

Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter: The Case of 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines



Jennifer Cordez San Jose

Partido State University, School of Graduate Studies, Goa, Camarines Sur, Philippines, 4422

ABSTRACT: Stakeholders' feedback is one contributing factor in the attainment of an organization's objectives. It clearly identifies strengths and weaknesses and other corrective measures to improve the implementation of public policies and programs. The study delved into the problems encountered in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter and recommendations for the improvement of its implementation in the 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines. Using thematic analysis, three themes were generated from forty-five (45) interviewees composed of frontline service providers and users from the Local Treasury, Business Permit and Licensing Office, and Engineering Office of LGUs Tigaon, Goa, and Lagonoy, Camarines Sur. These themes are 1) Knowledge/Attitude, 2) Clarity of procedures/flow of transactions, and 3) Structural barriers. Specifically, the findings revealed that service users are not aware of the Citizen's Charter, lack understanding of its purpose and procedures, the procedures in the Citizen's Charter are not followed during actual transactions, there are delays in the flow of transactions, problems in the queuing system, and structural designs hamper the clearness of instructions from the frontline service providers. The study recommends that LGUs, CSC, and other line agencies sternly monitor the Citizen's Charter implementation vis-à-vis, conduct awareness programs and capacity building, implement procedural innovations, address structural barriers, and conduct continuous research and extension activities of academic and field practitioners.

KEYWORDS: Social Sciences, Problems, Citizen's Charter, Thematic Analysis, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Section 6 of Republic Act No. 11032 otherwise known as the Ease of Doing Business for Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018, states:

All government agencies including departments, bureaus, offices, instrumentalities, government-owned and/or controlled corporations, or LGUs shall set up their respective most current and updated service standards to be known as the Citizen's Charter in the form of information billboards which shall be posted at the main entrance of offices or at the most conspicuous place, in their respective websites and in the form of published materials written either in English, Filipino or in the local dialect, that detail: (a) A comprehensive and uniform checklist of requirements for each type of application or request; (b) The procedure to obtain a particular service; (c) The person/s responsible for each step; (d) The maximum time to conclude the process; (e) The document/s to be presented by the applicant or requesting party, if necessary; (f) The amount of fees, if necessary; and (g) The procedure for filing complaints.

The use of Citizen's Charter was first developed in the United Kingdom (Saguin, 2013; Spark, 2016 Vol.9, Issue 4). First known as RA 9485 in the Philippines to improve government service delivery, reduce bureaucratic red tape and prevent graft and corruption. It was later repealed by RA 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business for Efficient Public Service Delivery Act of 2018. It aims to improve services by re-engineering, simplifying requirements and procedures, and promptly responding to the needs of the public.

According to Gabriel (2018), there are three core components of ARTA namely, (1) the Citizen's Charter which is the benchmark of performance to know the standard of service that the clients can demand from their service providers; (2) Frontline Services where the public can access the government service and (3) Report Card Survey (RCS) which serves as a feedback mechanism that measures the quality of service of the agency. These three core components of ARTA were also present in the amended law.

Citizen's Charter is an effort made by public organizations to inform their clients/users of their service types, standards, and time frame of receiving particular service and introduce a complaint procedure to let the users complain if service is not

Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter: The Case of 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines

provided according to the stipulated time without any real explanation. It plays an important role in providing public services, conceived as the most effective tool for implementing New Public Management (NPM) values. (Ullah & Rahman, 2018).

The Citizen's Charter also serves as a pledge of commitment between the agency and the citizens, both with reciprocal obligations—the government to fulfill its duties in the delivery of frontline services and the citizens to comply with the requirements to expedite the transaction (Calina, 2015).

However, despite the presence of law which criminalizes acts of bribery, extortion, abuse of office, and conflict of interest, the legislative framework is still inadequate to improve service delivery (GAN, 2017; Romero, et al., 2019). A myriad of problems was identified in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter.

Del Mundo (2022) revealed that problems encountered in availing frontline services by 93 teachers and staff at Nueva Vizcaya State University are *reasonably serious*. This includes: The personnel did not meet the maximum time to finish requests, the awareness campaign to educate clients about the Charter was not conducted systematically, the standards/time norms of services mentioned in the Citizen's Charter were either too lax or too tight, and were, therefore, unrealistic and created an unfavorable impression on the clients. Nineteen of the teachers also mentioned that the frontline service providers are not courteous and helpful. Huque & Ahsan (2016) found that the implementation of the Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh had minimal impact due to a poor publicity campaign that resulted in low awareness among the citizens, a person-centered approach to service delivery in local councils, and apathy and lack of interest among stakeholders. A top-down approach adopted in formulating the charter further contributed to its ineffectiveness of the charter. The study also revealed that citizens found it difficult to access services and were dissatisfied with their quality. While some of the problems were attributed to the performance of public officials, implementation failures made the initiative ineffective.

Compliance with the Citizen's Charter was not also consistent with the principles of New Public Management and charters. The CC was developed with the absence of stakeholder involvement with varying levels of compliance, inconsistencies of information provided in the CC, and lack of innovation and customization on the part of LGUs in terms of content and form (Saguin, 2013).

Moreover, employee behavior towards clients was one of the most felt problems in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter at Western Philippines University, Aborlan, Palawan. Continued information campaigns, hastening of the processes, employees' adherence to the norms of conduct, strengthening of feedback and redress mechanism, and improvement of the basic facilities were the recommendations of the study (Limsa, et al., 2022)

Seven factors affect the implementation of the Citizen's Charter in Iranian State Agencies, these are 1) the level of development and awareness of citizens, 2) employees' willingness and organizational strength, 3) citizens' trust in governmental resources and supportive policies, 4) network and infrastructure of appropriate institutional culture, 5) culture of ambiguity avoidance, power distance, and leadership commitment, 6) citizenship rights, 7) complexity of laws and motivation of government officials (Pedroud, et al., 2022).

The above situations are not different in local government units. In fact, for seven years, local government units received the most accusations of corruption based on the Finance and Management Ombudsman's findings (FMIO). A total of 3,189 complaints were made against local government unit officials in 2017, then 939 complaints against the Philippine National Police (PNP), 310 Department of Education employees, and 184 from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 117 complaints against officials from state universities and colleges. All the grievances brought up against the staff of the aforementioned agencies were both administrative and criminal in nature (Antiporda, 2018; Romero, et al., 2019).

"People in the government are generally and unfairly treated as crooks, slow in the delivery of services, inefficient and corrupt. Making the situation worst is the inadequate citizen engagement in public affairs and the inherently complex built-in procedures in the public offices which slow down the process of transactions in the government" (Ong & Gabriel, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to involve stakeholders in the formulation of the Citizen's Charter. The stakeholders know the drawbacks of the service providers and vice-versa. Feedback from both is important. The legislative bodies should consider the issues in the implementation of the same.

Initiating reforms to change the administrative system based on the purpose of the legal framework is not easy and cannot be resolved overnight, especially in a political system like the Philippine bureaucracy. It is important to strengthen the implementation and monitor the law, likewise, involving citizens in the policy-making process, which includes monitoring and evaluation of the policy.

This study delved into the 1) problems encountered in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter and 2) recommendations to strengthen the implementation of the Citizen's Charter in the 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines

Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter: The Case of 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive-evaluative. Forty-five (45) frontline service providers and users from the frontline offices of LGUs Tigaon, Goa, and Lagonoy, Camarines Sur, Philippines were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The purposive sampling technique was used in choosing the service providers, while convenience sampling was used in choosing the service users. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the responses to the problems encountered by both the service providers and users. From the themes generated, the researcher crafted the policies for the improvement of the implementation of the Citizen's Charter. The data gathering was conducted for fifteen days in July 2022.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the discussions of the study. Works of literature affirm as well in the findings of the study. **Figure 1. Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter** The problems encountered in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter were generated using interviews. The problems were clustered into three themes: 1) knowledge and attitude, 2) clarity/flow of transaction, and 3) structural barrier.



Figure 1. Problems Encountered by the Frontline Service Providers and Users in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter

Three themes were verbalized after the interview. First is knowledge and attitude. Clients do not read the Citizen's Charter and unfortunately are unaware of the same. They still ask the staff or frontline service providers about the procedures and steps for a specific transaction because they do not know it. One key personnel when asked during the interview was not certain where the CC was placed. Below are some excerpts,

"siguro sa main building, recently kaya binagyo kaya dae pa naaayos, pero usually nakalaag sa main building."
(Maybe at the main building, recently, a typhoon hit the area which is not yet fixed, but the CC is usually placed at the main building. (Key Personnel 1)

Other key personnel said,

Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter: The Case of 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines

"Clients do not read the CC; they are not aware of the CC; neither they understand it." (Key personnel 2)

"Clients usually ask the staff about the procedures, requirements, fees, etc. because they do not know the CC." (Key Personnel 3)

Conversely, there is a disparity between the key personnel and the client's responses. Here, the second theme emerged which is the clarity/ flow of the transaction. Some clients professed,

"grabe sanang kamag-kamag" (They rush the transaction, they do not attend to clients one at a time). (Client 1)

"We do not understand the information on the CC because it is written in English." (Client 2)

"Unarranged documents cause a delay in the transaction." (Client 3)

"There is a problem with the queuing system; the line is long." (Client 4)

"The procedures in the CC are not followed during the actual transaction." (Client 5)

Moreover, another theme emerged which is the structural barrier. The design of the transaction windows hampers the clarity of the information by the frontline service provider or staff. *"Dae mi nadandangog na maray ang instructions ta may nakaulang na plastic sa bintana"* (The clients cannot hear the instructions by the staff well because the window is blocked by a plastic cover in compliance with IATF and health protocols). This was placed during the peak of the Covid pandemic.

The problems mentioned above were also evident in Nayem (2010) who focused on the problems of implementing the Citizen Charter in the Upazila Land Office. The study revealed that after two years of its existence, implementation was very low. All services were not reflected in the charter; thus, political executives do not have the initiatives to improve the same. The staff and officials are not fully aware of the CC. The citizens are totally ignorant about the CC initiatives.

Similarly, De Leon (2009) also confirmed that some information was not reflected in the CC of the Bureau of Customs Port of Clark and the Clark Development Corporation. The procedures for filing complaints, allowable extension periods for unusual circumstances, and contact numbers for giving feedback were the problems in the study areas.

Ua-O (2022) further found that the improper posting of the Citizen's Charter needs to be addressed by the National Labor Relations Commission-Regional Arbitration Branch 10.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CITIZEN'S CHARTER

After a thorough analysis of the themes generated from the interviews, the following are the recommendations that would help local legislative bodies formulate policies to strengthen the implementation of the Citizen's Charter:

1. LGUs must update the information requirements on the Citizen's Charter in accordance with the mandates of RA 11032.
2. The local chief executives (LCEs) through the Human Resource Management must require each frontline office to post the Citizen's Charter in front of their office or in conspicuous places, prepared in billboard or poster size using Filipino or local dialect.
3. LGUs must conduct more capacity-building and awareness activities on the implementation and purpose of the Citizen's Charter to the stakeholders, specifically, the service users and frontline service providers.
4. Line agencies such as the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) must regularly conduct an ocular audit on the implementation of the Citizen's Charter. The audit findings must not only serve as a report or a piece of paper but be the bases for interventions in improving such implementation.
5. Academic Institutions should spearhead more need-based extension projects to the LGUs, specifically, the frontline service providers and users.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Problems in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter are evident in the locale of the study. The same must be properly addressed with innovations and customization so as not to deviate from the service standards mandated by law. The CC must not only be implemented for compliance but should serve its purpose by re-engineering, simplifying requirements and procedures, reducing bureaucratic red tape, and promptly responding to the needs of the public. The local legislators must consider the recommendations generated from this study to improve the implementation of the Citizen's Charter.

Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Citizen's Charter: The Case of 4th District, Camarines Sur, Philippines

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