

Returns from Investment in Government-Citizens Interface *An Evaluation*

This Briefing Paper aims to inform development and social accountability practitioners about the results of investment in implementing Community Score Card with regard to improvement in service delivery and governance at local level.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, donors and development aid agencies alike have invested heavily in the participatory development. The World Bank alone has allocated almost US\$85bn to participatory projects and decentralisation efforts.¹ Other development agencies – bilateral donors and regional development banks – have probably spent at least as much. Driving this massive injection of funding has been the underlying belief that participatory programmes enhance the involvement of the poor and the marginalised in the community-level decision-making bodies in order to give citizens greater say in decisions those affect their lives.

There have also been questions raised consistently about the effectiveness of such spending for improving the development outcomes. The debate continues and there has not been much research to answer the questions raised. Hence, there is genuine need of further investigation and evaluation of results of such participatory development interventions before arriving at any conclusion. This small evaluation report critically examines these concerns and tries to understand the return of investment (RoI) of creating interface between citizens and government with regard to development outcomes.

This Briefing paper is based on the realisation of facts associated with the use of social accountability (SAC) tool – Community Score Card (CSC) – through evaluation. The tool was utilised in a project entitled, ‘Developing a culture of good governance and accountability in the state of Rajasthan, India through involving CSOs and building their capacity with a focus on improving the public expenditure outcomes’ implemented by CUTS in partnership with

Affiliated Network of Social Accountability – South Asia Region (ANSA SAR) during 2010-12.

With an objective of taking strategic action against the fast spreading culture of anti-governance practices, the project attempted to build a cadre of people from community-based organisations (CBOs) in all 33 districts of Rajasthan State of India those can utilise CSC at the local level in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to improve its governance. 66 representatives from 33 districts, two from each district, were trained on CSC and provided with hands-on experience. After training, these trained people conducted CSC once in MGNREGS in their respective *gram panchayats* to achieve the major objective of improving service delivery and governance of MGNREGS.

It would be ideal to note that the trained people from CBOs tested their learning of CSC only once in the selected *Gram Panchayat* to see its potential of improving implementation of MGNREGS in their locality. The evaluation is done for gathering the glimpses of outcome achieved through the implementation of CSC.

Objective

The central purpose of this evaluation was to gather and document the outcomes achieved through the use of CSC and lessons learnt. This will help expanding the SAC knowledge circle with the aim of offering better guidance to other SAC work on grounds. The other aim was to identify key challenges and constraints faced in implementing CSC at a mass scale and the final objective was to establish how relevant were the activities of SAC approaches, bearing in mind the socio-political context of the places.

¹ “Localising Development: Does Participation Work,” a World Bank Policy Research Report published in November 2012

Methodology

Since this is an evaluation of considerably large scale (66 CSC in the project area) it was not felt necessary, as it was not logical, to carry out an examination of every individual CSC. Consequently, it was decided to undertake around 20 percent of the CSC for the study and review the impact of CSCs at 11 places. The results achieved were noted, analysed and discussed with a relevant group of stakeholders, successes and difficulties were identified, those could promote or jeopardise actions and main lessons or teachings were drawn, forming the conclusions.

The evaluation process involved the approach of comparison of experimental vs. control group. Experimental place is where CSC process was implemented during the intervention and control place is where CSC process was not implemented. 11 new places were selected each adjacent to one experimental place to reduce the impact of other factors which could contribute to any major difference. A comparative study was conducted to see why and what differences exist between the places. This could also bring out reasons for existence of differences.

To do this comparative study, three kind of quantitative and qualitative tools – interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and repeat score card were utilised:

- 40 MGNREGS workers in each experimental and control group, in total; 880 interviews
- 11 FGDs and 11 repeat score card with CSC participants in experimental and 11 FGDs in control group with MGNREGS workers, in total; 22 FGDs & 11 repeat score card
- Local surveyors were oriented by CBOs identified for the evaluation study from the cadre of trained civil society organisations (CSOs). FGDs could be conducted by the evaluation team members

The evaluation study was implemented during July-September 2012.

The Problem of Selection Bias

CSC is a tool which needs consent of both citizens and front-level service providers responsible for the particular service for its implementation. The selection of places (*Gram Panchayat*) to conduct CSC under the project was based on: earlier rapport of the trained CBOs with citizens and service providers in the catchment area; getting the consent of service providers to conduct the score card; the socio-political atmosphere of the place because in this case local *Sarpanch*, who is a political body, was one of service providers; and visible problems in quality implementation of MGNREGS. The selection of places to conduct CSC was not random.

While selecting places to be included in the control group, *gram panchayats* which were adjacent to the *Gram Panchayat* of treatment group were considered so that it can match with socio-economic conditions and other factors, such as distance from district headquarter, geographical conditions etc. But these were not exactly similar *gram panchayats* and their nature varied in several aspects. Hence, results arrived could not be completely attributed to the intervention and in case results could not be achieved, the intervention could not be completely blamed for.

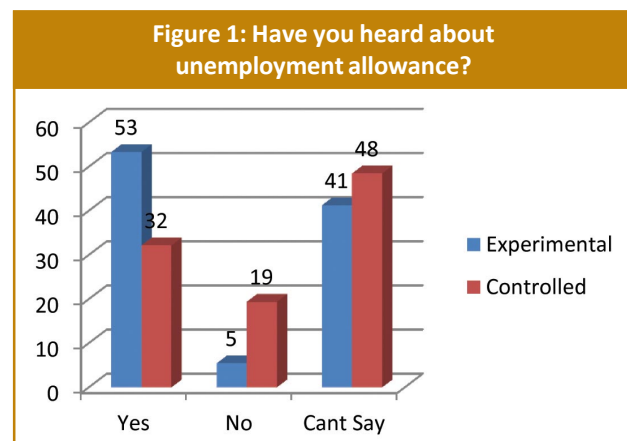
Key Findings

Since the CSC tool is effective at lower level of service delivery and believed to be very effective in engaging service providers as well as recipients, it was envisaged that there will be achievement of several objectives, such as generating awareness on the entitlements of the programme; improving community participation; improving service delivery and resolving immediate MGNREGS concerns; improving relationship between service providers and recipients; enhancing citizen-government engagement and larger goals; improving governance through the implementation of CSC by trained CSOs representatives.

The purpose of this Briefing Paper is to view the effectiveness of CSC in achieving the objectives. The findings of CRC with qualitative inputs from FGDs and repeat score card are described below.

Generating Awareness

The community in the experimental group was aware on rules, wages, entitlements and procedures adopted in MGNREGS than the community in the control group. The community in experimental group was aware especially on those provisions which are generally not revealed by service providers. For example, awareness on dated application receipt, provision of application in groups, unemployment allowances, and travel allowances if going

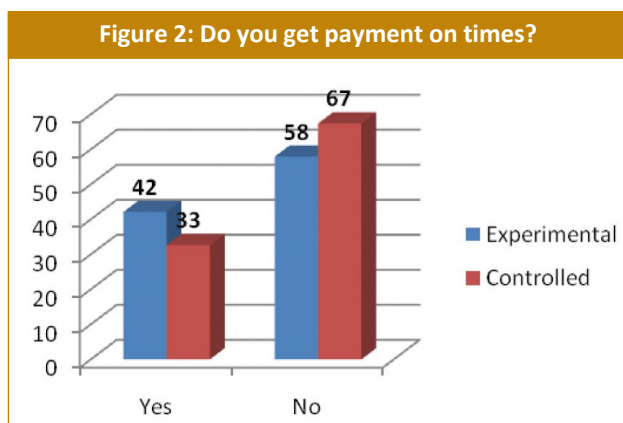


to work for more than 5 km etc. However, the level of awareness was better among places under experimental group, but not in significantly high quantum.

While conducting FGDs, it was found that workers in experimental group were more aware and vocal about the prevailing situation of MGNREGS. The activity of input tracking under CSC has made them aware about the procedure, such as budget allocation and expenditure. The workers were informed about the specific entitlements, such as unemployment benefits and worksite facilities. The information helps empowering workers to demand their rights, also adjudge performance of service providers, but in many cases it was found that even after the information, people were found helpless in getting their entitlements. As found, the degree of enhancement in voice power is not always proportional to the degree of awareness and many times it depends on the context.

Gradual Improvement in MGNREGS Service Delivery

Whether it is the case of applying for getting work in MGNREGS or demanding for dated receipt or getting payment on time or about informing measurement of the work done to the workers, it was found that CSC has been instrumental in improving the status of execution of component of services under NREGS but not overall services.



The service delivery could be improved to the extent through action plan generation during interface meeting of CSC, as reported by several beneficiaries and CBOs in the repeat score card.

During the FGDs, it was revealed that the community benefitted from the CSC process. Once they committed for bringing some improvement in service delivery or resolving some concerns of people regarding MGNREGS implementation, providers were compelled to answer the community about the progress. Collective bargaining also became one of the ways forward to get the issues resolved.

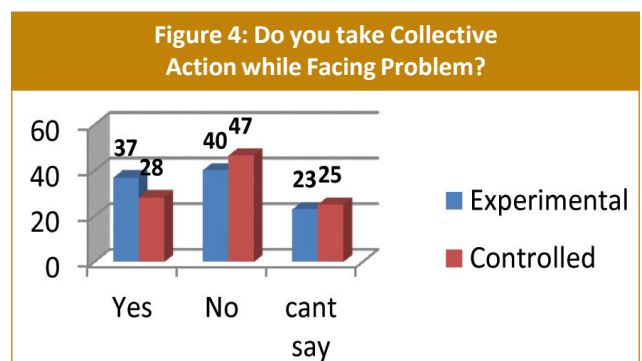
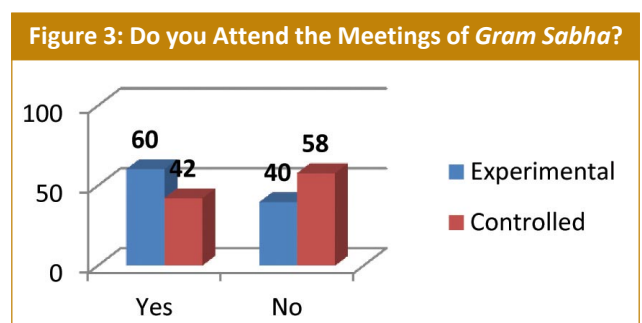
Earlier, when *Panchayat* officials were approached individually, they used to give an excuse for their non-performance. The collective interaction during interface meeting of the CSC provided people with significant voice power and boosted confidence among them in asking questions in the experimental group than in the control group.

Consolidating the experiences of CBOs, it came as a fact that there is at least partial improvement in service delivery through the use of CSC and more permanent changes can be brought with regular use of CSC.

Citizens' Engagement in the Implementation Process

Analysis of data could also establish the fact of enhancement of citizens' engagement in the process of implementation, such as prioritising the work to be held under NREGS, attending *Gram Sabha* meetings conducted under MGNREGS, community putting the point of their interest collectively to get problems resolved under NREGS. It was also found that people are more vocal in expressing their problems to service providers and evaluators during discussion. The positive difference was obvious in experimental and control group with regard to citizen engagement with CSOs and government entities.

Interface meetings have deepened the interaction between citizens and service providers. In a closed governance structure, where people did not feel comfortable in individually interacting with service providers, interface meetings provided the opportunity to collectively express their concerns and develop an action plan for the community. Interactions with beneficiaries suggest that earlier when service providers

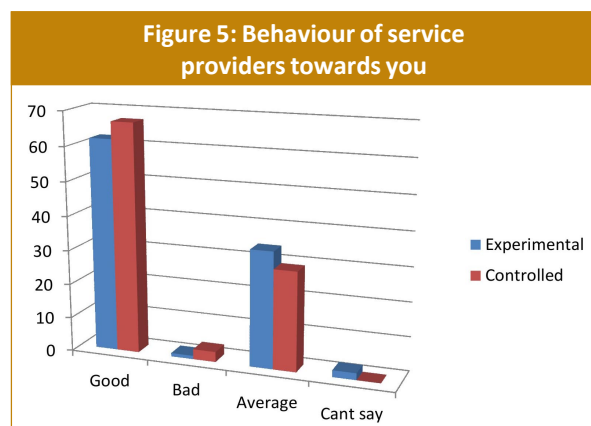


were approached individually by beneficiaries, it was easier for the *Panchayat* to make an excuse, however, in a meeting, service providers are obligated to give an answer to the concerns raised by the people.

Further, the community believed that the relationship between the community and service providers has improved. The attitude of service providers to ignore beneficiaries or procrastinate in resolving their problems has changed to an extent.

Relationship between Service Providers and Recipients

However, one of the major outcome of the implementation of CSC is to improve the relationship between citizens and service providers, surprisingly, it was found that the experimental group had lesser percentage of people in good relationship with service providers than in the controlled group. This came as a finding of interviews but was not obvious during FGDs. It may be possible that service providers feel more irritated due to awareness and questions on citizen’s side after CSC. It was also found that less percentage of people in experimental group are satisfied with the help provided by service providers than in the controlled group. But if these are not the reasons for poor relationship, one of the major objectives of CSC remained counter-productive.



The political situation had been very contrast in case of several *gram panchayats*. Due to revolving electoral system, the seat of the *Gram Panchayat* get reserved for candidates of a particular category (women, SC, ST) for the period of five years. The candidate from particular category can only fight election from the *Gram Panchayat*. This system creates a very different political scenario at many places. In such a contrast situation, dynamics of the relationship between *Sarpanch*, village secretary and community residing in the *Gram Panchayat* is very difficult to understand. The relationship between the community and service providers remained a puzzle.

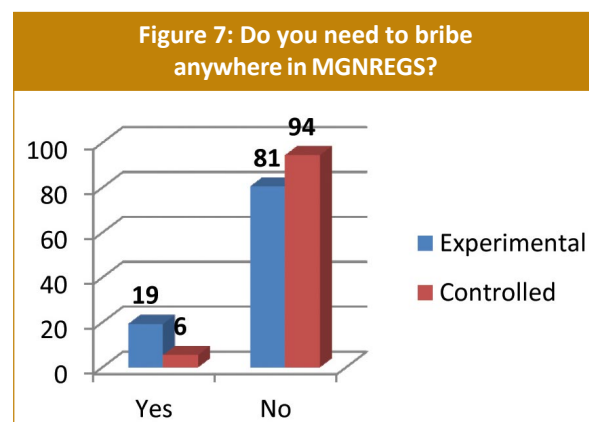
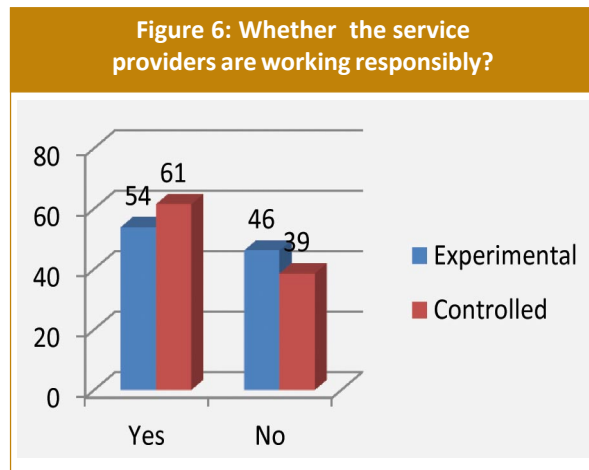
The other reason for deteriorating relationship in the experimental group may be the increase in voice power of the community and development of a questioning attitude which service providers do not like generally.

In stakeholders’ consultation meeting, it came out as an analysis that the relationship may improve as the long-term effect on both providers and recipients would certainly be better, but it is bound to deteriorate initially.

Governance and Accountability

The status of governance was reported poor in experimental than in the controlled group. The people in the experimental group were also found reporting about the need of paying at occasions under MGNREGS. This finding was surprising as it indicates that situation is more difficult in case of experimental group. The controlled group was found better in cases of execution, accountability and corruption.

However, the overall condition with respect to governance and accountability depends on many external factors in the experimental and controlled group. This can also be interpreted as increase in voice power of beneficiaries to speak about the poor



accountability, behaviour of service providers and corruption that was not the case earlier.

One problem expressed by the community was their reluctance to make any complain regarding poor governance. The members of the community said that they do not like complaining about various problems as most of the people involved in implementing the scheme (*Rojgar Sahayak, Mate, Sarpanch*) are from village *panchayat* itself.

Individual Cases

The evaluation study revealed several changes happening on the ground through the use of the CSC process in the implementation of MGNREGS. Some of the individual cases are highlighted here:

1) Several changes are visible now in experimental *Gram Panchayat Dhikola* of Bhilwara district. The findings of both qualitative and quantitative assessment tell the story of change. There is enhanced level of awareness among the community about their rights and entitlements. The delay up to five months was usual in payment of wages, but now the process is accelerated and payment is possible within 15 days of duration. Average wage is increased between ₹90-120 which was as lowest as ₹19 in earlier case. This was possible because of improvement in measurement procedure of executed work. The payment is also timely and given during the day time in a school which is closer to the village. There was a complaint of citizens regarding time and place of the wage payment. But the measurement on individual group basis is still not started and average payment is made to all workers.

Frequency of visit of Auxiliary Nurse Midwives at worksites has increased now and medicines are also made available there for MGNREGS workers. Four tent and crèches have been provided by the department to *Gram Panchayat* office. Water facilities are also available. Another work of preparing a gravel road is also started after the CSC process in the *Gram Panchayat* to avoid situation of deficiency for job seeking villagers. . Beneficiaries are happier that service providers listen to their issues with more patience and try to resolve them. This has considerably helped improving the relationship between them. The enhanced level of empowerment among women is visible in the *Gram Sabha* and other fortnightly meetings.

2) In experimental *Gram Panchayat Tordi* of Tonk district, several changes have been noticed after implementation of CSC. The awareness is visible in the meetings of MGNREGS, *Gram Sabha*. The

women are seen more participatory than earlier. The ward members are also seen more active after CSC and it seems that they have realised their obligation towards workers in MGNREGS. The people in Tordi had raised voice against the selection of members of social audit committee. Taking the opposition people into consideration, *Gram Panchayat* selected new members. The *Gram Panchayat* office remains open for relatively more period of time.

3) In experimental *Gram Panchayat Bardia veerji* of Jhalawar district, the wage-related problem has been resolved after CSC. The worksite facilities have also improved. Crèche facility is also provided by *Gram Panchayat* when there are more than five children. The first-aid box is kept at the worksite for its use during the day. Behaviour change is noticed in Mate, who speaks now in moderate voice with MGNREGS workers and asks also about their problems regularly. The enhanced voice power is witnessed among few female workers, who also have started participating in the *Gram Sabha* and raising their concerns.

4) In experimental *Gram Panchayat Dolia* of Kota district, the level of awareness about the provisions of MGNREGS among workers has enhanced. There is increased discussion at the *Gram Sabha* meetings as people have started speaking and the relationship between service providers and recipients has improved. The workers have gathered detailed information regarding the implementation of MGNREGS and started asking queries and taking part in monitoring activities. Further they report to the village council office for rectifying problems. It has been able to create some rippling effect on other services like ICDS. Two new ICDS centres have opened in the *Gram Panchayat* after demand from the community.

5) In experimental *Gram Panchayat Khariberi* of Jodhpur district, service providers accepted that information gap on provisions of MGNREGS was root problem in the implementation of the scheme. This has been substantially reduced after the implementation of CSC in *Gram Panchayat*. The service providers have started providing the relevant and new information regarding the implementation to workers where as in earlier situation, they used to sit on the information. Several changes, such as job demand in group by workers, service providers providing the dated receipt to job applicants after submitting application, mate providing the information to the group workers after daily measurement. The

people have succeeded in getting their wages in their village by the postmaster as a result of collective bargaining from the post office.

Lesson Learnt

1. The use of SAc approaches is most effective when it is used in a situation where both providers and recipients are willing to improve the scenario through mutual cooperation.

CBOs at the local level also do not want to be in confrontation with service providers and seen as the agent of community working against providers; hence sometimes they become submissive to providers and start talking diplomatically or taking side of the providers. This happens mainly because more power lies with service providers than citizens.

2. Evidences suggest that the people who are geographically isolated and more in need of improved services are not benefitted in most of the cases as visualised in the concept of the CSC.
3. The evaluation suggests that CSC has very limited effect, when there are provisions of inputs are little for improving the services however, it creates big impact when inputs for the service are strong.
4. Community is benefitted from the collective action taken by them which is not in case of approaching service providers on an individual basis. When providers are approached individually, it is easier to ignore. The community members also felt that approaching service providers in a group is more suitable option for resolving of grievances.

Limitations

The greatest limitation in the evaluation of this intervention was the difficulty in isolating the effects of the initiative from other factors contributing to the desired change. Since the evaluation was not designed in the project implementation process, there was no baseline information available and thus quantifying change was very difficult.

Another major limitation is the difficulty in operationalising (defining how to measure) key concepts that have great conceptual power but do not translate easily into quantifiable indicators (e.g., citizens' voice power). Hence, it was only a kind of adopting progress

markers those can show some results to complement the quantitative indicators with qualitative assessments.

Representatives of CBOs who were trained on CSC could only test their learning in one of the service deliveries under MGNREGS in a *Gram Panchayat* to see its potential in achieving its objectives including major objective of improving service delivery. One time implementation of CSC had a limited effect and thus was difficult to segregate and quantify.

Other limitations were related to the methodology adopted for the evaluation. In controlled group, situations were not so much controlled to do the comparative analysis. There was also limitation of nullifying the selection bias in the methodology.

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence for positive results of the assessment is scattered and generally not very enthusiastic. Actually, it was unrealistic to expect considerable results of changed behaviour, improved governance, relationship between providers and beneficiaries and improved status of service delivery with the implementation of one time CSC process. While significant positive results with regard to resolving local issues related to services under MNREGS were achieved, findings show adverse effects of CSC on governance and relationship is also there.

The use of qualitative tools to substantiate findings of the study could be helpful in zeroing in on the reasons for both the positive and adverse results. The simplest explanation for the adverse effects on governance outcomes is that existing structures are resilient and more fundamental change is not being achieved. The findings with regard to the deteriorated relationship and behaviour of service providers, it can be said that the behaviour might have changed negatively in the short term, but will improve in the long term.

Another possibility is that the scale of the CSC was too small to generate positive changes but even then the indicators related to awareness, community participation etc. have shown considerable progress. Hence, the evaluation produces mixed evidences of positive and adverse results.

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