

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals through innovative public service delivery: A critical assessment of implementing client service charters in Tanzania

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Abstract

The need to reach out and serve the people better has today become one of the major preoccupations of public administration as well as of multilateral organizations. In 2001, the United Nations member states numbering 192 and at least 23 international organizations adopted the eight millennium development goals and agreed to achieve them by the year 2015. Taking Tanzania as an example, this paper examines the extent to which Tanzania's public administration has managed to translate into action the intentions of the UN MDGs through the implementation of Client Service Charters. We have noted that most of the innovations adopted by public administration in developing countries are not a product of an internal dynamic and therefore fail to be sustainable. A local capacity is therefore critical to making these innovations work; thereby strengthening public administration capacity to reach out and serve the people better.

Key Words: Millennium Development Goals, Innovations, Client Service Charters.

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Introduction

With the beginning of the early 1980s, serving the citizens better became one of the major preoccupations of public administration, both in developed and developing countries. Public administration today has transcended the impersonal instrumental role it previously played whereby it simply served people as passive abstract subjects. Today, public administration, in addition to playing its traditional instrumental role, is also striving to exalt the status of citizens so that they (citizens) become respectable and recognizable actors, capable of exerting a significant influence on the processes of government, with the ultimate aim of making public administration more responsive to citizens' needs, demands and concerns. In other words, citizens are no longer expected to be passive recipients of goods and services. They are now active players in terms of calling upon public administration to account for its actions and behavior. Citizen involvement in governmental processes has strongly been viewed as one of the critical prerequisites for the successful implementation of governmental development programs (Zanetell and Knuth, 2004).

One of the major steps that public administration has taken to strengthen its capacity for serving the people better and more effectively has been the adoption of a number of both administrative and technological initiatives/innovations which, ultimately, aimed at strengthening the processes of delivering goods and services to the citizens. The process of adopting these administrative and technological initiatives/innovations has become a global phenomenon. Examples of administrative initiatives which some countries have adopted have included the Financial Management Improvement Program in Australia, the Administrative Management Project in Austria, Public Service 2000 in Canada, the Modernization Program for the Public Sector in Denmark, the Renewal of the Public Service in France, the Fundamental Policy of Administrative Reform in Japan, the Major Options Plan in Portugal, the Financial Management Initiative and Next Steps in the United Kingdom, the National Institutional Renewal Program of Ghana, and the Public Service Reform Programs in almost all African countries (OECD, 1993; Ohemeng, 2010; Kiragu and Mutahaba, 2006).

As a way of strengthening the significance and seriousness of these administrative innovations respective countries have issued reports, white papers, and related documents such as '*Reforming the Australian Public Service*' in Australia, '*Towards More Result-Oriented Management in the Netherlands*', '*Plan for the Readjustment of Central Government Administration in the 1990s*' in Norway, '*Reflections on Modernization of Public Administration*' in Spain, '*Making the Most of Next Steps*' in the United Kingdom, and '*Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less*' in the United States of America (OECD, 1993).

Additionally, many countries have adopted electronic innovations such as the World Wide Web and the Internet in order to improve the interactive processes between government departments/agencies on the one hand, as well as between citizens and government officials, on the other. E-governance, for example, defined as the process of utilizing the Internet and the world wide web for delivering government information to citizens (UN/ASPA, 2001:1), has presently been adopted by almost every country on the globe, the main purpose being to serve the people faster and better (Njunwa, 2005). In addition to electronic innovations there have also been non- electronic innovations such as Client Service Charters under which governments have expressly committed themselves to delivering public services to citizens more effectively in terms of improved quality, openness and timeliness. Public-private partnerships have also been another innovation that public administration has adopted in order to utilize the civil society and or the private sector for the delivery of public goods and services. The extent to which countries have succeeded in the implementation of these administrative and technological innovations has varied from country to country. Tanzania is one of the developing countries which have adopted some of

these innovations. To what extent has Tanzania's public administration succeeded in pursuing the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the implementation of these innovations, more specifically, the Client Service Charters? Has the adoption of this innovation significantly strengthened the process of reaching out in serving the people more effectively? What lessons for reflection can we draw from the Tanzanian experience?

The purpose of this paper therefore is to make a critical assessment of Tanzania's adoption and implementation of one of the non-electronic innovations, namely, the Client Service Charters (CSC) within the general context of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Goals (MDGs) whose common underlying goal is to reach out in serving the people better. The Paper attempts to show whether or not the adoption and implementation of Client Service Charters in Tanzania has made a noticeable difference in making public services more readily available to a significant number of the population/citizens. It may be recalled that in 2001, recognizing the need to assist impoverished nations more aggressively, all the UN member states numbering 192 and at least 23 international organizations adopted these goals and agreed to achieve them by the year 2015. These Goals were developed out of the eight chapters of the UN Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000. There are eight (8) goals with 21 targets and a series of measurable indicators for each target. These goals include the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reducing child mortality rate, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and finally, developing a global partnership for development.

To facilitate the discovery of the outcome of the research the paper is divided into four sections. The first section provides a brief review of key conceptual issues as they relate to innovations in government. Here, the purpose for adoption of these innovations and constraints limiting successful implementation of innovations are discussed. The next section presents the way CSCs have been implemented in Tanzania. The third section reviews the successes attained and the challenges encountered with the implementation of CSCs. Finally, the conclusion will close off the paper.

Conceptual Issues

Innovations in Government

Hornby (2000) defines 'innovation' as a new idea, or a way of doing something that has been introduced or discovered. Ellickson, et al (1983), Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) and Walker (1969) define 'innovation' as an idea, practice, or material artifact that is new to the adopting agency – regardless of how many other agencies have adopted it. Ellickson and his associates go a step further to distinguish between 'innovation' and 'invention'. To them, innovation, unlike 'invention' does not require that the knowledge it (innovation) embodies be "new," only that the adopting agency perceive it as new. This means, for example, that the adoption of CSCs by African countries (e.g. Tanzania, Ghana, etc) constitutes an innovation (not an invention) to them regardless of the fact that implementation of similar Charters had long been pursued by such countries as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States of America, France, Spain, etc (Clark, 2000).

There have been divided views about the process of adopting an innovation and making it work. Ellickson argues that research on factors that promote or impede successful innovation has been dominated by two distinct perspectives, namely, *adoption* and *implementation*. The former perspective (*adoption*), which arose out of the research and development model of knowledge

use, views innovation as a problem in developing and disseminating new ideas. This perspective implicitly assumes that “good” ideas, for example, those that have been scientifically developed and tested, are self-executing. In other words, once information about them (ideas) has been broadly disseminated, they will become widely used as a matter of course. In this regard, this perspective views potential adopters as relatively passive users who, if they know about a good idea and judge it attractive, will adopt it and put it into place with minimum effort. For this perspective, what happens after adoption is largely irrelevant since adoption and implementation are viewed as nearly simultaneous events. From this perspective, the most reasonable determinants of successful innovation are the information diffusion process and the characteristics of the innovations themselves.

Furthermore, supporters of this perspective have identified several factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of adoption of innovations. These factors are said to include, *implied benefits* (the innovation yields economic or social benefits to the user and improves on the current situation); *clarity* (both the innovation’s goals and the operations required to use it are easily understood and easy to learn); *compatibility* (the innovation resembles what it replaces, or supplements or is consistent with user values, practices, and needs); *implied cost* (the resources required for adoption and implementation are affordable; that is, within the adopting organization’s fiscal and manpower capacity (capability)); and finally, *scope* (the innovation’s initial requirements are limited. That is, it affects the behavior of a subset of individuals within the adopting organization, or can be introduced in stages or parts rather than requiring change across all tasks and organizational units (pervasiveness, divisibility)).

The second perspective on innovations is the implementation perspective. This perspective views post-adoption events as crucial. It focuses on actions and strategies of those who convert the innovation into practice and regards them (converters) as the key to success or failure of innovations. Implementation theorists stress the importance of establishing that the innovation has in fact been implemented (albeit modified over time) as well as the importance of understanding the process by which conversion of the idea into practice occurs (Palumbo & Sharp, 1980). Implicitly, they assume that those who convert the idea into practice do not share identical rationales or capacities for implementation and that an effective implementation process hinges crucially on the adopting organization’s capacity to mobilize and build participant support, cooperation and competence. As a result, implementation analysts have identified a different set of factors that enhance the likelihood of success.

These factors emphasize organizational and participant motivations, capacities and strategies for accomplishing the change (Bardach, 1977). In more specific terms these enhancement factors are said to include, *reason for adoption* (innovations are adopted because they address a pressing need or problem), *support of key actors* (these may include the adopting agency’s leadership, a project manager, and those individuals who convert the innovation into practice, generally referred to as users, practitioners, or participants), *organizational resources* (money and expertise), *adaptability and frequent communication* (adaptability refers to a planning process that continues throughout the period of implementation, and frequent communication is a corollary feature of an adaptive implementation strategy), *participation of key actors*, and finally, *staff training* (effective staff training typically involves a sustained in-service effort that helps to combine and integrate on-the-job learning and fosters regular interaction among practitioners and resource personnel).

Elenkov and Manev look at the question of innovations from a slightly different angle from the adoption and implementation theorists discussed above. The two scholars examine the extent to which top management leadership as well as the socio-cultural context can influence the

successful adoption of innovation whether in public or private organizations. Like Lengnick- Hall (1992) and Sastry (1999), Elenkov and Manev argue that innovations are a powerful source of competitive advantage. They further contend that successful innovation requires an active and highly sophisticated coordination of the efforts of a number of key participants who may include idea generators, gatekeepers, innovators, entrepreneurs, project leaders and innovation champions. The latter defend the innovation against the tide of opponents, make sure that the new idea will be introduced coherently within the company's policies and strategies, and motivate employees to implement those new ideas. They conclude that top management leadership and the social cultural context are critical factors to making innovations successful in any organization.

Kim and Chang (2009) view innovations as a major tool of organizational survival. For this reason, they argue that government managers must learn how to build capacity for innovation. They (government managers) must not only have a strong will for exploring innovative ideas, but also act as a problem solver to implement innovative tasks effectively. The two scholars advise that offering appropriate rewards for employees' creativity, encouraging information and knowledge sharing, and building a learning culture could also increase the capacity for government innovation.

From the foregoing review on innovations we can make a number of remarks. Firstly, it is important to note that both the adoption and implementation perspectives are not antithetical to each other. They do complement each other in innovation practical action. Secondly, innovations take place in both public and private organizations. However, it may be interesting to note that whereas the private sector exhibits more readiness to adopt innovations the public sector tends to view innovations with caution, mistrust, suspicion and inertia. Thirdly, innovations do not happen fortuitously or spontaneously. They (innovations) happen purposefully. They are a product of specific environmental demands, concerns and needs. Innovations are adopted in order to strengthen the process of public service delivery. As we shall shortly see, the adoption of Client Service Charters in Tanzania, for example, was a result specific dynamics in the environment, both local and foreign. Innovations are given shape by people who appreciate the need for improvement in the organization's processes, systems or procedures. This is partly why Quinn, Baruch and Zein (2002) once pointed out that the economic and producing power of a modern corporation lies more with its intellectual capabilities than in its hard assets. Finally, innovations need committed people and money to succeed. However, we may need to caution that money alone is not a guarantee to the success of innovations. Ellickson (1983) has indicated a number of examples of failed innovations in America's local criminal justice system despite generous funding by the Federal Government.

Client Service Charters (CSCs)

Client Service Charters – sometimes referred to as Citizen Charters - are one category of several non-electronic innovations that many governments have adopted as part of their public sector reform programs. In almost all cases, the desire behind these reforms has often been, to do more with less, empower citizens, enhance transparency, and hold public servants accountable, or briefly, good governance. As it has presently been witnessed, public service delivery has been at the center of public sector reforms throughout the past three decades. Many governments therefore have developed a number of service delivery mechanisms over the years to achieve these objectives. An example of these mechanisms is the Client Service Charter System.

A Client Service Charter is a form of contract between providers of goods/services and users of those goods and services. Under this contract, the service provider (could be a person, a government agency, or private organization, etc) expressly makes a commitment to serve the

users according to acceptable standards of improved service quality, frequency, openness and timeliness. The Service Provider furnishes the users with relevant communication mechanisms through which they (users) can express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction over the services and goods provided. In this regard, telephone and FAX numbers, postal and e-mail addresses, suggestion boxes etc are provided to the users (clients/customers/stakeholders) to enable them to communicate back to the service/goods provider. Users are also free to physically call on the service provider's offices to submit appreciation or complaints for relevant action (s). Moreover, and within the spirit of the MDGs, the service provider is obligated to treat the clients with courtesy and fairness, respect their privacy; as well as replying to clients' queries promptly.

The idea of the service client charter was first introduced in the United Kingdom under the Conservative Government of John Major in 1991. The idea was re-launched by the new Labor Government of Tony Blair in the summer of 1998. The core reason for the launching of this innovation was to empower the public in relation to public service delivery (Falconer and Ross, 1999). The idea quickly spread to other developed countries, in particular other developed commonwealth countries including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, as well as to the United States of America and to many other European countries including, but not limited to, France and Spain. Many key international organizations such the OECD, the World Bank and the United Nations have embraced this idea too. They have now helped to disseminate it around the world. As the years went by, many other countries, especially those in the developing countries including Latin America, Africa, and South East Asia adopted the system in one form or another as part of their service delivery mechanism (Haque, 2005).

The extent to which the adoption of client service charters has been successful has differed from country to country. The situation is even much more unclear in many African countries which have adopted this service delivery mechanism and where the evaluation of innovations recently put in place is rarely conducted. It is for this reason that we have decided to make an assessment of Tanzania's adoption of client service charters in order to firstly, find out the extent to which CSCs have strengthened the process of public service delivery, secondly, to explore some factors that account for the failure and or success and, finally, to draw some lessons that can serve us as a basis for further reflection.

Client Service Charters in Tanzania.

Implementation

The context in which Client Service Charters are implemented in Tanzania is the Public Service Reform Program (PSRP) which was launched in 2000. The PSRP, partly funded by the World Bank to the extent of US\$94/= million, aimed at supporting the attainment of a high rate of economic growth and ensure that delivery of quality services within the priority sectors conforms with public expectations for value, satisfaction and relevance by the year 2011. The aims of the PSRP reflected the Government's vision of the future public service as stated in the National Vision, 2025. The PSRP has three overlapping phases, ending in 2011 as follows:

Phase I: Installing Performance Management Systems (2000- 2004).

Phase II: Instituting a Performance Management Culture (2005 – 2008)

Phase III: Instituting Quality Improvement Circles (2009 – 2011).

The introduction of client service charters was carried out during Phase One. It has since been an on-going initiative. It (CSC) covered key service areas in all government ministries. It was one of the twelve (12) interventions that the government strived to put into place. Some of these interventions included improving compensation levels for professional, technical and management staff, defining key results areas, objectives and service delivery targets, introducing open performance appraisal system, establish a merit-based system of appointments in the public service, improving service standards in key sectors and through the “Quick-Wins” programme, etc.

The manner of introducing the CSC entailed the respective government ministry or executive agency drafting the Charter. It (ministry, etc) made the Charter’s objectives known to staff at the headquarters of the ministry and executive agency. The Charter was also made known to service users mainly those residing in Dar es Salaam where all government ministries, executive agencies, commissions and other independent departments are located. In principle, the charters expressed the organizations’ commitment to serving the people fairly and promptly. Moreover, the Charters outlined various redress mechanisms that the citizens would use to register their satisfaction or dissatisfaction over the services/goods provided. The wording of the charters exhibits a spirit of commitment, friendliness, courtesy and thoughtfulness. It is now ten years since the introduction of CSCs was embarked upon. Has the delivery of services and goods to the people significantly improved following the introduction of client service charters?

Successes and Challenges

The introduction of CSCs in Tanzania has been viewed with mixed feelings. Firstly, it is gratifying to note that all government ministries as well as all executive agencies have adopted the implementation of this innovation. Secondly, it is interesting to note that a significant number of employees at the headquarters of government ministries, executive agencies, commissions and independent departments have developed the required awareness about the purpose of this innovation. They can thus try to serve the people better. Thirdly, service users based in Dar es salaam are presently able to exercise their right to demand quality services/goods.

However, despite these successes there are still many limitations which need to be addressed. Firstly, Tanzania’s Public Service is made up of two major sectors namely, the central government as well as the local government authorities (i.e. city, municipal, town, district councils, village and street governments). The central government is made up of government ministries, regional and district administration units. CSCs have been introduced only at the levels of the ministry, executive agency, commissions and independent departments. The regional and district administration units numbering 26 and 128 respectively have yet to introduce the CSC system. Moreover, the local government authorities, numbering 133 as well as over 2685 village governments have not yet been assisted by the central government to introduce this important innovation. Let it be noted that this is a very big challenge since over 80% of Tanzanian population lives under regional and district administration units as well as under the local government authorities. In this regard, the vast majority of the citizens are not covered by this innovation and therefore they are denied their right to demand quality services from the providers. So the idea of “reaching out to people” is still very far from being attained.

Secondly, the level of general education and literacy in Tanzania is still a very big limitation to the successful adoption of the CSCs. For example, only 15% of adult Tanzanians know how to read and write. 75% of rural residents do not have an education. This is in contradistinction with the second MD goal which seeks to achieve universal primary education in 2015. Citizens without education do not have the required confidence and enlightenment to appreciate the

significance of CSCs. To them such innovations are an irrelevance. Thirdly, Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world, despite its immense endowments in natural resources. Goal number one of the MDGs seeks to eradicate poverty and hunger. Let it be noted that 80% of all Tanzanians live on less than a dollar per day. This means that the vast majority of the citizens are too preoccupied with eking out a living to think about these innovations. Agriculture in Tanzania is still hand-hoe based and largely dependent on rainfall. Innovations such as CSCs, electronic governance, etc are, to these citizens, an expensive luxury.

Fourthly, the introduction of various, seemingly progressive innovations, are elitist, top-down and imposed on the people's social structures which are clearly weak and fragile. It was imperative for the adoption of CSCs to start with grass root institutions such as village/street governments. For, that is where the majority of the citizens resides and can be reached more easily at that level of government. In other words, since these innovations (e.g. privatization, PPPs, e-governance, etc) are elitist and top-down, they bring benefits to a very small section of the citizens, mainly urban dwellers. Moreover, they (innovations) are not a product of a local dynamic. CSCs in Tanzania, for example, were adopted largely due to demands by development partners such as the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) and the British Department for international Development (DFID). This deprives them (innovations) of the prospects for sustainability. This largely explains the common phenomena of dying projects in developing countries on the departure of foreign managers. Finally, no sufficient sensitization and popularization of the CSCs was conducted. Sensitization was largely limited to the headquarters of the implementing organizations. It (the innovation) thus lacked popular support and ownership which are critical to making any innovation sustainable.

Conclusion and Lessons for Reflection

The Tanzanian case reflects the kind of development challenges that many developing/transitional countries encounter as they strive to serve their citizens better. Whereas the spirit behind the MDGs is impressive and worthy of implementation developing countries face a variety of bottlenecks that prevent them from adopting some of these impressive innovations successfully. Firstly, poverty, illiteracy, bureaucratic inertia, and poor leadership are some of these bottlenecks. Secondly, and we saw in the conceptual review section of this Paper, innovations take root if they arise from and are supported by the local dynamics. Clearly, most innovations (administrative, electronic, etc) are imports to these countries and therefore they lack an inherent, self-propelling dynamic. Truly, the United Nations may disburse money to assist developing countries in adopting innovations that would hasten the realization of the MDGs. But as our literature review has shown, money alone is not a guarantee to the success of innovations in developing countries. As Ellickson (1983:1) has written "external seed money can stimulate the local adoption of innovations, but not necessarily their sustained use."

Thirdly, following the introduction of a market economy in Tanzania [*where access is now based on the ability to pay*] there has emerged a disturbingly conspicuous phenomenon of social differentiation (classes). Income disparities have increased. The rich are getting richer and therefore gaining greater and disproportionate access to national development benefits. The poor are becoming poorer and therefore a reduction in their ability to access various public services and goods. Accordingly, the introduction of these innovations (including Client Service Charters) presents a potential for the reinforcement of the already existing social differentiation (classes) which, in fact, correspond with citizen access to public benefits (Njunwa, 2005). This has created a service delivery divide between the rich and the poor, thereby making a mockery of the well-

intentioned spirit behind the UN MDGs of reaching out and serving all citizens fairly and effectively.

Finally, we need to emphasize that innovations in public administration are presently unavoidable; in fact, they are desirable. Public administration must be strengthened through innovations in order to serve the people more efficiently and effectively. However, these innovations will not serve a useful purpose if they are limited to being mere imports, elitist and alien to the general public. It is therefore imperative that a local capacity (technical or otherwise) needs to be developed to serve as a basis for continued sustainability for these innovations. For imported innovations they must first be critically studied to establish their suitability and usability before adoption and adaptation are embarked upon. It is on this foundation that foreign assistance (financial, etc) may be based to pursue every other development goal and this includes the UN MDGs as well.

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