

Handout

Module 4: Social Accountability Tool

Citizen Report Card



Module 4: Social Accountability Method and Tools
Module 4.4: Citizen Report Cards

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Key Learning

Citizen Report Cards

1. Definition

Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) are participatory surveys that solicit user feedback on the performance of public services. CRCs can significantly enhance public accountability through the extensive media coverage and civil society advocacy that accompanies the process.

2. Purpose

The CRC methodology envisions the following objectives:

- Generate citizen feedback on the degree of satisfaction with the services provided by various public service agencies and also, provide reliable estimates of corruption and other hidden costs
- Catalyze citizens and civil society organizations to demand for more accountability, accessibility and responsiveness from the service providers
- Serve as a diagnostic tool for service providers, external consultants and analysts/researchers to facilitate effective prognosis and solutions
- Encourage public agencies to adopt and promote citizen friendly practices, design performance standards and facilitate transparency in operations.

3. How can this be implemented?

Stage 1: Assessment of Local Conditions

- **Assess Your Locality** (Political Context, Decentralization, Security, Citizen's Freedom to Voice, Presence and Activism of CSOs, Professional NGO Activity, Quality of Media, Leadership Orientation of Service Providers, Government Interest)
- **Statement of Purpose** (what service(s) or sectors do you wish to cover? Do you want to focus on a single service provider or multiple services?)
- **Gathering Local Feedback: Focus Groups Discussions** (Holding focus group discussions (FGDs) with citizens from the population of interest is an effective way to finalize the purpose of the CRC.._)

Stage 2: Pre-survey Groundwork

- **Prepare Schedule of CRC**
- **Finances**
- **Identify Task for and train them**
- **Review the Statement of Purpose:** *Meet with Service Providers:* Meetings with service providers will help you to collect more details on service provisions.
- **Writing Questions and Answers**
 - Closed-ended or open-ended questions
 - Suitable Ways of Evaluation - Considering standards: Example: How often do you get drinking water? Answer:
 - 1- More than once a day
 - 2- Once in a day
 - 3- Less than once a day
 - *Create Standards:* (Km, Litter which are commonly understood)
 - Appropriate answer scales.

Example: How do you rate the reliability of public road transport services, in your area/village?

- 1- Good
- 2- Average
- 3- Poor
- 4- Cannot comment

- Coding and Organizing the Questionnaire: The coding of questions, the internal organization of sections) make sure that the question is in order.
- Fine-tuning the Questionnaire (cover all the stated objectives of the CRC, have the questionnaire the shortest length possible. Resist the temptation to “pad” the questionnaire; only include those questions that will be analyzed!, use simple and explicit language, include clear instructions for investigators; make sure “skip” commands are located where necessary, make sure the flow or order of questions makes sense, do you have too many open-ended questions? (Too many open-ended questions will make the data entry and analysis stages difficult!) are users of services capable of answering the type of questions that are asked? avoid double barrel questions, or questions that make an assumption about the respondent)
- Sampling Design (type and size)
- The sampling design depends on the purpose of the CRC and the population of interest. The CRC aims to gather feedback from the population of interest. However, to collect feedback from the entire population is extremely costly and can take a lot of time.
- Finalizing the Questionnaire: Pilot Survey

Stage 3: Conducting the Survey

- **Training of Investigators**

- **Carrying out the Survey – Execute Sampling Design**

Quality Checks (each team supervisor and the field coordinator should perform quality checks to ensure reliable and accurate data collection)

Accompanied Interviews

To ensure that the survey process is unbiased and carried out properly, the supervisor should accompany each investigator and observe several interviews in progress. A good rule of thumb is to have at least 10% of the interviews observed through accompaniment.

Spot Checks

Surprise visits during an interview that is in progress, or spot checks, by the field coordinator also serve as a good quality control measure.

Back Checks

- The field coordinator should randomly select 30% of the completed questionnaires and perform back checks.
- Back checks involve selecting a few key questions and confirming the respondent’s response for these questions.
- The purpose is to ensure that the information marked in the schedule reflects the true opinion of the respondent. This can be done through a house visit or phone call.
- Usually 25%-30% of the interviews are back checked.

Final Scrutiny of Schedules

Field supervisors should check questionnaires before leaving an area, and at the end of each ` day by a pre-selected scrutiny team.

Scrutiny in the field

- Once an interview has been completed further scrutiny is required to ensure that the information marked in the questionnaires is correct.
- The field supervisor should carefully check through every completed questionnaire to ensure that the questionnaires are filled in accurately. This should occur daily before leaving a field area.
- If gaps are found or answers appear inconsistent, the supervisor should request the investigator to go back to the household and correct the mistake.

End-of-day Scrutiny

After the questionnaires have been checked for quality in the field, a trained team should complete 100% scrutiny of the questionnaires.

Simultaneous Data Entry

Simultaneous data entry during the survey period creates a final opportunity to notice unreasonable answers or missed questions in time to correct an error.

Stage 4: Post Survey Analysis

- **Data Entry.**

- The pre-coded questions can be directly entered.
- For open-ended questions, similar answers should be grouped into categories and manually coded.

- **Accuracy Check**

The data that has been entered into the central database should be checked for accuracy. This step is very important, whether data entry takes place in-house or if it is outsourced.

- **Generating the Findings** With the creation of a database of citizen responses, it is time to generate the findings.

- **Categories of CRC Findings**

- Estimates on aspects of service delivery
- Comparisons across services (level of satisfaction across service providers (water, electricity, health, sanitation) in a city.
- Comparisons across localities (evaluating the percentage of residents who have door-to-door garbage clearance in the East zone of a city in comparison to the West zone).
- Comparisons over time (tracking the change in satisfaction with the quality of drinking water in a town over a five-year period using data from two CRCs — one at the beginning of the five-year period and one at the end.)

- **Sections of the CRC Main Report**

- Executive Summary (It presents a brief version of the purpose, methodology, and major findings of the CRC).
- Survey Objectives (
- Methodology (how was information gathered? location and respondent)
- Major Findings
- Conclusions & Policy Recommendations

Stage 5: Dissemination of Findings

- **Planning a Dissemination Strategy** (identifying the target audience/stakeholders: public service providers, civil Society Organizations (regional, national & international), media- print, radio & TV (regional & national), general Population, government (at higher levels and regional levels), donors/ Supporters.

- **Methods of Dissemination**

- Pre-launch presentations,

- Media conference,
- Press Note
- Post-launch presentations,
- Creative opportunities

4. Strengths and Challenges

a- Strengths

- CRCs can be used to assess either one public service or several services simultaneously.
- The feedback can be collected from a large population through careful sampling.
- CRCs are quite technical and thus there may not be a need for a major citizen mobilization effort to get the process started.
- Perceived improvements in service quality can be compared over time or across various public agencies involved in service provision.

b- Challenges

- CRCs require a well thought out dissemination strategy so that getting public agencies take note of citizen feedback and take the required action to correct weaknesses.
- In locations where there is not much technical capacity, CRCs may be difficult to design and implement.
- If there is an error in sampling, the quality of service may not be reflected in the survey results.

Key Learning:

- The CRC methodology should not be seen as a social science survey that ends with a written report. Findings need to be publicly distributed and followed up!
- CRC surveys are not opinion polls. The findings only include feedback from individuals who have used a particular service, not from any member of the general public.
- The CRC methodology includes several stages, each with its own skill requirements. A reliable, independent, and local institution is required to lead the effort; it will need to partner with different organizations to carry out a CRC.