Pakistan: Enhancing Service Delivery in Districts across Punjab

Synopsis
In order to overcome widespread civic cynicism caused by petty corruption, the World Bank is working with government officials and politicians in Pakistan's Punjab Province to create a proactive management culture that seeks out citizens' feedback using mobile phone technology. The project has been highly successful in reaching out to the grassroots and is gaining strong support within the government.

Challenge
Petty corruption is particularly destructive because it makes all citizens, especially those most in need of government assistance, cynical about any attempt by the state to provide services.

Rather than speaking out against petty corruption, citizens become resigned to accepting it. As a consequence, communication between high-level government officials and community members is cut off, and the feedback loop necessary for policymakers and officials to correct such problems is broken.

“The common man on the street is most affected by petty corruption and bottlenecks in government processes that often go undetected. This program with the World Bank has enabled us to gain insights at a level that is typically not visible to policymakers,” says Dr. Umar Saif, Chairman of the Punjab Information Technology Board, the agency working with the Chief Minister’s Secretariat to implement the Punjab Model of Proactive Governance initiative.

Approach
The Punjab Model of Proactive Governance initiative is harnessing the power of call centers, text messages, and personal phone calls to rebuild community trust by soliciting feedback from citizens receiving services for pensions, prenatal health, and property registration.

“We are trying to change the usual way that the government interacts with a citizen such that the state is not at the center of the transaction — the citizen is,” says Zubair Bhatti, Senior Public Sector Management Specialist at the World Bank.

Under the initiative, when a citizen in Punjab visits a government office, their name, mobile phone number, type of service requested, and the responsible official are sent to a privately contracted call center. The call center follows up with an automatic SMS message and a phone call requesting feedback. Responses are entered into a database and reports are made available in real-time to both the ministry providing the service and an oversight body. In addition, the project supplements this survey with direct calls to citizens by senior government officials, local assembly members, and the Chief Minister himself.

“It’s a pretty simple idea, but it has immediate impact,” says Nabeel Awan, a senior official in the Chief Minister's Secretariat. “You start today...Collect the numbers tomorrow...Then you start making calls...And corruption levels begin to decrease because the distance between the citizen and the state is gone.”

By design, the internal feedback mechanism piloted within the Punjab Model of Governance initiative are readily scalable and cost efficient so that they can be expanded to other districts and integrated into other services. The Punjab government has expanded the pilot to all of the province’s 36 districts. After using police, health, or revenue department services, citizens receive an automated call with the Chief Minister’s Voice and are invited to provide feedback about the quality of service and whether they encountered any corruption.

“The biggest challenge for us is to have the supervising officers cross the threshold of putting the model into practice. Once set in motion, the model shows its efficacy and results so soon and so complete that the practitioner becomes a protagonist forthwith,” says Barrister Nabeel Awan, a senior government official managing the project at the Chief Minister’s Secretariat.
Beneficiary Results

More than 200,000 citizens have been sent text messages seeking feedback. With the model currently operating at full scale, approximately 10,000 new transactions are added every day. Some 30,000 citizens have already provided feedback on various services, which has shed light on a number of corruption schemes that since been halted.

“This success is due to the fact that rather than passively waiting for complaints, the state has been proactively reaching out to citizens and inquiring about their well-being,” says Asim Fayaz, a World Bank consultant working on the project.

The project has also found a strong vocal champion for its efforts in Punjab’s Chief Minister. Not only is the Chief Minister allowing his name and voice to be used in the messages sent to citizens, but he has joined a group of provincial legislators in agreeing to directly call citizens to solicit their feedback.

“The direct personalized communication to citizens for reduction of day-to-day petty corruption provides a very strong incentive to the political leadership to improve services. This incentive also aligns very neatly with that of the citizen,” says Bhatti.

Bank Contribution

While the Punjab Model of Proactive Governance project is funded and led by the government of Punjab, the World Bank has provided technical assistance to support the development of social accountability mechanisms and has awarded pivotal funding to support scale up of the initial pilot through its Innovation Fund. Under a new proposed project “Enhancing Service Delivery at the District Level” the World Bank will provide additional funding through the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank’s Fund for the Poorest, to support the institutionalization of the citizen feedback model in other sectors.

Partners

A critical success factor in the pilot and subsequent institutionalization of the proactive citizen feedback model has been multiple partnerships across the government in Punjab. The provincial government finances the use of the call center that serves as the cornerstone of outreach and follows up with citizens. Beyond financing, high-level political champions in the Chief Minister’s Secretariat have been enthusiastic about the potential for proactively seeking citizen views to help in rebuilding citizen confidence. PITB provides technical and administrative support to collect and analyze citizen feedback. The Resource Group (TRG) Pakistan, a private sector company contracted by the government of Punjab, facilitates day-to-day operations of the Lahore-based call center that conducts the calls to solicit citizen feedback.

Moving Forward

The Punjab Model of Proactive Governance has significant potential for replication and scale up. Already, the project has begun to implement a basic monitoring system for key departments, which alone is expected to significantly curtail petty corruption. Also, district administrators are closely eyeing the feedback as it comes in, which has made them more engaged when it comes to the monitoring of day-to-day services.

“The idea – organized collection of feedback from beneficiaries on large ongoing scale is replicable across sectors and across countries,” says Naseer Rana, World Bank Governance Advisor. “This project is inexpensive and easy to scale up. It will be an important tool for implementing the Pakistan Governance and Anti-Corruption strategy and for mainstreaming cutting edge social accountability tools in the Pakistan portfolio.”

In addition to directly curtailing corruption, the monitoring activities of the Punjab Model of Proactive Governance are resulting in a wealth of data on service delivery issues. The next steps will involve analyzing the data and strategically integrating into future governance improvement work.