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Calcutta questions

A survey reveals the nature of the city's daily problems and the apathy of the authorities



When the tap runs dry, how many Calcuttans stop cursing and turn to the right agency for redress? How many know there is a right agency?

The findings of the PUBLIC & GfK-MODE survey, conducted in association with **The Telegraph**, try to understand the nature of the Calcuttans' daily problems and their views of the various service-providing

agencies. The survey confirms what the city has long known: that its residents do not, almost, associate agencies such as the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) and the police, with "service".

There is nothing much to say in favour of the private sector either. CESC, as the sole representative of the private sector, does not fare very well.

The survey lists several civic problems and measures their severity. Power cuts top the list, followed by sanitation and garbage/sewerage; drainage and waterlogging; lack of open space and playgrounds; noise pollution; vehicular traffic control; road quality; air pollution; and pedestrian-related problems. **(See table 1)**

Problem	Total Recall of Problems	Unprompted Recall of Problems	Severities of the problem		
			Top Rank	2nd Rank	3rd Rank
Power cuts	80	43	13	20	15
Sanitation - garbage/sewerage	73	48	16	18	12
Drainage/water logging	70	45	19	12	11
Lack of open space/playground	54	10	1	6	7
Noise pollution	52	10	3	7	6
Domestic pipe water	50	32	22	6	4
Air quality	48	11	2	4	6
Vehicular traffic control	48	10	3	4	4
Air pollution	45	10	5	5	4
Pedestrian traffic control	36	7	3	2	2

Table 1

There is a huge gap between the severity of the problem and the number of people who are aware of the right agency to contact. In the survey 80 per cent of the respondents listed power cuts as the most crippling civic problem for the city and 50 per cent of them ranked them among the top three problems in the city. Yet 14 per cent of those who had ranked it as one of the top three did not know which agency to contact for redress.

Few actually turn to agencies. Only 36 per cent of those who ranked power cuts as one of the top three problems went to an agency. Even fewer emerge from agencies with their problems resolved. Of the 99 people who went to CESC, 45 did not have their problem resolved.

There are several other eye-openers in the survey, which was conducted on 600 people from the area under CMC. The respondents were divided into three equal groups of 200 people each, selected from households with a monthly income above Rs 17,500, between Rs 12,500 and Rs 17,500 and below Rs 12,500. The target group was the main earners of the households.

"It is interesting to note the huge gap between the total recall of problems and their unprompted recall in certain categories, such as lack of open space," says Bonani Kakkar of PUBLIC (People United for Better Living in Calcutta), an NGO that partnered the study.

While in the "unprompted recall" category, only 10 per cent of all respondents spoke of lack of open space as a problem, in the "total recall" category, 54 per cent mentioned it as a problem. It means that many more people spoke of the lack of open space as a problem when the researcher reminded them of it as a problem.

The same happens with the problems of pollution and traffic control. "This is because other problems such as power cuts, sanitation or water are so pressing. We are so busy firefighting always that issues such as environment need prompting to be remembered," says Kakkar.

Among all respondents, 41 per cent spoke about the health services as a problem, but only 25 per cent about law and order. "The agencies have just not done enough. But the survey is meant to tell them how to reach out to the citizens. It is to encourage people to take action," says Kakkar.

If environment only emerges as an issue on prompting, it is not a surprise that the greatest lack of awareness surrounds the agencies that are meant to be the protectors of environment. Among those who felt lack of open space to be one of the top three problems (14 per cent of all respondents), 72 per cent are not aware of the right agency, the state pollution control board. It's almost the same for noise and air pollution: among those who think it's one of the top problems, 60 per cent and 58 per cent respectively are not aware of the right agency. (See table 2)

Table 2	People who are not aware of the agencies
Lack of open space/ playground	72
Noise pollution	60
Air pollution	58
Vehicular traffic control	46
Pedestrian-related problems	46
Road quality	22
Drainage/water logging	18
Sanitation - garbage/sewerage	17
Power cuts	14
Domestic/pipe water	14

Base: Those who rated these problems among the top three
Figures in percentage

One of the reasons of poor awareness about the environment agency is lack of knowledge about its location, says Kakkar. Not many know its new address in Tabela Salt Lake, she feels. Its previous address at Taratala was not well-known either.

The highest number of people react to power cuts and contact an agency (See table 3). The next highest number reacts to water-related problems. Thirty-three per cent of those who feel it is a major problem contacted an agency, followed by those who consider sanitation and garbage accumulation a problem. But only 15 per cent of those who contacted an agency about water, contacted the right agency (CMC), and 17 per cent of those who went to an agency to complain about garbage went to the right one (CMC again). The rest? For water problems, people went to the police, CESC, Writers' Buildings and local political leaders.

Table 3	People who contacted any of the agencies
Power cuts	36
Domestic/ pipe water	33
Sanitation - garbage/sewerage	27
Drainage/water logging	26
Road quality	17
Lack of open space/ playground	16
Vehicular traffic control	10
Air pollution	9
Pedestrian-related problems	6
Noise pollution	6

Base: Those who rated these problems among the top three
Figures in percentage

Among the 128 people who went to the CMC for redress, 47 returned without their problems resolved. Only two cases were fully resolved. The figures are equally dismal for CESC and the police (see table 4).

Tabela 3

Hardly anyone spoke about courts or government hospitals. Possibly because Calcuttans do not think of taking daily life matters to the court.

Courts and hospitals, however, fare better in their perception. When asked to rank the institutions, the CMC, police, CESC, the courts and government hospitals, courts fared best, with 24 per cent of all respondents saying they were satisfied in general with courts. Which, actually, is not a very high mark.

Table 4	Not resolved	Resolved but recurred	Partially resolved	Fully resolved
Police	83	8	8	0
CMC	47	35	16	2
CESC	46	51	2	1

Base: All respondents who correctly contacted the three agencies with their problems
Figures in percentage

Tabela 4

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