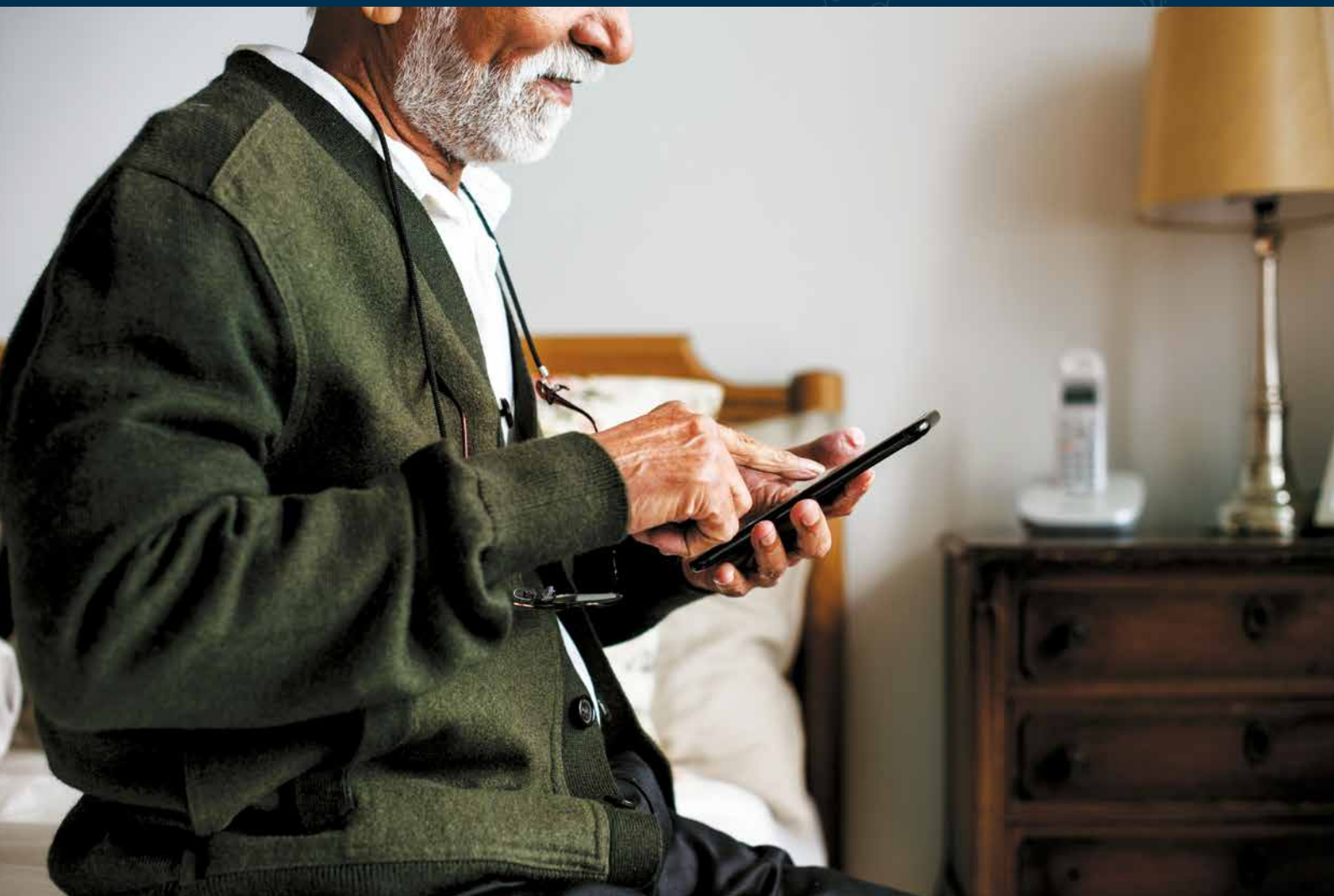# IMPROVING PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE

THROUGH INNOVATION AND INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION
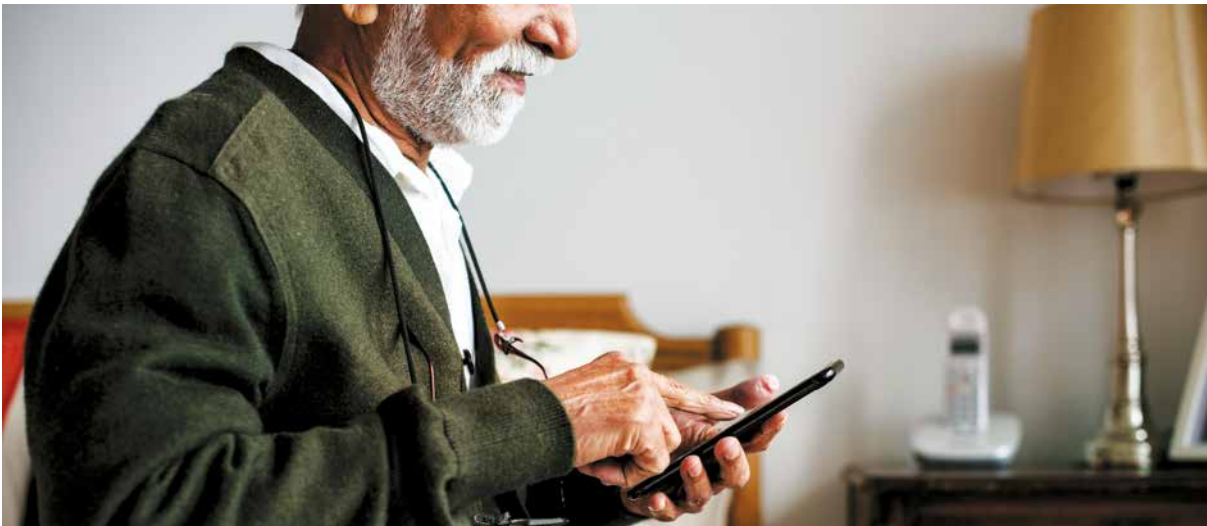
CASE STUDY FROM THE GLOBAL REPORT

Engaging Citizens to Improve Service Delivery: The Citizen Feedback Monitoring Program in Pakistan

CASE STUDY 12

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Overview

Engaging citizens to get critical feedback on public services can help governments improve service delivery and reduce petty corruption. But even on a small scale, many governments struggle to collect objective feedback from their citizens, analyze it, and act on it. In Punjab, a Pakistani province of about 110 million people, the government has scaled up a small pilot in one of its districts to create a wide-ranging monitoring program that leverages the ubiquity of cellphones to proactively solicit feedback from users of public services. The Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), the government's technology agency, turns that information into easily digestible quantitative and qualitative data, and provides that information to senior officials who can hold frontline civil servants accountable for their performance.[21]

PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

POPULATION (2017 est.)[1]
207 million (Pakistan)
110 million (Punjab)

GDP PER CAPITA (current US$)[2]
1,443.60 (Pakistan)

INCOME GROUP[3]
Lower middle income

GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS[4]
28.8%

[1]Census of Pakistan, [2]World Bank (2016), [3]World Bank (2016), [4]World Bank (2016)

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Introduction

"A government's greatest challenges are delivering on electoral promises and delivering public services," said Tauqir Shah, the former chief of staff to Shehbaz Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab, Pakistan's largest province. "The chief minister wanted objective feedback on how his government was doing in that regard." Under Sharif, Punjab has implemented an innovative citizen feedback program to monitor the performance of civil servants, address petty corruption, and improve public services.

One approach governments have traditionally taken to get feedback from citizens is to set up call centers that take complaints about corruption or service delivery issues. But such "hotlines" have often been prone to abuse, and have created large administrative burdens in the investigation of complaints. Further, individual citizens are unlikely to report minor issues because of the time and travel burden imposed on them in the required due process investigations. Because those complaints usually go unreported, higher-level officials often have no actionable evidence about persistent service delivery problems or petty corruption issues.

In 2008, Sharif read in a newspaper about a new initiative a government official had begun in Jhang, one of Punjab's 36 districts, to tackle petty corruption. That official, Zubair Bhatti, had begun asking frontline staff to collect phone numbers from citizens that came into their offices so that Bhatti could personally call the citizens to ask about the quality of service they received. Based on that feedback, Bhatti could confront civil servants that citizens consistently complained about. Sharif invited Bhatti to Lahore, Punjab's capital, to discuss how to scale-up the idea province-wide.

Rather than building criminal cases against officials suspected of corruption, the citizen feedback monitoring program (CFMP) aimed to identify patterns of persistent negative feedback and provide that information to officials who had the power to change management practices and to transfer, suspend, or reprimand poor performers.

Response

Bhatti's initial intervention required little more than a phone and a list of phone numbers, but implementing a systematic province-wide feedback program would require more capacity and investment. In Jhang, Bhatti was not able to call as many people as he wanted due to the time the calls took. As the district coordination officer (DCO), he was responsible for the entire district administration, including issuing licenses and permits, and delivering services such as health and education. To contact more citizens, the CFMP had to begin using technology in innovative ways.

The initiative would also require strong political will to ensure follow-through from DCOs, as well as to counter backlash from civil servants who had taken advantage of the previous lack of oversight from the provincial government.

Piloting the program

In 2010, Sharif requested Bhatti, who had left the government in 2008, to take up a short-term position in the chief minister's office to start a pilot at the provincial level. Bhatti presented the program to DCOs across the province, and six signed on for the pilot. The DCOs asked civil servants to begin collecting phone numbers at the point of service delivery, and then getting staff in the DCO office to call citizens back and inquire about the service received, based on training provided by Bhatti.

As well as looking for cases of recurring negative feedback, the DCOs also looked for trends of invalid or incorrect phone numbers; such a pattern could suggest an official was listing false numbers to avoid getting negative feedback. When a trend was identified, the DCOs confronted officials receiving persistent complaints and counseled them to change their behavior. In several cases, citizens reported cases of petty corruption in property registration branches, and after investigations, some officials working in those branches received disciplinary action.

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Scaling up data collection

Despite some early success with the pilot, the CFMP could not scale up adequately using the same model. DCOs and their staff did not have enough time in their workday to constantly be calling citizens, gauging feedback, and identifying trends. The Punjab government wanted to find a way to use technology to reduce the time burden on those staff.

After a stint in the private sector and at the Asia Foundation, Bhatti moved to a position in the World Bank's Pakistan office in 2011. In his new capacity, he continued to support the CFMP project, albeit from the World Bank side. He applied to the World Bank's Innovation Fund for a grant to boost the CFMP pilot. With US$100,000 from the fund, Bhatti hired some technologically-minded young people to work on the CFMP. They worked with the PITB to develop a program that could automatically send SMS messages to collect feedback from citizens.

Next, the PITB sought to procure a call center to operate the feedback program. The procurement process quickly ran into problems, however. "The government was very comfortable contracting for civil works, but not anything non-standard like a call center," said Bhatti. "At the time, we did not understand exactly what we wanted, and the [company that won the contract] did not understand either." Eventually, the call center contract broke down, and the CFMP began relying on the SMS application.

Umar Saif, who became the chairman of the PITB in November 2011, brought new energy and focus to the fledgling program. Under Saif, the PITB brought in a new contractor to create the call center and oversaw the spread of the CFMP to all 36 districts across the province. The government decided to begin soliciting feedback through "robocalls," recorded by the chief minister himself. The new approach created a direct link between the citizens providing feedback and the provincial government, and encouraged ownership of the initiative from the chief minister. Call center workers categorized citizens' responses and made follow-up calls when citizens indicated possible cases of corruption or requested to speak to a live person. They also recorded positive responses, which the PITB often passed on to the chief minister's office – hearing positive feedback from citizens helped maintain political support for the initiative.

The phone call and SMS approaches each had distinct advantages and disadvantages. For example, calls allowed the program to solicit responses from people who couldn't read, as illiteracy was widespread. Calls also enabled more structured questions. On the other hand, text messages were easier and cheaper to send, and gave respondents more time to reflect and provide a considered response. Eventually, the PITB decided on a hybrid approach whereby citizens would receive a robocall asking them to express "satisfaction" or "dissatisfaction" with the service in question, and then to select the reason for their dissatisfaction from a range of categories. A follow-up text message then gave citizens the opportunity to go into further detail on the problems they encountered. Having citizens self-categorize the reason for their dissatisfaction eliminated the need for the call center, significantly reducing costs. The PITB reported monthly operating costs for the program of 350,000 Pakistani rupees in 2018 (about US$3,000), compared to 1,785,000 rupees (more than US$15,000) when using the call center.

The PITB chose which services to use the CFMP for, based on the ease of soliciting useful feedback. For example, it was easy to get constructive feedback on simple processes like birth certificate applications, but more difficult to get objective feedback on more complicated services, such as police investigations, where the outcome could be affected by circumstances outside the civil servant's control. "We monitor basic public services that are mechanical in nature; services where there is not a lot of investigation or discretionary interpretation involved," said Saif.

Taking action

Analyzing the data and acting on it was critical for the CFMP to be effective. The CFMP team had to boil down the vast array of data into a format that the chief minister and other senior officials could understand and use. To do so, the PITB developed a user-friendly dashboard that clearly showed where the problem districts and offices were. "The chief minister only needed a graph that could depict what districts were doing well and what areas were not doing so well," said Shah.

Government departments could access the dashboard to monitor the feedback they were getting, and a

team of staff within the PITB closely monitored the incoming feedback and created reports based on the data. "We generate about 400 reports on a monthly basis," said Saif. "Those reports are sent out and the departments are expected to take action based on those reports and provide evidence that they have done so."

Every month, the chief secretary, the senior most civil servant of the province, held a daylong meeting with all 36 DCOs, and the CFMP was always discussed. "He would always ask them about the initiative," said Shah. "That way they knew it was a serious program and high on the government's agenda." In the meetings, the chief secretary discussed CFMP data with the DCOs and addressed any issues that had come up.

In cases where SMS and robocall data showed persistent issues, the government took action. "For example, if there was persistent negative feedback about the land ministry in the 55th district, it would come to our office and we had the full mandate to take corrective action, including removing the official in question," said Shah. "The CFMP gave [the actions taken] a lot of credibility. If a decision came from within the administration, people could allege bias, but we were making these decisions based purely on citizen feedback. Anyone engaged in malfeasance stood out like a sore thumb."

The SMS messages and recorded robocalls provided strong and irrefutable data that the chief minister's office could use to overcome backlash. In one case, a land registry office headed by a close relative of a powerful Punjabi politician was flagged after persistent reports of petty corruption. The chief minister's office was able to use call recordings and SMS messages from citizens to prove that any move to reprimand the official was based on real citizen feedback and was not politically motivated.

Replicating the program

Word about the success Punjab was having with the CFMP spread quickly around Pakistan and the world. In 2015, the head of Pakistan's Directorate General of Immigration and Passports reached out to Bhatti to talk about replicating the initiative. At the time, the directorate had a very basic monitoring

program in place for its 164 offices around Pakistan, relying on occasional preannounced visits from senior staff to check things were running smoothly. Usman Bajwa, the head of the directorate, said he had three main objectives when launching the CFMP in his directorate: "First, we wanted to proactively engage with citizens. Second, we wanted to improve performance monitoring. And third, we wanted to enhance the accountability of field staff."

In November 2015, the directorate began sending SMS messages to solicit feedback from every passport applicant who provided their cellphone number. Bajwa said they sent out about 250,000 to 300,000 messages each month, and about 10-12% of people replied with feedback on the application process. A team in the central office categorized responses, quantified them, and uploaded them to a dashboard system through which Bajwa could monitor offices around the country. The feedback was integrated with individual staff members' performance evaluations, and in cases of corruption allegations, Bajwa implemented a three-strike system: if an office was getting consistently high complaints, he issued them with a warning. A second warning was issued if complaints persisted. If things did not improve after the second warning, Bajwa initiated disciplinary proceedings against the staff in question. He said that, as of 2018, he had taken administrative action against 53 offices.

As well as making efforts to improve staff performance, Bajwa used the CFMP to improve processes within the directorate. He said that there were consistent complaints about long queues throughout the application process, but particularly for making payments. "In many areas there was only one bank branch that was authorized to collect passport fees," said Bajwa. In response to the citizen feedback, Bajwa authorized all bank branches to collect the fees, and soon after set up a mobile payment system that meant citizens could pay passport fees in any location where they could top up credit on their mobile phones.

By 2018, such process improvements had led to a much faster and smoother passport application process for Pakistani citizens. Bajwa said the directorate had cut the processing time for passports from 3 weeks to 10 business days, and from 7 days to 5 days for priority applications. The average

time spent in the passport office itself was cut from 290 minutes in 2015 to 70 minutes in 2018. The improvements were backed up by CFMP data: when the directorate first launched the program, 15% of responses were categorized as "negative," whereas in 2018 that figure was less than 5%.

Reflections

The CFMP created what Shah described as a "paradigm shift"; for the first time, the Punjab government began proactively reaching out to citizens for feedback. "Suddenly, the citizen has everything at his fingertips," he said. With just their phones, citizens began actively participating in governance by providing real-time information on service delivery. Further, that information went directly from citizens to senior officials, who had stronger incentives than mid-level officials to cut corruption, including political incentives.

While the feedback was used to investigate corruption in some cases, similar to a complaints hotline, the main focus of CFMP was preventative: frontline service providers knew that their superiors were contacting citizens via SMS and phone calls. If they provided poor service or requested bribes, they could face disciplinary action down the line based on citizen feedback reports.

The CFMP empowered government officials to take corrective action. In the past, the government found it difficult to take action against underperforming or corrupt officials because the officials in question could allege the action taken was politically motivated. Further, genuine complaints by citizens were often withdrawn because of the time it took to make complaints and provide evidence, or more often, because the errant official and the citizen reached a compromise outside the process, leaving no complainant to provide evidence. With the CFMP, officials did not face the same problem: no one could argue against extensive written and recorded feedback from citizens.

The CFMP also had political benefits. A 2014 phone survey of Punjab citizens who had been contacted through the CFMP found that more than 75% of citizens believed the initiative could help improve timeliness of service and help reduce corruption, and more than 90% believed it could improve the government's image and trust between citizens and the state. Some of the citizens that had received robocalls recorded by the chief minister said they felt "delight" at having been approached directly by the government to provide feedback. Those who could recall the call or the text message were also more likely to say the initiative helped reduce corruption and improve service delivery (Oasis Insights 2016).

As of 2018, the Punjab government was using robocalls to seek feedback on 27 different services in all 36 districts across the province. "We are sending out more than 15,000 robocalls every day to a randomized sample of 40% of people who use one of those 27 services and provide a valid telephone number," said Saif. Several services had benefited from corrective actions taken, such as improved processes or removing problematic officials. The PITB noted that such actions had been particularly effective in improving the dispensation of medicines at hospitals, with 84% of contacted users in January 2018 reporting they received prescribed medicines for free at public hospitals, compared to 46% in October 2015. The government also introduced biometric attendance systems at public hospitals where citizen feedback indicated high rates of doctor absenteeism. Overall, more than 38,000 corrective actions had been taken by 2018, based on more than 2 million unique pieces of feedback received from citizens.[22]

In addition, the CFMP had been replicated domestically in Pakistan's Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, and internationally in Albania. As of 2018, the Albanian government had implemented the CFMP in 5 government organizations, including the tax directorate, where it was using citizen feedback to monitor the performance of tax inspectors. The government had contacted over 180,000 citizens, a sizeable number considering Albania's population of less than 3 million.

The initiative could be implemented on any scale, depending on the cost of SMS messages and/or calls, and how large a segment of the population the government wanted to reach. The passport office sent messages to 100% of applicants, while the Punjab government opted for a 40% sample size. Government officials said that the program was extremely cost effective, considering the service improvements it

resulted in. "We got immense value for money from the CFMP," said Shah. "Looking at the impact and scale, the costs were peanuts."

While the scale of the CFMP in Punjab has become very large over the course of a decade, its humble beginnings show that managers who want to fight petty corruption in their departments could easily start the program on a small scale. "When the CFMP started it was just me," said Bhatti. "Any government official could start this program tomorrow; you just need to pick up the phone and call."

Success Drivers

Punjab's experience with the citizen feedback monitoring program reflects all **five** of the key dimensions for successful public sector innovation.

Political leadership was key because the initiative required strong political will to implement it across services and districts in a province of more than 100 million citizens. Shehbaz Sharif, the chief minister of Punjab, championed this initiative because his government's greatest challenge was delivering on electoral promises by improving public services. The citizen feedback monitoring program (CFMP) provided objective feedback on how his government was doing in that regard. The chief secretary regularly discussed CFMP in his monthly meetings with district coordinating officers (DCOs), which signaled to DCOs that CFMP was high on the government's agenda.

Institutional capacity building took place chiefly through the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), the government's technology agency. Initially, there was a lot of trial and error as the design was iterated and procurement issues were resolved. Eventually, a reform-minded PITB chairman, Umar Saif, oversaw the spread of the CFMP to all 36 districts across the province.

Getting **incentives** right was instrumental to ensuring success of the program. The feedback went directly from citizens to senior officials who had political incentives to cut corruption. In addition, the cost of reporting for the beneficiary was much lower: only a text message with no need to follow up with visits to the courts. Crucially, the main focus of CFMP was preventative rather than investigative: frontline service providers knew that their superiors were contacting citizens via SMS and phone calls. If service providers offered poor service or extorted bribes, they could face disciplinary action down the line based on citizen feedback reports; this provided an incentive to adjust their behavior ex ante.

Transparency associated with the CFMP empowered government officials to take corrective action. CFMP focused on intra-government transparency. Large volumes of feedback created more credible information, which was shared up and down the government hierarchy. Government departments and districts could access the dashboard to monitor the feedback they were getting. A team of staff within the PITB closely monitored the incoming feedback and issued reports based on the data.

Technology, in particular simple tools, as citizens only needed a basic feature phone, was key to the success of the program. When CFMP started in Jhang with one DCO making calls to citizens, he was not able to obtain sufficient feedback, and so the program had to leverage technology to contact more citizens. Later, the CFMP team had to boil down the vast array of data into user-friendly dashboards so that reports, both electronic and paper, could be generated and understood by senior officials for them to take action.