey data revealed that not a single respondent has seen DDT or a sprinkler in those areas during the previous four months. The community needs to either disprove the official AMC information on the performance of its services or present counter-data so that the AMC has to take the complaint more seriously. Also, through the housing clinics, the community gained a better theoretical understanding on how a city works for the poor and the rich, and how much the poor pay for services (in many cases more than the rich). Community residents also received information on how levels of services are measured and where AMC has openings for citizens like them to enter the decision-making process in order to influence decisions and operations. Also those chosen to participate in the housing clinics were expected to gain some skills in directly and effectively

contacting AMC zonal offices for improvements in levels of services.

The report card project was also intended to help SEWA to assess the living conditions of their members, to identify system-wide efforts that could be made to improve service levels, and to have a tool with which to influence public policy. SEWA also learned that each of their members is a source of direct, authentic, useful and updated information on public services, which is useful to the community, to SEWA and to public policy. In addition, it learned that city-wide information has stronger public policy influence. Another lesson arising from the project was that different people should be exposed to different kinds of information in order to maximise their learning, for example, a key SEWA informer in a housing clinic gained a great deal when she joined the FPI team in disseminating the report card to the AMC officials. This is also key for community residents, for involving them in several roles enables that to build up skills and confidence.

For AMC, the report card provided a more accurate picture of the level of services from the users' perspective, as well as baseline data on the level of services that could be used to determine which services performed better and where, and whether performance levels changed over time. This was expected to help AMC decide if money spent on these services was making a corresponding impact on their performance, as well as help AMC in deciding which strategic actions would bring about widespread satisfaction with minimum efforts of time and resources. AMC learned that allocation of funds and actual performance are two separate issues and that user satisfaction matters. User feedback is valuable and useful if it is in certain formats. Instead of rejecting or countering non-AMC information, it is possible to accept it, and in fact use it.

or FPI, the report card helped them acquire city-wide information that was of use at the city level. The information also helped FPI become better known at the community level, as well as at various levels in AMC and the Government of Gujarat administration. The data, in many ways, helped FPI with specific public policy interventions from AMC to the Government of India in the areas of water, sanitation and urban sectors. In addition, FPI learned about a set of issues involved in urban infrastructure and governance sectors and a new method of holding authorities accountable and improving city governance using operational information from the users. Between PAC and FPI the flows of information and learning were multiple, for example, FPI learned from PAC that it is important to collect robust data, and for that it is possible to hire outside expertise if the task is well

defined in terms of scope and services. FPI also learned from PAC that a systematic and step-by-step approach is useful when dealing with the authorities. Though it is not formally known, it may be inferred that PAC learned also from FPI that it is also desirable to focus on the poor among the citizens, that it is useful for a professional agency, such as FPI, to team up with membership based organisations, and that it is possible to use information and data to influence others without widespread media dissemination.

During the report card project, two groups that proved to be difficult to reach were urban poverty academics, and the engineering staff in administrative high offices in AMC. Academics who have worked on poverty or urban services or Ahmedabad have well-defined and well-argued cases or points of view and as a result, they find it difficult to communicate with the community or FPI. These urban poverty experts find it difficult to accept complexities and contradictions in information or knowledge. They expect it to be clear, simple and logical, however there some academic insitutions prove to be notable exceptions to this norm.

3.4 Use and Impact

The worth of any information is measured by how it is used and to what end. That is, information should be used as widely as possible and in as many formats as possible. Often more time and money is spent on deciding what information to collect, how to collect it, and how to analyse it, while relatively limited time is spent on actually using it for a range of purposes. It was difficult for FPI to explain this point to NFI, namely, that usable data is more valuable than scholarly data. In the case of the information generated though the assessment of municipal service performance, widespread use was made of it. For example SEWA used it for its organisational work, SEWA Bank used it for its financial planning, AMC used it as baseline data for international proposals, and FPI used it to expand its own urban sector work, while frequently the community utilised the information to resolve community problems. Certainly, after the exercise more SEWA members came forward to register complaints on the poor performance of services in SEWA Chowk.

Should the report card exercise be repeated at the same large scale, SEWA and MHT now have to capacity to do it, with much less input from FPI. MHT has internalised housing clinics and conducts them on a weekly basis, independently of PAC or SEWA. FPI has combined the report card and housing clinic methods with its action planning exercise, which it carries out with local communities to develop a new 'tool box' for participation. Unfortunately, the learning impact of the report card on AMC has been comparatively less, but perhaps it is to be expected that the agency whose performance is being assessed is least likely to promote the process. Also, key

personnel within AMC who were enthusiastic about the project were subsequently transferred within AMC or beyond, taking their enthusiasm and knowledge of the initiative with them.

3.5 Replication

Since the completion of the exercise, SEWA has used the methodology to rate its own organisational performance, and it has also used the methodology to assess other services. MHT has used the housing clinic methodology in its involvement in 12 slums under the Parivartan Slum Networking Project of AMC and is also using it the report card methodology as a foundation for a baseline survey. FPI has also replicated the housing clinic and report card methodologies in several other projects. For example, it developed a report card of the Corporate Sector on Government of Gujarat Cyclone Relief, and report cards on municipal services in six small *nagarpalikas* of Gujarat. It can thus be shown that the approach developed by FPI, SEWA and PAC for capturing community's attitudes toward the services they receive has great potential to be replicated in other areas, or to be used for the assessment of other issues or problems.

SECTION 4 LESSONS LEARNED

4.1 The potential of robust and systematic data

From the report card initiative, it is apparent that information generated by communities gains in power when it is has the potential to be aggregated or disaggregated, and systematically organised for small or large areas, thus maximising its usefulness and impact.

4.2 The potential of organised communities to use data

Robust and organised information, when matched with organisation of the poor, increases its impact manifold. This requires poor men and women to develop the skills to handle data, present it and not be intimidated by statistics.

4.3 The process used to generate information is important

The case study reveals that while the data generated by survey can in itself be used to great effect, the actual process of collecting, analysing, managing and owning the information is just as crucial, especially if poor people are to gain the confidence and skills to effectively use information for their benefit.

4.4 Dissemination needs to be constructive and tailored

When information is to be used to influence others, for example the use of the report card to influence AMC policy, then the methods used for its presentation and transfer are crucial. A constructive approach is the one which does not push people to reject, counter or doubt the information, but allows them to tolerate, review, and be open to the information. This may call for step-by-step use of collected and analysed information. Sudden transfers of an entire package of information may in fact hinder learning.

4.5 The importance of identifying common interests

Different stakeholders have different and multiple interests in information, learning and communication which may clash or overlap. While co-ordination and careful planning to meet all information needs is ideal, often this is not possible. Thus, rallying common interests in information is important, building on them to encourage learning and ultimately to maximise the use to which the information is put.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (1991). **Amdavad**.
- Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (1998). **Public Issue of Municipal Bonds**. (A Presentation).
- Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (1997). **Statistical Outline of Ahmedabad City – 1996-97**.
- Ahmedabad Study Action Group (1992). **List of Slums and Chawls in Ahmedabad**.
- Disaster Mitigation Institute (1997). **Basic Urban Services: Users' Views**.
- Edadan, Narayan (1997). **Urban Governance and Capacity Building: Experience from Ahmedabad and Surat Municipal Corporation**.
- Foundation for Public Interest (1998). **Innovations in Urban Partnerships in Ahmedabad**. UN-Habitat Best Practice Submission.
- Foundation for Public Interest (1997). **Report Card of Poor Self Employed Women on Public Services in Ahmedabad**.
- Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (1997). **Urban Partnerships in Ahmedabad: Lessons Learned**. (A Presentation).
- Oxfam (1997). **Urban Poverty in India: Strategy for Research and Action**.
- Tripathi, Dwijendra (1998). **Alliance for Change: A Slum Networking Experiment in Ahmedabad**. Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company Ltd.
- Twigg, John and Bhatt, Mihir R (1998). **Understanding Vulnerability: South Asian Perspectives**. Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Vikas Centre for Development (1996). **Life and Living of Urban Poor, Ahmedabad, Gujarat**.
- Bhatt, Mihir R.; Mehta, Trupti; Khosla, Saloni; Mahadevia, Darshini; and D'costa, Wilfred, C. (1998). **Poverty and Vulnerability in Ahmedabad**. Final Draft, Urban Poverty Research Programme, Oxfam (Ahmedabad). November.