

A comprehensive citizen engagement framework for effective resolution of public complaints in cities

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Abstract - Across the world, many nations have successfully implemented complaint management solutions for diverse complaint types, so as to promote open government initiatives and other policies. The issues reported include potholes, broken sidewalks, flooding, garbage, etc. In Sri Lanka, there are many issues with the current public complaint management process which have led to citizens being dissatisfied. Based on this background, the project aims to analyse why citizens in key cities in Sri Lanka are dissatisfied with the process; and design, develop and evaluate an IT solution to reduce this dissatisfaction, while creating a conceptual framework for effectively incorporating the solution into the complaint management process. In creating an effective conceptual framework and IT solution for complaint management, attitudinal factors, social factors, technological factors and knowledge and communication factors affecting citizen participation in complaint management initiatives were analysed based on existing literature. These factors were validated via interviews with government officials and questionnaire distribution amongst citizens. Building on this, the conceptual framework was formulated, incorporating a complaint management IT solution for citizens.

Keywords - *Citizen engagement, Complaint management, Conceptual framework, Infrastructure, Environment*

I. INTRODUCTION

In many countries, citizens are able to directly interact with government institutions, in line with open government initiatives. These initiatives are titled ‘citizen engagement’. According to Open Government Guide, citizen engagement is crucial if open government initiatives are to be successful. Citizen engagement is also important for governments as it ensures citizens enjoy their basic human rights via the creation of a just and fair society [1]. Further, the ability for citizens to take part in government is also in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a key component of engaging with citizens, many of these countries have implemented complaint management solutions which enable citizens to submit complaints via hotlines, websites and mobile apps, on issues such as potholes, broken sidewalks, flooding, garbage dumps, illegal graffiti, faulty street lights, overgrown trees, etc.; with photo and video evidence and accurate GPS locations. After capturing the complaints in a centralised system, government officials are able to analyse these complaints and forward them to the relevant departments, while monitoring the complaint status in real-time. Citizens are also provided access to this system, whereby they too can monitor complaints via a website/mobile app. In addition to monitoring complaints, citizens can also submit votes and

comments for each complaint. Therefore both government institutions and citizens work together in resolving complaints in a transparent manner. The perceptions of trust and accountability of these institutions is thus high amongst citizens due to this transparency [2]. In addition, due to the ability to get issues resolved faster and the subsequent creation of a better image of government institutions, the occurrence of conflicts with the institutions is also reduced [3].

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

This research revolves around the question of whether citizens have an effective public complaint management solution for submitting complaints to government institutions and monitoring these complaints; in a manner which suits their requirements. As such, the objectives of the research are – the influence of citizen engagement concepts on public complaint management, identifying the factors affecting citizen participation in public complaint management, and to provide recommendations based on the findings.

In Sri Lanka, only a limited number of issues submitted via existing methods were resolved successfully [4]. In addition, the problems highlighted below have led to citizens being dissatisfied with the government’s responsiveness to resolving their issues, while there is also a ‘disconnect’ between the government and citizens due to the lack of transparency and accountability [5]. Thus it is practical for a country like Sri Lanka to implement a comprehensive public complaint management solution, considering it is also a participant in the Open Government Partnership [6].

A. Hassle in reporting

It is evident that the current methods of submitting complaints have several issues including unnecessary wastage of time - making a call to government officials is time consuming and costly for citizens while public meetings are also time-consuming. Citizens are also inconvenienced as calls are unanswered and letters are misplaced by officials.

B. One-directional reporting

This results in citizens experiencing issues such as difficulty in tracking the status of a complaint in real time. Thus citizens are unclear if the issue has been attended to or not, unless they contact government institutions. This lack of feedback has caused low levels of transparency on government operations [7]. There is also inability to easily provide