

# Improving Public Service Delivery in Pakistan through Citizen Feedback



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ..... 1  
 Delivery Challenges..... 2  
 Addressing Delivery Challenges ..... 3  
 Lessons Learned ..... 4  
 References ..... 5

### PROJECT DATA

<b>ORGANIZATION:</b> Punjab Information Technology Board	<b>SECTOR:</b> Governance
<b>ORGANIZATION TYPE:</b> Government body	<b>COUNTRY:</b> Pakistan
<b>DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES:</b> Improving government service delivery; human resources and organizational capacity	<b>REGION:</b> South Asia
<b>DELIVERY CHALLENGES:</b> Commitment and Leadership: Opposition or Lack of Consensus; Basic Infrastructure: Information and Communication Technology; Human Resources and Organizational Capacity: Staff Turnover	<b>PROJECT DURATION:</b> 2012–2017
	<b>AUTHOR</b> Hasnain Iqbal

## Introduction

In 2008, the public service delivery mechanism in Pakistan was outdated and inefficient because of a lack of digitization and process automation. The inadequacy of the system led to inefficient service delivery, petty corruption, unnecessary hurdles, and incompetent staff. All of these problems put a strain on government resources and inconvenienced citizens. The situation was especially critical in Punjab, the most populous province in Pakistan, where millions of people relied on the government to provide driver’s licenses, issue certificates of residency, register property, and provide health care, among other services. Reforming the public service delivery mechanism in Punjab was particularly challenging because it required changing a culture of inefficiency and rent seeking entrenched deep within the system.

It was difficult for complainants to proceed against inefficient and corrupt officials due the absence of a structured and transparent accountability mechanism. An additional hurdle, though, was the lack of digitized service delivery processes, which made it impossible to track the recipients of service delivery, the officials who provided the service, and the quality of service delivered. The strength of evidence was often low when officials monitored cases of petty corruption and inefficiency. Often, the accused official persuaded the complainant to withdraw a complaint by applying pressure (e.g., threatening to deny service) or by offering to return the bribe paid.

One of the limitations of the traditional approach to accountability through performance evaluations was that there were no concrete performance indicators and hence no actual data to gauge an official’s performance. Most of the time,

**Acknowledgements:** This case study was one of the five winning entries in the 2019 Global Delivery Initiative Case Study Competition, which focused on service delivery in fragile, conflict-affected, and transitional situations. Hasnain Iqbal, the author, was a director at the Punjab Information Technology Board leading the Citizen Feedback Monitoring Program.

conversations about a civil servant's performance were based on a subjective evaluation of how a particular office was performing.

In 2008, concerns about petty corruption led one district in Punjab to pilot a new system, the Citizen Feedback Monitoring Program (CFMP), to address the monitoring and evaluation challenge (Masud 2015). The CFMP took a different path and crowd-sourced feedback on public service delivery through cell phones. This feedback was a tool to both monitor service delivery and evaluate the performance of officials. In 2011, the provincial government approved an expansion of the project based on positive comments from citizens who had used the system (Masud 2015). In 2012, the Punjab Information Technology Board, the information technology arm of the Punjab government, implemented the program across 36 districts in Punjab and 25 different public services.<sup>1</sup>

The CFMP sought feedback on a citizen's actual experience with government service delivery after that service was rendered. Analytical reports aggregated citizen feedback by service and by district. The reports were sent to government officials, thereby enabling the officials to identify problems and implement evidence-based corrective measures to improve service delivery.

Many citizens were hesitant to approach government officials on their own, especially in rural localities, where literacy was low. This problem, in turn, led to a lack of awareness among citizens of their rights and greater fear of retaliation by government officials. The CFMP provided these citizens with a platform through which they could voice their grievances.

## Delivery Challenges

It was a challenge to come up with the ideal methodology to reach out to 100 million citizens across 36 districts of Punjab.

### Commitment and Leadership: Opposition or Lack of Consensus

It was difficult to motivate government officials to use the online feedback collection portal. Because of the historical disconnect between government officials

and citizens, making those officials act on the basis of citizen feedback was a challenge. The absence of a legal framework that embedded citizen feedback as a key performance indicator in the evaluation criteria of government officials allowed significant space for official inaction, which diminished the program's efficacy in improving service delivery.

Securing a budget allocation for the CFMP was also a challenge. District government officials were reluctant to fund a program that generated evidence about their performance in delivering services. The program also expected officials to take corrective actions that were based on citizen feedback and to provide evidence of those actions (although there was no explicit legal requirement to do so). The costs incurred by the program, including for data analysts, call center services, and telecommunications, were not unsubstantial. The provincial government had to pay for the program because the financial burden might have discouraged districts from adopting the program.

Other challenges included securing accurate and complete citizen data from public service providers, motivating citizens to provide their accurate cell phone numbers, and countering the resistance of service providers to recording actual citizen data and cell numbers. All of these factors impeded accurate feedback collection.

### Basic Infrastructure: Information and Communication Technology

Implementers lacked data on the full universe of citizens who were using public services. This lack was due to inadequate information technology infrastructure, especially in public sector hospitals. For example, government hospitals had no mechanism to digitally record the details of all the citizens coming for treatment. Even if the hospitals had the ability to digitally record citizens' details at the point of service delivery, connecting the service delivery database to the CFMP database in real time was challenging because officials were reluctant to provide access to their database.

### Human Resource and Organizational Capacity: Staff Turnover

Expanding CFMP to all 36 districts of Punjab was challenging because of frequent transfers of relevant government officials. Engaging with new district

<sup>1</sup> The Punjab Information Technology Board's mission was to improve governance through the use of technology.

government officials to make the case for the importance of citizen feedback was taxing and slowed down uptake of the program.

## Human Resource and Organizational Capacity: Organizational Capacity

When an SMS (short message service) text model was used to collect feedback, a major challenge was deciphering the text messages sent by citizens. Low citizen literacy (around 64 percent in Punjab and 56 percent in rural areas of the province) impeded citizens from sending clear messages in Urdu, English, or a local language.<sup>2</sup> Using a dedicated team to read citizen text messages also presented a huge financial burden.

## Addressing Delivery Challenges

The CFMP started in one district of Punjab in 2008. By 2012, it had expanded to 36 districts monitoring approximately 25 different public services. The World Bank played a critical role in the initial rollout and expansion of the program through a sizable grant and the deployment of a small team that supported the Punjab Information Technology Board in developing the online portal and the initial feedback collection model.

The program team experimented with different modes of collection to arrive at the optimum mechanism that met the requirements of scalability, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability. The initial feedback collection model used SMS texts or manual phone calls. This mode was labor intensive and hence very expensive. A dedicated team was needed to both decipher the citizen text messages and make manual calls. The CFMP embraced a robocall model in 2016, whereby citizens received an interactive call asking them to express “satisfaction” or “dissatisfaction” and then select the exact reason for their dissatisfaction from four or five options. (A robocall is an automated recorded call that can be sent to a large number of people rapidly.) By 2019, the CFMP made around 15,000 calls per day and had the potential to expand to 75,000 calls per day. Robocalls were highly cost-effective and scalable. Embracing robocalls made it considerably easier for citizens to respond and for the

program to record their feedback. Moreover, robocalls were not subject to considerations of citizen literacy and mitigated the issue of the high cost of human resources needed to decipher citizen text messages or make manual calls.

The challenge of motivating government officials to use the online portal was partially overcome through continuous liaison with district officials, highlighting the benefits of using citizen feedback. In this regard, the program recognized that a huge leap could be made if citizen feedback were included as one of the key performance indicators for government officials.

There were data integrity challenges, including invalid or incorrect mobile numbers of citizens. The Punjab Information Technology Board analyzed the CFMP data and suspected that officials were sometimes intentionally inputting incorrect numbers because they feared punishment might result from providing the real numbers. To address this issue, the Punjab Information Technology Board gradually integrated the online web portals of government service providers, such as those providing certificates of residency, driver’s licenses, and police background checks. This move allowed the Punjab Information Technology Board to access citizens’ data directly from service providers in real time and prevented service providers from uploading fictitious citizen details onto the CFMP dashboard, thereby resolving, at least partially, the data integrity issues.

The CFMP had a significant impact on health service delivery in public sector hospitals across Punjab. CFMP feedback led to a marked improvement in the availability of essential medicines at all public sector hospitals across Punjab. Robocalls asked patients if they received the medicines they were prescribed from a hospital free of charge. According to this metric, the availability of medicines increased from 46 percent in October 2015 to 77 percent in March 2019. Similarly, citizen feedback regarding the services of the Punjab Emergency Service (Rescue 1122), solicited through CFMP, led to tangible improvements in service delivery, response time, and attitude of the emergency staff. (Rescue 1122 was the leading emergency humanitarian service in Pakistan, with infrastructure in all 36 districts of Punjab.)

The chief secretary of Punjab, the senior-most civil servant of the province, chaired a meeting every quarter with all government officials. An important agenda item at this meeting was CFMP feedback on service delivery. The chief secretary encouraged officials to regularly check

<sup>2</sup> Literacy data are available at Finance Division (2019).

CFMP data to identify problem areas and to undertake corrective actions. Officials documented and uploaded these actions to the CFMP online portal. CFMP data empowered officials to take evidence-based corrective measures instead of acting on hearsay. The online portal was also accessible to officials across Punjab. A dedicated team of analysts based at the Punjab Information Technology Board generated dozens of analytical reports every month to help officials take remedial measures to improve service delivery.

As of 2019, CFMP monitored 25 different public services across Punjab and had contacted 29 million citizens to solicit their feedback. The government took 41,600 corrective measures in response to CFMP data. These measures included initiating inquiries, warnings, mentoring, penalties, and suspension. The CFMP served as a platform for reaching out to citizens and alleviating the trust deficit. It was also about citizen empowerment, allowing citizens' voices to influence the service delivery.

The CFMP was also a globally recognized program. It was included in a 2018 World Bank report as one of 15 case studies highlighting recent achievements in emerging economies (Beschel et al. 2018). In a 2015 case study, Princeton University's Innovations for Successful Society program stated, "In the evaluation survey (through telephonic calls), almost 90 percent of the respondents said the CFMP helped build trust between citizens and the state and improved the image of the government" (Masud 2015).

## Lessons Learned

In CFMP's experience implementing the program, monitoring of service delivery providers was more effective when the monitor and the service providers were separate entities. An independent monitoring function provided a less biased account of civil servants'

performance and prevented agencies from pushing back or interfering in the feedback system. If the entities are not separate, the incidence of data inaccuracies, such as the inputting of fictitious mobile numbers for citizens, increases. These inaccuracies affect the quality of feedback, which may not be representative of the reality on the ground.

Open-ended feedback questions, such as "Did you face any issues when you accessed the government service?," made citizens more reluctant to provide complete details of their experience with public services. Questions with a limited set of fixed answers, as presented to citizens in a robocall, improved both the rate and quality of response.

In a country such as Pakistan, where performance evaluation of government officials did not use well-defined key performance indicators, measurable deliverables, and a clearly laid-down evaluation mechanism, CFMP data in the form of citizens' feedback provided some structure to the evaluation criteria.

The lack of a law to support the CFMP was a hindrance to effective implementation, because the citizen feedback data were not included in the official performance indicators for government employees. Any initiative based on citizens' feedback needs to be legally embedded to be effective. It should be one of the key performance indicators of government officials, preferably linked to salary increases.

Data integrity (that is, the accuracy of citizens' data) can be improved if citizens' details are digitally entered into an online portal at the point of service delivery. As of 2019, the Punjab Information Technology Board had made partial progress in this area by integrating some service providers' systems with the CFMP portal. The citizen feedback database should fetch citizens' data from the service providers through an application programming interface in real time. This method minimizes the incidence of data fabrication by the service providers.

## References

- Beschel, Robert P., Blair Cameron, Jana Kunicova, and Bernard Myers. 2018. *Improving Public Sector Performance through Innovation and Inter-Agency Coordination*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/833041539871513644/pdf/131020-WP-P163620-WorldBankGlobalReport-PUBLIC.pdf>.
- Finance Division. 2019. *Pakistan Economic Survey, 2018–19*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.
- Masud, Mohammad Omar. 2015. “Calling Citizens, Improving the State: Pakistan’s Citizen Feedback Monitoring Program, 2008–2014.” *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. <https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/publications/calling-citizens-improving-state-pakistan%E2%80%99s-citizen-feedback-monitoring-program-2008-%E2%80%93>



© 2019 Global Delivery Initiative. Some rights reserved. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Delivery Initiative, its Secretariat, or of its members. The Global Delivery Initiative does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. This work is subject to a CC BY 3.0 IGO license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo>).