



prologue

A 55-year-old doctor at a remote, rural public hospital very close to retiring thought outside the box, he says, "for the first time in my life" and designed a health-care system for the people living in extreme poverty in his area. This low-cost mechanism may hold an answer to universal health care in Bangladesh by 2030! What's driving this amazing journey? The answer lies in a ground-breaking empathy-based innovation toolkit.

**Empathy-based
Innovation Toolkit**
for Transforming Public Service Delivery



Cultivating Empathy Among Civil Servants To Unleash A Citizen-friendly Innovation Revolution

When public services are not designed with empathy for the people who use them, mothers have to travel long distances with their newborns and wait in long queues to collect government maternity allowances. Citizens lacking knowledge of where to access a service or even how to apply for it have to ping-pong among different agencies, sometimes for months and years. Unscrupulous intermediaries take advantage of this situation and charge exorbitant speed money.

Stepping into the shoes of citizens and frontline staff on the ground is crucial to developing empathy for the end-user experience of a system. A consultation with Nesta, the innovation organization of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, led to the crucial realization that cultivating empathy in civil servants can make public services more cost-effective and easier for citizens to use. Seeing the world through the lens of citizens is often not enough; it is necessary to walk a few miles in their shoes.

a2i began a process to adapt the knowledge from Nesta to the reality of Bangladesh. After several years of persistent experimentation, daring to fail but learning continuously, it developed a unique empathy-based training module for civil servants in Bangladesh to help them to embark on a journey of innovating citizen-centric services.

This 'Empathy-based Public Service Innovation Toolkit' is an integral part of a2i's efforts to bring about a paradigm shift in the Bangladesh Civil Service, away from its rigid, rule-based roots primarily designed to control, towards a modern, citizen-friendly and dynamic service delivery ecosystem designed to serve.

Build EMPATHY

Stepping into the shoes of the citizens for whom public services are designed

Reduce TCV (Time, Cost, Visit)

Defining a clear objective for innovation: Reducing the Time, Cost and Visits required by citizens to access public services

Apply SPS (Service Process Simplification)

Mapping out entire service delivery processes end-to-end, eliminating unnecessary steps and redesigning them to be more easily accessible to citizens

The a2i Empathy Methodology

The unique home-grown training module, popularly known as empathy training, that the a2i Programme developed arranges training for mid-to-senior-level government officers. Those officers are responsible for dispensing services to citizens. The training arranges for them to act as secret shoppers and visit citizens' access points for services outside of their ministries or areas of expertise. For example, as part of this training, a government land officer is asked to review the process of submitting an admission application at a public college. A doctor is asked to go through the process of having his or her passport renewed. A teacher is asked to experience how social safety net disbursements are received by beneficiaries. Such orchestrated situations place them in citizens' shoes since they are forced to navigate public systems without any official or intellectual privileges. Under normal circumstances, their rank shields them from being exposed to the real picture, and knowledge of their own domain makes it difficult to assess the state of affairs objectively. After the secret shopping exercise, these officers from different departments are brought together to share their experiences. The result in most cases is a powerful, moving situation that creates a deep sense of empathy for citizens and the myriad sufferings that they must endure to obtain the most basic services. This experience helps participants to develop a critical eye that they use to scrutinize their own agency's delivery systems and improve the overall quality of services.

TCV: Placing citizens at the centre of efforts to improve public services

Gathering insights and understanding citizens' needs is crucial for identifying new, innovative ways to improve the delivery of public services. Once empathy is triggered, equipping civil servants with tools as quickly as possible is equally important so that they can bring about the necessary changes.

When a2i first started talking to civil servants about innovation; they almost immediately got bogged down in debates around what did or did not constitute 'innovation'. What exactly is 'innovation'? How do you identify it? How do you measure how 'innovative' something was? Opinions were sharply divided at the senior levels while frontline government employees – who were closer to citizens and thus potentially had more ideas to contribute – found it difficult to even conceptualize it.

Reducing the time, cost and number of visits it takes for citizens to access public information and services puts them at the centre and offers simple, unambiguous parameters to measure and communicate efforts to improve public services and their delivery systems.

TCV also helped replace confusing and frequently misinterpreted jargon like 'outcome' and 'impact'. Since civil servants and development practitioners understand exactly what indicators to record and track, it has contributed immensely to an increase in the amount and quality of data that is collected and made available. Thus, TCV is also gaining popularity as a results-management tool.

Getting Land Records From Govt. Office



Before 'SPS'

7+ DAYS

After 'SPS'

1 HOUR



TK. 5,000

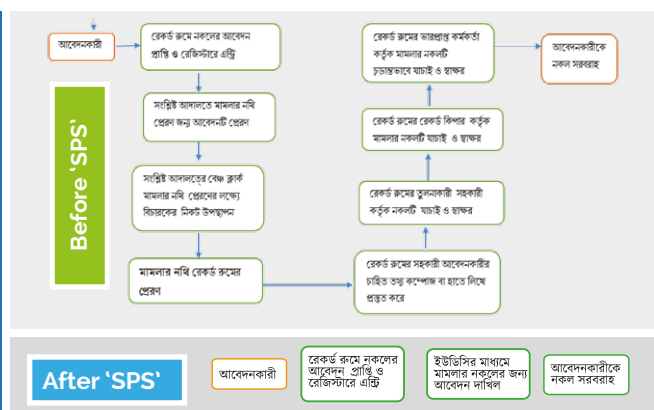
TK. 300



40 KM
2-3 TIMES

WALKING
DISTANCE

PROCESS



Fund prototyping of ideas and testing with citizen user-groups for feedback using SIF and locally mobilized funds



Service Innovation Fund (SIF)

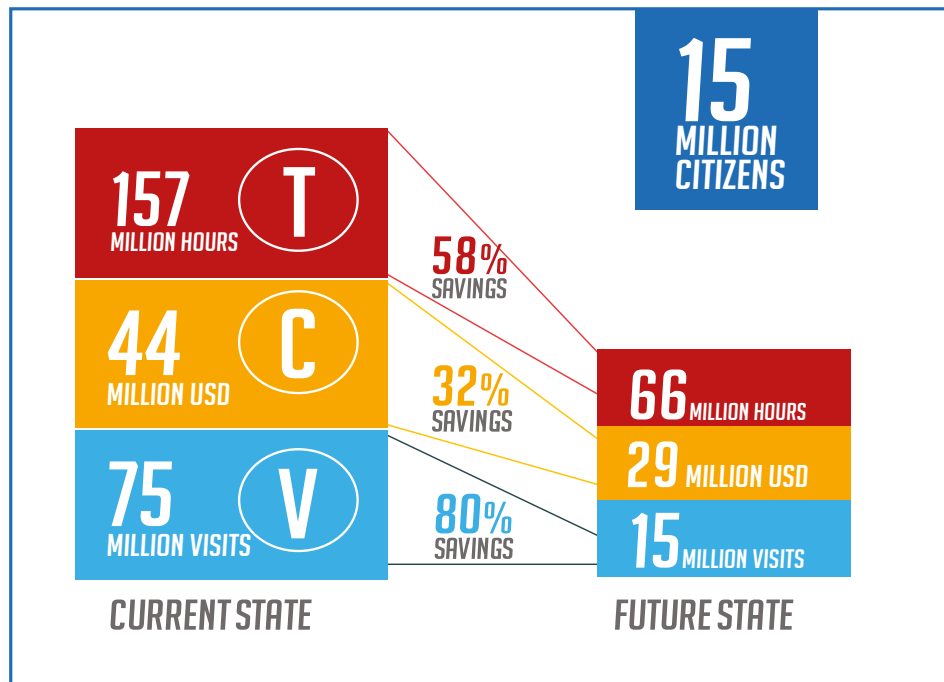
SIF is designed to encourage innovative home-grown and localized solutions and is open to all. It embraces the notion of co-creation and engages government agencies, development organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, private companies and even individuals as active partners in the improvement of public services. Anyone can apply online any time, the whole year round for grants worth up to USD 32000. Its priority areas include service decentralization and delivery, gender empowerment, empowering people with disabilities, healthcare, agriculture, rural development, right to information, green initiatives, disaster management, low-cost devices, and Bangla language tools.

Service Process Simplification (SPS): a2i's innovative tool for reducing citizens' hassle

'Business Process Re-engineering' (BPR) is a popular methodology in the private sector for optimizing end-to-end processes and automating non-value-added tasks to boost productivity. a2i took the BPR concept and essentially rebranded it 'Service Process Simplification' (SPS) since it was more meaningful to policy-makers and government service providers who did not consider themselves to be engaged in either 'business' or 'engineering'!

In collaboration with the Cabinet Division and government ministries (which formulate policies) and their directorates (which are responsible for service delivery), a2i trained civil servants to apply SPS by mapping out entire service delivery processes end-to-end, eliminating unnecessary steps and redesigning them to be more easily accessible to citizens from a greater number of delivery-points.

Detailed profiles were also developed containing descriptions, process maps, relevant fees and documents needed to access the new, simplified services as well as grievance redressal processes, and associated rules, policies and laws. These profiles were published both in hard-copy (in the form of books) and online at Bangladesh Services Portal. This not only represents extraordinary service delivery reform but also unprecedented proactive disclosure on the part of the government.



CITIZEN BENEFICIARY TCV SAVINGS FROM DIGITIZING SOCIAL SAFETY NET PAYMENTS



1 COLLECTION CLASSIFICATION SELECTION

- Online applications
- Screening & shortlisting
- Workshop on designing presentation for Technical Experts Panel (TEP)
 - To help refine each idea/project and how it is to be presented
- Presentation to TEP
- Ministry vetting

2 BUDGET WORKPLAN FINALIZATION

- Workshop on budget and workplan
 - To help develop a pragmatic implementation plan
- Contract finalization

4 EVALUATION

3 IMPLEMENTATION

- SIF Project Orientation Workshop
 - To inform relevant public offices about SIF awarded projects
- SIF Project Coordination
 - To ensure regular follow-up and necessary support for the projects from the relevant government offices Innovation Team
- SIF Project Handover Workshop
 - To handover the project completely to the relevant government office and facilitate its scale up

5 SCALE UP PLANNING

Impact & Results

Empathy was what empowered a junior land officer to build a shed for poor and aged clients in his jurisdiction and automate the manual land service, thereby rooting out corruption and becoming a local hero overnight. It was what drove an agricultural extension officer in a remote district of Bangladesh to develop a pictorial database that enables farmers to easily identify crop diseases and get proper solutions without having to travel tens of kilometres to seek

expert advice. With encouragement from top bureaucrats and more than USD 3 million in SIF funding, over 2,410 such pilots have been launched since 2015 in a wide range of areas, including health care and education, crops and fisheries, land and human rights.

To date, a2i has trained 1,000+ officers from 36 government organizations to apply SPS to 400+ vital services. Moreover, each Annual Performance Agreement signed between the Cabinet Secretary and the Secretary of a particular ministry now mandates simplification of at least one service and digitization of a service every year – an important step

towards institutionalizing this citizen-centric way of improving public services.

A study over the period of the last seven years reveals that as a result of this holistic approach to empower civil servants with the tools, expertise, knowledge and resources they need for experimenting and innovating citizen-centric solutions to public service challenges, on average, time to receive services has come down by 85%, cost by 63% and the number of visits by 40%. Translated in monetary terms, Bangladeshi citizens have saved more than USD 1 billion.

Partnerships



Institutionalization

This innovation toolkit was first applied in phases during the 2014–2016 period by the Divisional Commissioners of various districts under the leadership and guidance of the Cabinet Division and funded by a2i. Though the funding from a2i continues, several ministries have started mobilizing their own funds to scale the practice. a2i is increasingly providing only resource persons to facilitate the process. All government ministries in Bangladesh now exhibit innovative practices. In fact, a separate government budget code has been introduced to enable all ministries to fund innovative initiatives. To date, nearly USD 3 million have been allocated. 15 ministries have identified over 30 innovation pilots for nationwide replication using their own funding and commissioned outcome studies by the UK's Behavioural Insights Team to rigorously track the process.

Moreover, public training institutes like Bangladesh Public Administration Training Center (BPATC) have incorporated this training into their foundation course.

Way Forward

What a2i is trying to achieve is more ambitious than simply digitizing public services. It is developing a culture of innovation in Bangladesh which aims to change the mindset of civil servants to put citizens at the centre of all reform/innovation initiatives. To achieve this, empathy has been adopted as the first guiding principle.

a2i works with all ministries, districts and local government institutions in not only triggering and nurturing vital innovations but also facilitating their adaptation and scaling up throughout the country.

Public Service Innovation Bangladesh – a social media powered peer-support and mentorship network – offers a platform for sharing, discussing and refining the pilots (and other promising ideas) boosting their chances of making impact at scale. Finally, outstanding efforts to transform public service delivery are celebrated through national and district level Innovation Summits & Fairs that enhance citizens' knowledge and deepen their engagement in making further improvements.

Recently, the Governments of Bhutan and the Maldives have joined hands with Bangladesh to import insights from this empathy-based innovation toolkit into their respective countries.



a2i - innovate for all

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TOOLKIT FOR Empathy-based Public Service Innovation

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Pilot & Scale SERVICE INNOVATION FUND

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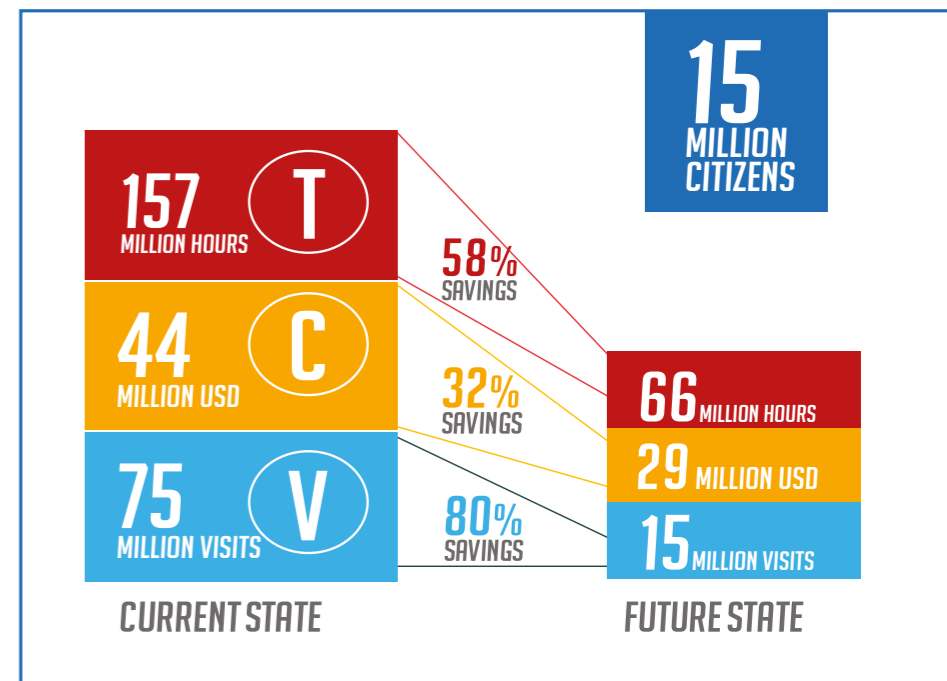
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