CASE STUDY

Bangalore | iChangeMyCity

Civic Participation On-the-Go

I n India, a mobile app is transforming municipal governance and enabling the people to call the authorities to account when they renege on citizens' trust in service delivery. This iChangeMyCity platform has given the people a collective voice of grievance and become a platform for them to drive solutions to neighbourhood problems.

The Challenge

Often heralded as the world's largest democracy, Indian cities have ironically faced difficulties in embedding citizen participation in governance, service delivery and city development. Municipal governance has remained weak, despite ambitious legislative interventions, most significantly the 74th Constitutional Amendment that formalised municipalities as the third level of government after state and central organisations. Executive power stays vested at the state level. While the democratic ideals of decentralised governance and citizen participation persist, less has been said about the nuts and bolts needed for urban citizenship to flourish.

This lack of municipal empowerment has left citizens largely unable to exercise their influence for better service delivery and distributional outcomes. Access to institutional mechanisms for redress is uneven and stratified by class, resulting in low trust between citizens and governments. Trust between the citizens themselves is similarly low due to divisions across class and socio-economic lines, thus affecting civil society's ability to solve civic issues effectively.

Poor access to institutional mechanisms makes it difficult for citizens to report civic issues such as potholes.

BANGALORE

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Fixing civic issues with
iChangeMyCity
is as easy as 1-2-3

1

Post complaints on potholes, unattended garbage, bad roads and other civic issues in the neighbourhood.
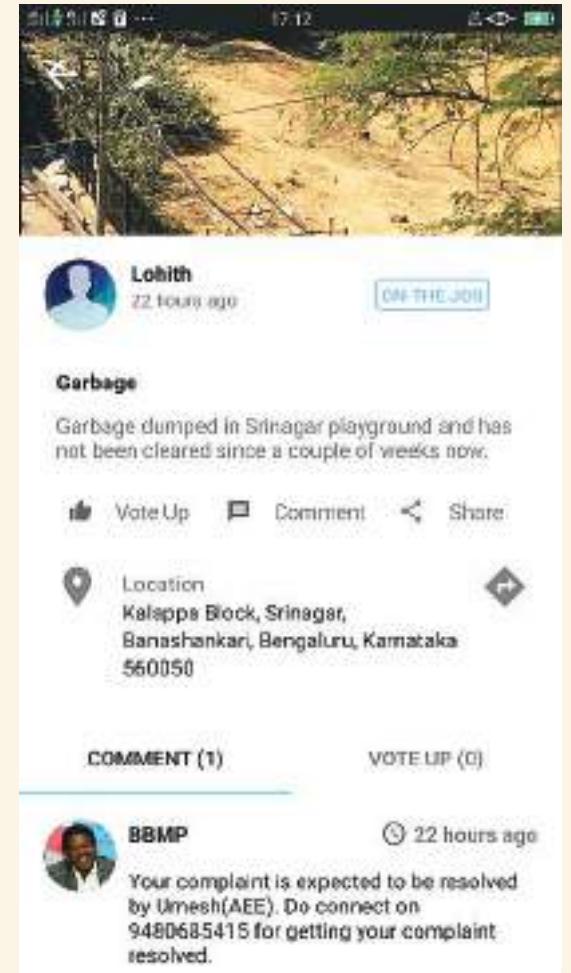
2

Upvotes prioritise complaints. The more the upvotes from friends and neighbours, the higher the priority.

3

Users interact with civic authorities and elected representatives to ensure complaints are resolved.

Lohith
22 hours ago
ON THE JOB

Garbage

Garbage dumped in Srinagar playground and has not been cleared since a couple of weeks now.

👍 Vote Up   💬 Comment   ◁ Share

📍 Location
Kalappa Block, Srinagar, Banashankari, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560050

COMMENT (1)   VOTE UP (0)

BBMP   🕐 22 hours ago
Your complaint is expected to be resolved by Umesh(AEE). Do connect on 9480685415 for getting your complaint resolved.

01   02

The Solution

Technology has helped to bridge this chasm between democratic ideals and the practice of city-making. Bangalore civic organisation Janaagraha's iChangeMyCity platform is credited with increasing citizen participation and eliciting institutional responses from city governments. The platform, initially implemented in Bangalore in 2013, provides an opportunity for citizens of various strata to exercise their right to the city by calling out service delivery failures and lending their voice to civic matters.

At the core of the platform is the iChangeMyCity mobile app that Janaagraha characterises as a "hyper-local social change network" that allows people to come together and change the city. The app allows citizens to report civic issues such as potholes and

unattended garbage, vote for complaints and interface with civic authorities to ensure institutional follow-ups.

The app's design is deliberately open and interactional. All complaints are available for public viewing instead of being privately fed to government authorities. Users are encouraged to interact, forming a network of citizens seeing each other as stakeholders in the city, and reinforcing cooperative networks of trust that engender active participation in resolving municipal problems.

The app does not operate in isolation. Instead, it forms the core node in a nexus of other platforms that build off each other to amplify citizens' voices. In addition to the app and its social media accounts on Twitter and

Facebook, iChangeMyCity expands its network of users with a web portal that also allows for posting of complaints.

The Bangalore version carries links to sub-sites that allow citizens to access news of civic participation; local data on city budgets, infrastructure and quality of life; and other platforms to give their feedback on the city budget or report traffic violations.

Citizen participation is not only confined to the digital realm, but can carry over to real life. Citizens have used the app to come

> **" Users are encouraged to interact, forming a network of citizens seeing each other as stakeholders in the city. "**

together to resolve neighbourhood issues instead of relying on government intervention, thus building trust within the community.

01   Citizens can improve their city by reporting civic issues or voting for complaints on the iChangeMyCity app.

02   Authorities update users on their complaints, as seen in this screenshot.

> "Citizen participation is not only confined to the digital realm, but can carry over to real life."

An active member of iChangeMyCity, Vimarsha Vishruth, created an event on the platform to gather the community to clear a garbage dump in his neighbourhood. This caught the attention of another active member, who mobilised other volunteers including a grassroots campaigning organisation Jhatkaa. The area was cleaned within a mere seven days after the event was created on the iChangeMyCity app, thanks to the collaboration of citizens and community organisations.

While the app's ease of access and transparency encourage citizen uptake, the authorities' participation is crucial in ensuring institutional responsiveness to citizen feedback and the platform's legitimacy.

Data from iChangeMyCity's website shows that Bangalore has higher rates of active participation and resolution of complaints than other cities such as Mumbai and Solapur. One key difference seems to be the active participation of municipal authorities. Bangalore's municipal corporation, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, participates actively on the platform by addressing complaints and providing status updates on complaint resolution. In contrast, the Municipal Corporation for Greater Mumbai has yet to come on-board despite the state government's support.

01   Beyond participating online, citizens also come together in real life, such as to submit budget inputs.

02   City Pulse, a sub-site under iChangeMyCity, showcases news of civic participation such as Mega Cleanathons, which sees the community cleaning and refurbishing public spaces.

02   03

The Outcome

By tapping mobile technology, iChangeMyCity has mobilised millions of users across India and encouraged civic participation. Data from Bangalore shows a complaint resolution rate of over 92%, which is impressive considering the millions of complaints logged. This shows that the municipal authorities are responsive to citizen feedback, improving trust between citizens and government.

Janaagraha has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Maharashtra state government to use iChangeMyCity as a grievance redressal platform. The central government has even enlisted Janaagraha's help to develop a similar app for its Swachh Bharat ('Clean India') campaign.

The platform has also won several accolades including the 2013 Google Global Impact Award, the 2015 Manthan Award for South Asia and the 2015 Information Society Innovation Fund Asia Award.

Those looking to emulate iChangeMyCity's success would do well to consider it in relation to a sphere of mutually enforcing networks and factors. To effectively enable citizen participation and foster trust, openness is key and feedback must be made public. Both the citizens and the authorities have to participate actively—on online and offline channels—to mutually reinforce the networks of trust and cooperation that engender collective action. ⚪

01 & 02 A garbage dump before (*top*) and after (*bottom*) a clean-up organised through iChangeMyCity.

03 Citizens take a pledge at the Bengaluru Civic Fest hosted by iChangeMyCity.