

SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY: COMPLAINTS AS SOURCE OF INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's Government Transformation Programme (GTP) was formulated with the aim of transforming the public service delivery to be more effective, efficient and accountable. Complaints management is one of the vital components for ensuring the successful implementation of the GTP in transforming the public sector. In this regard, the Government views complaints as a source of innovation and creativity to bring about systemic improvement in public service delivery. This is achieved by way of eliminating irrelevant or obsolete laws, rules and procedures and creating more people-friendly processes. The Public Complaints Bureau will continue to serve as the key focal point between the Government and the people in managing public complaints. This is to ensure that the public sector continuously delivers service improvements beyond the ordinary with a view to enhancing the nation's competitiveness as well as the overall wellbeing of the people.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The main purpose of this paper is to present Malaysia's experience in the management of public complaints. It will give a special focus on new approaches and specific programmes carried out by the Government of Malaysia in the management of public complaints and in bringing about systemic improvement in its public service delivery. This paper will cover several key areas including: Change of Approach; Managing Complaints - Reaction vs Proaction; Identification of Issues and Systemic Improvement; as well as Conclusion and the Way Forward.

B. CHANGE OF APPROACH

2. The key issues for improvement in public service delivery always feature customer satisfaction and expectation as the benchmark. In addressing public expectation, the quality of public service delivery becomes the focal point. In the case of Malaysia, it has become the number one objective of the Government under “1Malaysia - People First, Performance Now” principle.
3. Malaysia’s Government Transformation Programme (GTP) was launched on 28 January 2010 aimed at, amongst others, transforming the Government to be more effective in delivering results in areas of major concern for the people through higher efficiency and accountability. The expected consequence of this transformation measure is about generating a robust economic growth to further improve the quality of life and welfare of the people.
4. Without improvement in the quality of public service delivery, efforts to implement GTP will not be effective. Complaints management is one of the vital components in ensuring effective public service delivery. Complaints management can no longer be seen merely as an administrative function. Rather, it must be viewed as a strategic function in implementing the GTP. Managing public complaints in a prompt, fair and courteous manner complements efforts in improving the quality of service delivery. The Government no longer views complaints as an impediment, but considers it as a source of innovation. Therefore, public complaints are always welcome.

5. With this changing approach, the roles and responsibility of PCB as a facilitator have also changed to meet the new dynamic in complaints management. In this connection, PCB has shifted its role from merely accepting and resolving individual complaints to critically analysing complaints. The critical analysis of complaints provides a valuable feedback to systemic improvement of the existing Government policies, procedures and work practices.

C. MANAGING COMPLAINTS – REACTION vs PROACTION

6. PCB has been entrusted with not only managing public complaints on services provided by the Government, but also about civil servants who are administering or rendering such services to the public. Complaints are being viewed positively and considered as a form of feedback to keep the government departments alert and always prepared for improvement in their delivery system.
7. As such PCB provides a number of channels for the public to forward their flow of complaints. This includes electronic channel, walk-in, telephone, faxes, SMS and the proactive programmes. Generally, the electronic channel (e-mail and website) is the public's preferred channel followed by the proactive programmes. From 1 January 2011 to 30 September 2011, a total of 9,887 complaints were received by PCB. Of this, 5,183 (52.4%) complaints was lodged through electronic channel and 1,847 (18.7%) via pro-active programmes.

8. With the enhancement of ICT, PCB's web portal provides main gateway for the public to lodge more than 50% of the complaints against Government agencies. The PCB manages the complaints through a system known as i-Aduan, an integrated public complaints management system that has been upgraded to increase PCB staff productivity. Public Relations Officers (PROs) of other Government agencies are also allowed to access the i-Aduan directly. PCB does not even need to forward the complaints to agencies as they can access them directly and take immediate action on complaints which are under their respective jurisdictions.
9. PCB's proactive programmes are the Mobile Complaints Counter (MCC), Integrated Mobile Complaints Counter (IMCC) and Mesra Rakyat Programme (MESRA). These outreach activities have enabled the public to directly put forth their complaints, enquiries and suggestions to government agencies. In 2010, a total of 134 proactive programmes were held, with 2,310 complaints received from 16,277 visitors. For the period of 1 January to 30 September 2011, a total of 122 proactive programmes were held, with 1,820 complaints received from 18,345 visitors.
10. PCB has even taken a pro-active initiative by identifying problems or issues and forwarding them to relevant agencies for solutions before they become a subject of public complaint. The programme is acronymed as MASJA or in Malay language *Menangani Aduan Sebelum Jadi Aduan*. Literally means solving an issue before it becomes a complaint. Under this initiative, PCB personel as

proactive complainants are expected to be an agent in spotting and reporting issues on the ground before they become a complaint.

11. Government agencies are also required to monitor and address issues raised in the media including online media on a daily basis. Besides, PCB and the Department of Information also monitor issues and complaints highlighted in the media daily and forward them to the respective PROs of the ministries or departments for immediate action. The agencies are also required to monitor and response immediately to issues reported or raised in the media. The government agencies are required to upload them on their official websites. These feedback and responses will also be uploaded on PCB's website.
12. In addition, PCB also launched a smart partnership of online portal programme with BERNAMA, a government news agency. The portal enables more people to access the feedback on complaints over a longer duration.
13. More often than not, PCB also receives complaints on the services provided by and/or entities in the private sector. Similarly, the complaints are channeled to the relevant government agencies which in turn will deal with the private sector entities concerned for solutions. Therefore, the overall task of PCB is indeed very challenging.
14. Over the past few years, the number of complaints has increased quite significantly. However, the high volume of complaints does not necessarily reflect the declining standard of the government service.

Rather, it is an indication of the people's higher expectation on the quality of public services rendered and the speed of service delivery. It goes in tandem that as the society becomes more affluent, their expectation for better quality services and speedy solutions is higher.

D. COMPLAINTS AS SOURCE OF INNOVATION

15. As the Malaysian society has become more affluent and demanded higher quality and speedy public service delivery, PCB's approach in managing complaints has also been redefined and further improved. PCB not only channels complaints it receives to the relevant government agencies for their appropriate action and response, but has taken a more pro-active and prominent role as innovator in solving issues which are the source of complaints.
16. One of the mechanisms for PCB to ensure agencies take a serious view of major issues in the flows of public complaints is through the Permanent Committee on Public Complaints (PCPC) chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia. The PCPC which meets monthly will consider nation-wide or high impact issues that will contribute towards improving the public service delivery.
17. In this connection, PCB will sieve through all complaints received or raised in the media. Repeated issues or issues with high impact on the public wellbeing are identified. Concept papers are prepared on each of these issues. A thorough study and consideration of the causes of complaints/issues, their impacts and solutions to improve the related public service delivery are conducted through a

mechanism established at the PCB level involving concerned agencies/organizations or parties. The concept paper will then be presented for consideration and decision of PCPC.

18. Since its first meeting on 6 October 1984 until September 2011, PCPC had considered 423 concept papers on various issues for purposes of innovating and improving the public service delivery. The ideas for innovation were generated by complaints raised by the public. The following are some examples of issues of public complaints which have become a source of innovation:

- a. **Proposal to Improve Payment of Medical Claims to Pensioners**

- Complaint:**

- Government retirees who purchased medicines from pharmacies experienced delay in getting their claims for reimbursement from the Public Service Department (PSD).

- Innovation:**

- Under the new partnership arrangement to be introduced by the Government in 2012, retirees can continue to get their supply of certified medication unavailable at Government hospitals from any network providers chosen and appointed by the Government. Retirees will no longer be required to pay for the medication purchased from the pharmacy upfront and later claim for reimbursement from the Government. Instead, the pharmacy concerned will claim directly from the Government based on the purchases made by the retirees. Under the new arrangement, the

process of payment of medicines has been simplified involving only the pharmacy and the Government.

b. Proposal to Improve the Process that Suspends Individuals from Travelling Abroad Due to Debt or Security Reasons

Complaint:

The complainants were not allowed to make overseas trips as their names had been blacklisted by the Government for various reasons such as criminal cases, bankruptcy, failures to pay income taxes or study loans provided by the National Higher Education Fund Corporation, etc. However, the complainants have proved to have been cleared off the blacklist.

Innovation:

The process and procedures for blacklisting of individuals has been streamlined and improved. This is to assist the Immigration Department to accelerate the process of listing and clearing the blacklisted names. Information concerning names that have been delisted from the blacklist is made available online to the Immigration Offices at exit points. The State Immigration Directors at all exit points are empowered to access the system for current status of blacklisted cases.

c. Proposal to Improve the Procedure and Scale of Payment for Subpoenaed Witnesses

Complaint:

Subpoenaed witnesses faced difficulties and delays while claiming for expenses and compensation from enforcement

agencies such as the Royal Malaysian Police, Royal Custom Department or Anti-Corruption Commission.

Innovation:

The new Criminal Procedure (Rate of Payment to Witnesses) Rules 2011 was introduced to replace the old Criminal Procedure (Witnesses Fees) Rules 1954. With the replacement, the relevant authority is required to make payment of expenses and compensation to the subpoenaed witnesses or their parents, relatives of guardians. The rates of compensation were also revised from RM10 to RM45 per day to RM50 per day. The witnesses are also entitled to claim for reimbursement on travelling, hotel accommodation and lodging expenses.

d. Proposal to Improve the Process of Resolving the Problem of Courses Without Accreditation Certification

Complaint:

Complainants felt cheated because the fields of study in private institutions were not accredited by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA). There were also cases of private colleges had deceived the public on their accreditation status by making misleading advertisement on the programmes or courses offered.

Innovation:

All institutions of higher learning are required to obtain accreditation by MQA for all their courses and study programmes offered which previously was optional. In addition,

all Private Higher Learning Institutions (IPTs) are required to show the details of the MQA accreditation of courses or programmes offered in their advertisements to avoid confusion amongst prospective students.

e. Proposal on Addressing Problems of Swiftlet Farming

Complaint:

Some members of the public have experienced noise problems generated by swiftlets farms, especially those living in residential areas close to the swiftlet farms locations. In addition they also have to endure the foul smells of the swiftlets droppings. In a rush for good profits generated by the industry, swiftlet farmers have resorted to renovating and turning unused shoplots and buildings into swiftlets nests without following the guidelines and approval of the authorities.

Innovation:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry has been identified as lead agency in developing a guidelines for the swiftlet farming industry. In ensuring that swiftlets farmings are not posing hazards to the residential areas, the States Governments are required to allocate and designate certain areas or zones in rural areas suitable for swiftlet farming activities. The properly managed swiftlets farming activities can create employment opportunities for the local community and have the potential for tourism in the area besides improving the inflow of foreign exchange through export of “Bird Nest”.

f. Proposal to Improve Services of State Education Departments

Complaint:

Parents and teachers are not satisfied with the services of the State Education Department on matters related to delay in transfer process for school children, salary adjustment and reimbursement for travelling claims.

Innovation:

Specialised training on administration, financial management and audit inspection is given to administrative staff to improve the management of the State Education Department and schools. It also involves development of Standard Operating Procedures for each financial and administrative process in the State Education Department.

g. Proposal on Supervision Responsibility of Sewerage Service Channels in Public Reserved Areas

Complaint:

Complainants facing faulty problem on their private sewerage pipelines channels wanted the authorities to bear the cost of repair because the private sewerage pipelines channels were located outside their area.

Innovation:

The National Water Services Commission (SPAN) and the Department of Sewerage Services (SRC) have agreed to use emergency funds to repair damages to the Private Sewerage Pipelines in public reserve areas. SPAN will determine Private

Sewerage Pipelines across reserve lands, roads, drainages and others outside the reserve property as Public Sewerage Pipelines. Any damage to Private Sewerage Pipelines will be the responsibility of SPAN.

h. Proposal to Improve Process of Issuing Medical Reports in Hospitals

Complaint:

Patients are unhappy with the delay to get medical reports by hospitals within the period of 8 weeks set by the Ministry of Health Malaysia.

Innovation:

The Ministry of Health has introduced a Guideline for Preparing Medical Reports (Director-General of Health - Circular No. 16/2010) and a Guideline for Managing Patients' Medical Records (Director-General of Health - Circular No 17/2010) in an effort to further improving the process of preparing reports and managing medical records.

i. Proposal on Implementing Guidelines for Gated and Guarded Community Not Covered under Act 318

Complaint:

Concerned with the rising crimes such as frequent house breaking and robbery, some residents associations in certain housing areas have implemented their own gated and guarded

community arrangements. These ad-hoc security arrangements have not complied with the State Governments Guidelines on Gated & Guarded Community Scheme (GACOS). For instance, some gated and guarded communities have been implemented without the consent of at least 85% of the residents in the respective housing schemes. In certain residential areas, the existence of ad hoc security arrangements have created various unintended problems to the local communities and surrounding residents.

Innovation:

With the continued need for gated and guarded neighborhood schemes, the Government has approved the standard Guidelines on Gated Community and Guarded Neighbourhood. The guidelines are intended to guide the local authorities on the management and monitoring of the development of the security scheme. Previously, the guidelines on gated community were provided separately by each state and local authorities.

j. Proposal to Improve Loan Management by the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (NHEFC)

Complaint:

New students at the private institutions / universities were unable to enter NHEFC website to fill out the online loan application due to heavy web traffic. In addition, NHEFC is slow in adjusting student account refund following the reduction of service charges from 3% to 1%.

Innovation:

NHEFC has been providing diverse facilities and payment channels including online payment methods, Bank Draft and salary deduction by the Inland Revenue Board for loan repayment. NHEFC has also set up One Stop Centre at KL Central and NHEFC Info Centre in Sabah and Sarawak for various transactions including queries and complaints, consultation, loan settlement and Internet services for easy access to NHEFC online applications. NHEFC also has established Call Centre which operates from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm on weekdays to assist the public on general queries.

k. Proposal for Implementing Guidelines for the Establishment of Kindergartens and Nurseries in Housing Areas**Complaint:**

There are a number of kindergartens and nurseries in a particular housing which have affected the owners of adjacent or neighbouring houses. There is no standard guidelines to establish a kindergarten and nursery in residential areas.

Innovation:

The Ministry of Housing and Local Government has established uniformed guidelines to all local authorities on the number of nurseries and kindergartens that may be established in a housing estate. The guidelines require that parties seeking approval to open nurseries and kindergartens have to seek prior views or feedbacks from the residents in the housing areas

concerned before the nurseries and kindergartens can be approved by the local authorities.

I. Proposal to Improve the Reading System for Electricity Bills

Complaint:

Consumers were unhappy with the electric bills that were not issued on a monthly basis. This had resulted in them not being able to enjoy the RM20 of government subsidy. The bills which are not issued monthly will result in consumers being charged at a higher block rate for higher electricity consumption.

Innovation:

The National Electric Company (TNB) has ensured that the electricity bills will be issued on a regular monthly basis. TNB also has outsourced the job of meter reading to ex-TNB staff to ensure the consumers get their monthly electricity bills. This effort helped reduce the electricity bills and ensure the consumers benefit the RM20 government subsidy.

m. Proposal to Improve Services of the Light Rail Transit (LRT)

Complaint:

The public is dissatisfied with the quality of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) services. The complaints include services disruption, delays, ticket reader and train air-conditioning system not functioning and failure of LRT staff to furnish accurate information to the passengers.

Innovation:

PRASARANA, the company that manages the LRT has established the position of Station Master to strengthen the management of each LRT station. Improvement has been made on customer service and reliability of the system and facilities available at the station. The Station Master is assisted by technicians trained to immediately overcome technical failures especially during peak hours. Complaints management has also been improved by PRASARANA. Various channels such as website, Facebook hotline and e-mail are made available to disseminate information and receive complaints/suggestions from customers.

E. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

19. Viewed from a positive perspective, complaints can assist Government agencies improve the quality of their service delivery. This can be done through various ways which could lead towards overall systemic improvement of public service delivery. Elimination of obsolete laws, rules or procedures and creating more people-friendly processes are amongst examples of systemic improvements. They can have a positive impact in terms of boosting the image and credibility of the Government that is people-oriented and performance-based.
20. PCB will continue to serve as a key and effective focal point between the Government and the people in managing complaints about the public sector. Apart from strengthening the complaints

management mechanisms, PCB will focus on mindset shifting efforts in building a customer-friendly public sector that strives to continuously deliver service improvements beyond the ordinary, create efficiency gains, ensure value for money and enhance customer satisfaction.