

Institution: University of Leeds
Unit of Assessment:30 (History)
Title of case study: Empowering Indian citizens to use the Right to Information through a 'Public Information Centre'
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study grows out of the research and collaboration between Gould and Asha Parivar, a Third Sector organisation in Lucknow, India. Gould's research between 2005 and 2010 (5), resulting in his 2011 monograph on corruption in India (1), led directly to the development of electronic Public Information Centres since 2010, which allow economically deprived communities in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, India to access information on government projects in a systematic and widespread manner. Centres/booths are run in six locations in two Indian states and assist in the filing of Right to Information (RTI) applications. Around 1,000 applications have been filed so far.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The case study is directly underpinned by two broad research outputs/activities of William Gould, University of Leeds (Lecturer September 2003- September 2007 Senior Lecturer, 2007 to February 2013, Professor of Indian History, February 2013-present).</p> <p>Firstly, it grows out of his work on the history of the 'everyday state' and government corruption in India, focussing on the period of 1930 – 1960s. The research was conducted 2005-2011 and resulted in the publication of a monograph in 2011 (1) and three articles (2-4). Gould first came into contact with Asha Parivar (AP) when undertaking his initial research in 2005-6. The head of AP arranged for Gould to interview volunteers involved in anti-corruption work with AP. The resulting monograph (1) is one of the first academic histories of corruption and anti-corruption for this period of South Asian history and one of the only historical works to draw on the latest anthropological work on the Indian state. It has led to a number of high profile invitations to speak (for example, at Cambridge (March 2012, CRASSH); Darmstadt (June 2011), Leiden (scheduled November 2013) and Philadelphia (scheduled March 2014).)</p> <p>Secondly, it is the result of a larger research collaboration carried out for the collaborative AHRC funded project (£450,000) 'From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1964' (i), which ran 2007-2010. Gould was PI on this project, with a CI currently at Royal Holloway London and researcher (previously Royal Holloway, presently LSE). Gould was the only member of the team focussing on corruption and the collaboration with AP deepened during this research. The principal output relevant to this case study is monograph (1). Two key ideas in this work inspired and shaped the Public Information Centre work with Asha Parivar.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gould showed that most everyday corruption in government departments developed through entrenched and long-term networks of mutual benefit, which related to ideas about customary/traditional governance. He observed that these structures and customs tended to break down when government department activities were made public as a result of changed political circumstances. Historically, the exposure of malpractice and access to information via non-official organisations were most successful when they concentrated on public exposure <i>across different localities</i> and outside the reach of existing government servant webs of influence. Access to information and, most importantly, the <i>systematic</i> public exposure of government corruption via the press and access to documents, was key to the promotion of successful anti-corruption strategies. (Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5). 2. Gould demonstrated the difficulty of gathering evidence about corruption and showed that its systematic public exposure had to take place via appeals to higher levels of an administrative hierarchy, since corruption networks were socially entrenched (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Looking at anti-corruption efforts after independence, he showed that official bodies

had been largely unsuccessful in breaking into corruption networks because the latter involve informal contracts between official and unofficial agencies (Chpt 5). The implication is that the exposure and prevention of corruption can only take place where a widespread and inter-connected *public* culture of anti-corruption has developed (along the theoretical lines suggested by Congress governments in the late 1930s (Chpt 5, pt i)).

Research outputs 2 and 4 develop specific themes around rent seeking in 'civil supply' and caste based lobbying in government. Both are of continuing relevance today, when some public goods are distributed via systems of rationing, and in a context of caste-based political parties. Item 3 explores the development of anti-corruption movements in different regions of India and Pakistan and formed a broader context for the design of the Public Information Centre network, reinforcing the advantages of inter-connected and widespread facility accessible to the public (1).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Publications and research projects:

1. William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930s-1960s* (London: Routledge, 2011). Routledge is one of the principal academic publishers, worldwide in the area of South Asian Studies. This book was subject to rigorous peer review, and is submitted to REF2014 for potential double weighting.
2. William Gould, 'From Subjects to Citizens? Rationing, refugees and the publicity of corruption over independence in UP', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, Issue 1, pp. 33-56 (Cambridge, 2011). DOI 10.1017/S0026749X10000302. *Modern Asian Studies* is an international leader in publications on South Asian Studies. This article was subject to rigorous peer review.
3. William Gould, Sarah Ansari and Taylor Sherman, 'The Flux of the Matter: Loyalty, Corruption and the 'Everyday State' in the Post-Partition Government Services of India and Pakistan', *Past and Present*, Vol. 219, Issue 1, pp. 237-279 (May 2013). DOI: 10.1093/pastj/gts045. *Past and Present* is a top ranking international journal in Historical research. This article was subject to rigorous peer review and is submitted to REF2014.
4. William Gould, 'The Dual State: The Unruly "Subordinate", Caste, Community and Civil Service Recruitment in North India, 1930-1955'. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 20, No. 1-2, pp. 13-43 (June 2007). DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-6443.2007.00299.x. This article was subject to rigorous peer review.

Research funding:

- i. AHRC large grant, in collaboration with Royal Holloway, London, 'From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1964', £450,000. The grant was awarded to the University of Leeds. Gould was the PI.

5. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The Public Information Centre (PIC) network that is the vehicle for the impact emerges from Gould's research in two ways. Firstly, the PIC network emerged from discussions between Gould and the head of Asha Parivar (AP) from September 2010. Gould took a leading role, alongside key figures in AP, in making it happen and continues to have day-to-day involvement in its development (B, C, D). Secondly, the form that the PIC network took emerges from Gould's research which identified an infrastructure that would: i) systematically give public access to information to form the basis of challenges to local corruption; ii) coordinate grass-roots efforts across different localities and facilitate and plan effective appeals up the administrative hierarchy and outside the reach of existing government servant webs of influence; iii) organise public exposure for campaigns and help build an inter-connected, institutionally backed public culture of

anti-corruption.

Interaction between Gould and AP involved a trail of over 60 emails [C], involving India-based coordinators, volunteers and the head of AP. It also involved skype/phone calls and conference calls, and planning visits by Gould to India. In Hindi the project is called Janta Suchna Kendra (JSK), and has the following forms of impact:

Enhancement of knowledge and skills of Third Sector organisations

The head of AP states: 'William Gould's research on his book, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence: Society and the state in India, 1930-1960s* (London: Routledge, 2011) and his interaction with the head of AP which grew out of that research between 2005 and 2012, led to and influenced the development of the Public Information Project. This project has resulted in five [now six] manned computer centres or booths, which local people can visit to gather information on public projects and to file Right to Information (RTI) applications. The latter have been very effective in both preventing and remedying problems associated with corruption in local government, which includes loss to government development projects. In particular, Gould's research and book on the history of anti-corruption and the significance of citizen's access to information about local government activity has been important, in the longer term, in the promotion of the Right to Information applications through the centres'. [B] Discussions with the head of AP (who is a nationally prominent anti-corruption figure in India and winner of the Ramon Magsaysay Award), also led to plans to 'map' centres and RTIs (C, Trails 3-4, pp. 7-19).

Changing organisational culture and practices

AP had been conducting RTI campaigns since 2005. However, these were organised around particular issues in localities around Lucknow. There was no systematic, inter-connected project to process and coordinate RTI applications. Email discussions involving Gould, the head administration of the PIC and head of AP among others (C), detailed the need to create an electronic, systematic and interconnected framework of PICs. The first PICs (Sandila and Kanpur) were opened in early June 2012. Others followed in four other locations across UP and Bihar. They provide a mix of services beyond RTI applications, including support similar to that offered by a Citizen's Advice Centre in the UK and basic services such as support for writing applications, passport photographs, etc. The electronic RTI system makes applications available to all PICs, allowing applicants and centres to share information and experience. It adds weight to applications, because higher officials know that they have been audited by AP and that they are publicly shared (A), and allows AP to target applications based on knowledge of the bureaucracy and local networks of corruption. An AP progress report on JSK states: 'Gould's work on the inter-connection of anti-corruption movements was one of the models for the JSK and has helped to change the way AP deals with RTI applications' (D, p. 5).

Increasing public engagement with societal issues

The six PICS currently in operation in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar serve areas with a total population of about 18.7 million and have guided, at the last estimate, around 1000 RTI applications (see source A detailing and tabulating some of the main applications, and C thread 10). The major beneficiaries are the key target groups of Asha Parivar, the poorest rural and urban communities, particularly low castes. Data from Centre reports gives a picture of the large amount of routine but important work to local people going through centres (A). At the Sandila Centre in October 2012, for instance, two ration card problems were resolved and three enquiries about old age or disability pensions were completed. A report from November 2012 states: 'Through the centre [labourers with the Fatehpur JSK] filed over 50 applications for work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA). Beforehand, their requests had been ignored by the local Block Development Officer (BDO). However, by filing mass applications online through the JSK, the workers caught the attention of more senior officials', This 'led to the increase of collaboration between workers and an increase of online applications' (F, report by intern, p. 3). An RTI worker and user of the PIC in Fatehpur Chaurasi also reported in video interview that 'The public is getting information about what is happening from it [the PIC]; the funds our village is getting, where it is being spent, how many labourers are working. All these details are now available and people are

more aware than before. The government people are working more cautiously because of this.’ (G). Some of the extensive media coverage of the scheme indicates that it is meeting a perceived need and is seen to have state-wide scope. *Kanpur Jagran* reported, on 3 August 2012, that ‘RTI applications will no longer have to be bewildering ... the JSK [PIC] serves people from all over the province’ (E).

Gould continues to partner AP in the development of the growing PIC network (C, trails 9-10, pp. 29 - 33). Three cohorts of student interns from the University of Leeds, all of whom had studied Gould’s research on corruption in India (1-4, B and F), have served in the centres in 2012 and 2013 and the University of Leeds scheme has served as a model for an AP student intern scheme in Indian universities, producing 24 interns in total (D, p. 3). This continuing involvement is influencing the evolution of the centres. For instance, analysis by a University of Leeds intern showed that the Sandila centre, the only one run by a woman, was getting many more women users. AP has since implemented a women’s day staffed by women at all centres. [C, trail 8, p. 28]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Oral and written verification, as well as an electronic record of Right to Information applications filed via the PIC in the period between 15 July 2012 and 1 June 2013. So far, this totals around 1000 applications across the centres at Kanpur, Amethi, Fatehpur Chaurasi, Sandila, Patna and Bara Banki. For online data on the Kanpur centre see <http://jsk.ashaparivar.org/reports/kanpur-work-report/> (Accessed 21.9.2013).
- B. The head of Asha Parivar has corroborated the impact of Gould’s research on this project in a letter/endorsement to the University of Leeds, 18 September 2012.
- C. The email trail, which details discussions leading up to the setting up of the PIC, is available to the panel on request. This is split into 10 ‘trails’, one of which (Trail 8) is a Facebook conversation.
- D. Asha Parivar have produced a report (authored by head administrator of PICs) dated 7 June 2013 which details the nature of the project at that stage and what it had achieved.
- E. Nine newspaper reports from the main regions of our PICs, discussing the inauguration and subsequent work of the centres. These reports publicise more broadly the purpose and work of the PIC and include the report cited in section 4 from *Kanpur Jagran* (16 November 2012).
- F. Report of student intern at the PIC, 16 November 2012.
- G. Video evidence detailing user engagement with the PICs, filmed on 7 April 2013.