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Building a Democratic Public Service through Citizen’s Charter: Lessons Learnt from Yogyakarta City

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Abstract

This article discusses the “citizen’s charter” as an instrument for the development of a democratic public service. Theoretically, linking public service to democracy is a challenging task in public administration. Traditional models of public administration consider the government as responsible for ensuring public service efficiency and effectiveness. On the contrary, the citizen’s charter model espouses the notion of involving citizens in determining public service delivery methods. This article will discuss the adoption of the citizen’s charter in the service of birth certificate delivery in Yogyakarta city, Indonesia. There was a need to improve the delivery of birth certificate services due to the fact that the process one had to follow to get them was plagued with red tape and uncertainty with respect to procedures, time required, and charges, as it involved several agencies. In fact, possessing a birth certificate influences right of access to delivery of other public services such as education and health services. The participation of citizens has not only contributed significantly toward improving public service quality generally, but has also enhanced political consciousness of the citizens’ right to influence government processes. Consequently, local officials such as the village heads and the sub-district heads have become more accountable in providing public services.

Introduction

This article discusses the adoption of citizen’s charters in the delivery of public services in Indonesia. In addition, it delves into the inception of the idea of adopting a citizen’s charter, comments on the performance of the citizen’s charter system, and considers the extent to which it has been institutionalized in the bureaucracy. Various innovations have been introduced driven by the need to improve the quality of public service delivery in Indonesia. Unfortunately, little headway has been achieved in institutionalizing them, a weakness that has undermined their sustainability. But potentially at least, the citizen’s charter is an exception.

Citizen’s charter practice has been adopted in many countries, especially those in the Anglo-Saxon bloc and Ireland. Moreover, in the European Union, the citizen’s charter forms an important part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights (Kumoroto 2007). Citizen’s charter practice has also been adopted in South East Asia, South Asia and Africa. However, the terms used are different from one country to another: Australia (Service Charter), Belgium (Public Service Users’ Charter), Canada (Service Standards Initiative), Malaysia (Client Charter), and Portugal (The Quality of Charter in Public Services) (CGG 2008:1-2).1 In Indonesia, the adoption of citizen’s charter practice constitutes a new phenomenon: it is today considered a new innovation, and has been adopted by many regional governments engaged in public service delivery, notably in the delivery of health services (Blihar city), in the issue of citizenship identity cards and the handling of disturbance and enterprise operational permits (Semarang district), issue of birth certificates (Yogyakarta city), and citizens’ records service delivery (Bogor city) (Kumoroto 2007).

Conventional public service delivery is based on the idea that the government is the provider of services. Such a model of public service delivery does not pay serious attention to the interests of users of services. On the other hand, the citizen’s charter positions the service user at the centre of public service delivery – when based on a citizen’s charter, public service delivery accords top priority to the needs and interests of users of services. The assumption is that public service delivery designed on the basis of democratic political accountability mechanisms encourages improvement in service delivery with respect to speed of action, quality of service, and fulfilling the needs of the general public (Acosta et al. 2010). As Diaz Fuentes and Clifton (2010) note, the perception and perspective of the general public about public service delivery is vitally important, and with the citizen’s charter the citizens’ voice is known, analysed and utilized in designing quality improvements. As forms of democratic public service delivery, citizen’s charters will have the following implications: (a) they make administration accountable and citizen-friendly; (b) they ensure transparency and right to information; and (c) they involve measures to motivate civil servants (Areza 2008:3).

To present a discussion of the citizen’s charter using the case study of Yogyakarta city, this article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the concept and approach of the citizen’s charter internationally. The section that follows deals with changes in public delivery systems in Indonesia, moving from the centralized to a decentralized era. Then comes a discussion of the process of adopting the citizen’s charter in Yogyakarta, right from the initial phases of the idea to its implementation. And the final section looks at problems relating to the institutionalization of the citizen’s charter.

Citizen’s Charters: Concept and Approach

The purpose of the citizen’s charter is to increase the level of public satisfaction with public service delivery. John Major, former British Prime Minister, is considered to be the brainchild behind the resurgence of the idea (Cabinet Office 1991). Early use was encouraging, and subsequently Tony Blair’s government continued to support the idea by developing it into a concept that became known as “Service First”. Throughout the UK, about 400 citizen’s charters were formed, in both the public and the private sectors (Shankar 2006). In the United States, President Bill Clinton introduced the same idea in 1993; he called it “Putting the Customer first” (Tindagurukayo 2005:5).

The formation of the citizen’s charter is underpinned by the desire to improve public service delivery: “it is a tool to improve the quality of services, address the needs of citizens’ rights and set clear standards of performance” (Shankar 2006:2). To that end, benefits it is expected to deliver include: (a) ensuring certainty of public service delivery with respect to time, charges/dues, procedures and methods; (b) providing information
on the rights and responsibilities of users, providers and other stakeholders in the entire public service delivery process; (e) simplifying ways service users, the general public and other stakeholders have of exerting control over public service delivery practices; and (d) assisting public service managers to improve delivery processes (Dwiyanto 2004).

Shankar offers several definitions. Thus a Citizen’s Charter “is a written, voluntary declaration by service providers that highlights the standards of service delivery that they must subscribe to, availability of choice for consumers, avenues for grievance redress and other related information”. Further, it is “an expression of understanding between the citizen and the service provider about the nature of services that the latter is obliged to provide” (Shankar 2006:2).

The adoption of citizen’s charters is very much in line with theoretical movement from the old public administration, through “new public management”, to the latest “new public governance”. While the guiding principle of the old public administration model lies in its orientation towards obedience of the general public to providers of public services (notably government institutions), the underlying principle of “new public management” is its orientation toward efficient service delivery and output. For the “new public governance” model, orientation of public service delivery is towards the existence of accountability, transparency and public participation.

The difference in public administration models also lies in the focus on the party charged with the management function. The old public administration requires the provider of public services to implement policies that are designed by the government. In “new public management”, the provider is charged with the responsibility of managing the input efficiently to turn it into an output that is desired by the customer. Then the “new public governance” model requires taking into consideration the involvement of many stakeholders in the public service delivery process, with democratic involvement in the process that produces the outcome (Denzau & Denhart 2002).

Public Service Delivery in Indonesia: From Centralized to Decentralized Era

Democratization of public service delivery is an important development for an increasingly democratic society. Put in another way, political democratization has resonated into public service delivery practices. Cohen (2005:5) aptly states that democratization of public service delivery will “provide citizens with new opportunities to monitor and direct government activities; and increase the openness, transparency and accountability of decision-making within the administrative structures of government”.

The change in the system of government in Indonesia from a centralized to a decentralized one had significant implications for public service delivery (Pramusinto 2006; Dwiyanto 2011:25). During the New Order regime, a centralized system of government was in place whereby the central government regulated the delivery of public services to different regions in a uniform manner. The function of government, at both district and provincial levels, was limited to implementing policies formulated by the central government. To that end, despite differences among regions, the delivery of public services in all regions in Indonesia was done in the same way.

Mechanisms were set for the delivery of various public services, ranging from the availability of health services to the issue of birth certificates, citizenship identity cards and driving permits. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) were also determined centrally, and were the same for all regions. SOPs related to charges/fees, procedures and time required for service delivery. Practically, there was little if any room for innovation. To that end, changes and improvements in delivery methods had to come through policy and operational instructions from the central government.

However, the political reforms of 1998, and subsequent implementation of Act No.22/1999 (later amended to Act No.32/2004) on regional government, brought a change in the system of government which has since been oriented toward local governments (Rasyid 2002, 2003). Local governments gained a lot of authority and opportunity to create and develop public service delivery systems suitable to the aspirations of the regions. Power still resting with the central government is confined to managing religious affairs and public order, foreign relations, monetary policy, and the judiciary. The power and authority to deliver the remaining public services has been decentralized to local governments, largely to district and city governments (Pramusinto 2004).

The political democratization process has strengthened democracy in public service delivery. Today, members of the general public have better opportunity to express their demand and complaints for better public services, and leaders of local governments also have an opportunity to respond to such demands in as quick a manner as possible. Local government leadership no longer has to wait for instructions from the central government in the form of macro policy or more technical instructions about implementation.

Since the onset of the political reforms, Indonesia has witnessed many innovations. Some of the public service delivery innovations in various regions have included:

- one-stop integrated public service delivery (in Srigen, Sidowarjo, Solo, Jembrana, Bandung city, Takalar, Banjarbaru);
- local government performance-based financial incentives (in Gorontalo, Riau, Solok, Yogyakarta city, Jembrana);
- transparent recruitment systems for local government officials (in Yogyakarta province, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Jembrana);
- formation of a transparency and participation commission (in Lebak, Gorontalo city);
- application of an integrity pact for public officials (in Solok, Yogyakarta city);
- adoption of an integrity pact in procurement of goods and services (in Banjarjarmasin);
Phase 2: Building a Citizen-Centered Program

The second phase of the program involves the development of a citizen-centered program. This program is designed to improve the delivery of government services by involving citizens in the planning and implementation process. The program focuses on creating a system where citizens can easily access government services, and their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

A key component of this program is the creation of a citizen service delivery system. This system is designed to be user-friendly and accessible, with a focus on providing services online. The program also includes a citizen feedback system, allowing citizens to provide input on the quality and effectiveness of government services.

In summary, the citizen-centered program aims to make government services more accessible and responsive to the needs of citizens. By involving citizens in the planning and implementation process, the program seeks to improve the delivery of government services and increase the satisfaction of citizens with these services.

Citizens, Citizen-Focused Programs, and Procedural Considerations

The success of a citizen-centered program depends on several key factors, including the effective engagement of citizens, the availability of technology, and the willingness of government officials to adopt new approaches. The program must also be designed with the needs of citizens in mind, ensuring that their voices are heard and that their concerns are addressed.

Implementation of the citizen-centered program will require significant investment in technology and resources. However, the benefits of such a program are significant, including increased satisfaction among citizens and improved efficiency and effectiveness of government services.

In conclusion, the citizen-centered program is a crucial component of modern government. By engaging citizens in the planning and implementation process, governments can improve the delivery of services and increase the satisfaction of citizens. The program must be designed with the needs of citizens in mind, ensuring that their voices are heard and that their concerns are addressed.
hospital, LPMK (the city population representation institution), and bureaucracy (officials from the citizens records office).

Representatives of users constituted the largest single group. But it was the involvement of NGOs that aroused most suspicion from government representatives. This was because NGOs have often been considered a threat based on their activities in disclosing weaknesses in the realm of public service delivery. However, members of the bureaucracy agreed to their participation after an understanding was reached that required them to avoid the practice of disclosing all the negative aspects that might occur during the process of making improvements in public service delivery.

As the forum was being set up, the sub-district head tried to include as many village/lurah administration heads as possible. The expectation was that, by including such people, the sub-district head would be able to sway the activities and direction of the forum toward his interests and whims. He had seen the existence of the forum as a threat to the bureaucracy, which had for long derived financial benefit from the issuing of birth certificates and other such services. However the designers of the forum reached an agreement that placed a limit on the number of representatives of the bureaucracy and so reduced its influence.

Phase 3: Preparing to operate

With the forum in place, the next phase involved consolidating it by establishing an organizational structure for the election of head and secretary, and for identifying the opportunities, problems and threats that lay ahead. The forum also prepared/developed the instruments which were used in conducting a survey of service users covering such aspects as the problems, needs and expectations of users of public services.

Findings of the survey reflected problems which have long been of public concern, many of which were recognised in the arguments for establishing a citizen's charter. They included (a) uncertainty of timeliness of services; (b) uncertainty of service charges/dues; (c) poor and often unmedical relationships when providers interacted with users; (d) the compulsory requirement for the user to present two witnesses prior to having services delivered; and (e) delay in completing service simply because the head of the office who is supposed to sign is out of office.

Phase 4: Implementation

Based on the problems found, the forum instituted the following changes in the birth certificate delivery procedure:

1. It clarified the time required for service delivery (three days starting with the day a complete list of all documents is submitted), with the consequence that, in the event that the completion of the processing exercise takes longer than the stated time limit, providers of services are obliged to deliver the birth certificate to the home address of the client.

2. It regulated charges/dues for processing the birth certificate from Rp. 10,000.00 plus other charges, which included paying for the services of witnesses offered by intermediaries or members of the bureaucracy, to Rp. 0 — in other words, it is free of charge.

3. It provided two-day training on service delivery ethics and leadership, carried out by researchers and professors from Gadjah Mada University. Course materials delivered encompassed improving attitude and behaviour in public service delivery, and various methods to gauge the level of satisfaction with public services delivered. A simple survey by members of the citizens' charter forum was used to assess the level of satisfaction of the general public with public service delivery, the survey being carried out once in every three months.

4. It replaced the obligation to present two witnesses to sign the application, which was an official government requirement embodied in regulations, by the requirement that the signing of the application forms is made by an official of the relevant public bureaucracy. Hitherto, the process had required two witnesses who had to be residents of the place where the applicant lives or personnel charged with parking who served as intermediaries and were paid money to compensate for transport fares and service fees.

5. Prior to the implementation of the citizen's charter, delays in finishing birth certificates were often caused by the absence of the office heads who were charged with signing them. With the adoption of the citizen's charter, other officials can sign birth certificates on behalf of the office head when he/she is out of office.

Based on the results of a public satisfaction index survey carried out by CPPS, satisfaction was higher in the processing of birth certificates following these changes than in the areas of company registration, trade licenses, disturbance licenses and building establishment approvals (Figure 1). The perception of public satisfaction was based on several indicators, which included: users' rights, facilities provided, time and cost spent by users, fairness in services, and attitudes of service providers. It is evident that, with the exception of the attitude of service providers, public satisfaction was higher with the processing of birth certificates than with delivery of these other public services.

This positive public perception about the application of the citizens' charter in the processing of birth certificates attests to a significant change in the quality of public service delivery attributable to the innovation. Problems relating to public service delivery, which became the concern of the general public prior to the formation of the citizen's charter, were substantially redressed in the wake of introduction of the citizen's charter.

Moreover, in the wake of adopting the citizen's charter for birth certificate delivery in Yogyakarta City, there has been noticeable improvement not only in the quality of service but also in the behaviour of service providers. Sub-district heads and village heads have become keen to deliver public services efficiently to their citizens. Frequent surveys
been attempted to make it more secure, but they have not been sustainable. Several reasons are suggested for this lack of sustainability.

**Weak Legal Foundation**

The legal framework which has so far been used to support the existence and use of the citizen’s charter in Yogyakarta city has been limited to the mayor’s decision conveyed in a statement or decree. At the local government level, public service delivery runs smoothly if it is underpinned by a strong legal foundation, in the form of a regulation enacted by the local government assembly. The lack of such a foundation for the citizen’s charter has meant that budgetary support is weak; even more importantly, it means that the continued existence of the system depends on continuity in office of the present supportive mayor. In the event that a new individual takes office as city mayor, an unsecured practice based on the innovative policies of the former mayor can easily be revoked.

**Lack of Support from Institutions of Advanced Education**

Strong and intensive involvement of institutions of advanced education was limited to the introductory and early implementation phases, and this support has fallen off. Apparently believing that the innovation was going according to plan, they reduced their efforts to monitor progress. Unfortunately, their continuing involvement is necessary to ensure sustainability.

**Weak Internalization of the Values of Public Service Delivery within the Bureaucracy**

Though many quality innovations have been introduced in the public service delivery system by local governments, commitment to such innovations has been limited to the elites. The result is that there has usually been a deficiency in implementation. Local government leadership is often preoccupied with searching for innovations without paying sufficient consideration to making appropriate arrangements to ensure that their innovations will be implemented in a sustainable manner. The proliferation of innovations brings awards from various institutions both in the central government and in the international donor agencies. This strengthens the image of the leader and increases the interest of donor agencies in assisting in the creation and development of new programs — but so often the effort does not carry through to the implementation stage.

**Concluding Remarks**

The above analysis shows that citizen’s charters constitute a form of participative service delivery, compared with the conventional public service delivery system that is based on the interests of the bureaucracy. With the existence of the citizen’s charter, users of public services have the opportunity to contribute to the process of designing the delivery system. To that end, based on the capacity of the organization, providers and users of public services can jointly determine the quality of those services.
The citizen’s charter in Yogyakarta city has been successful in increasing the quality of public service delivery with respect to time required, cost/charges users have to pay to acquire services, and attitude of providers of services. This is reflected in the public service delivery satisfaction index, which indicates that the general public has a positive view of the changes that have occurred. The government’s decision to adopt the citizen’s charter system has yielded good results.

One clear lesson is that there is need to give serious consideration to institutionalizing and replicating the citizen’s charter principle in other areas of public service delivery. This can be done through taking measures to provide an adequate legal foundation to support adoption of the citizen’s charter, and to ensure availability of sufficient financial resources to support the smooth running of the citizen’s charter forum as it conducts surveys of service users and works towards enhancing service delivery capacity.

When we look at the dynamics of public administration, it is clear that the citizen’s charter model has provided a good way of taking the service delivery function forward consistently with the concept of “new public governance”. Now public service and democracy go hand in hand, with citizens involved in the process of creating and developing services, much more than being simply the object of service delivery in ways determined by the service provider or the government. Even the intermediate model which allows for public consultation by government officials is relatively outdated when compared with the citizen’s charter. The citizen’s charter goes further in positioning the general public as stakeholders who participate in the design of the public service delivery system. Compared with public consultation mechanisms which are liable to manipulation for purposes of achieving legitimacy, and by extension help to create a false impression that the provision of public services is based on inputs from the citizenry, the citizen’s charter positions citizens as participants who play a crucial role in determining the form, quality and accountability of the public services which the government provides to its citizens.

Endnotes

1 Developed from a paper presented at the EUROPA Annual Conference, Bangkok, 19-23 February 2012.

2 Among the many other documents detailing the growth of citizen’s charters around the world that I have drawn on in preparing this article are: DIST Australia 1997; Citizen’s Charter Unit, Jamaica 1995; Sadler 1999.

3 This institution and the project was led by Agus Dwiyanto, Professor of Public Administration, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta City.

4 Interview with Erwan Agus Purwanto, Professor of Public Administration, and Agus H Hadna, Researcher, Center for Population and Policy Studies (CPFS), Gadjah Mada University, 21-22 May 2012.

5 Information given by one of the forum members of the Citizen’s Charter of Yogyakarta City.

6 Interview with Agus H Hadna, 12 January 2012.

References


Biosketch

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