

Asian Development Bank's Launching of E-Learning Toolkits: Comments and Reactions of Dr. Victoria A. Bautista, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) and Professor of the University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance

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It is indeed a pleasure to be considered as reactor to the launching of the Citizen Report Card Toolkit. I had a first exposure to the toolkit when I attended the International Conference of the Network of Asia Pacific Schools and Institutes in Public Administration and Governance I already saw the value of the toolkit as an educational tool.

I certainly agree that the accountability of officials for public service could best be gauged by the quality of service they deliver. This could best be assessed by getting the perspective of the citizens themselves, being the major user of public services, particularly the poor and marginalized groups in society who are the primary recipients of these services. Obtaining the data from the citizens ensure rational basis for decision-making among policy makers and implementers.

As shown in the toolkit, a critical step in the process of preparing the CRC is identifying who can be an advocate for the CRC, who will ultimately decide what institution or team in an institution will carry out the design of the CRC. This would mean steering key persons of institutions (either from government or civil society groups) to assume this responsibility and therefore a key target of the advocacy.

The bulk of the toolkit actually dwells on the technical requirements in preparing the CRC—from the design of the data gathering process, to the analysis of the data, until advocacy is made to various sectors to become aware of the state of public service, and advocacy to the institution being evaluated to improve how it is performing. The coverage of the toolkit is comprehensive enough and the person who is going through the toolkit will have an overview of the research process, focusing on an evaluation of how the citizens respond to services in terms of availability, access, quality of service, resolution of the problem, and interaction with staff. The toolkit is therefore, particularly useful to the technical persons who will implement the design and implementation of the assessment.

To be able to implement the Citizen Report Card, several factors had been mentioned and for me, the most critical here is the freedom of the citizenry to voice out their opinion and could be affected by other factors mentioned in the toolkit, like the political setting, security situation, unbiased media, openness of service providers and government interest to listen to the results of the report. Lack of confidence by the citizens on the fate of what will be reported by them can make them clamp up and not ventilate their views and be cynical about the process.

Upon going through the toolkit itself, a plus factor in the set of test items at the end of each module in order to assess if the person going through each module has internalized what he/she has read. One gets to see if this has been correctly answered, immediately. As an advocate of distance learning being affiliated with the University of the Philippines Open University, this is one of the advocacies we make in preparing materials for distance learners—to make intermediate assessments for the learner who goes through self-instructional materials.

I must acknowledge, too, that the CRC toolkit is easy to understand and is user-friendly.

Another strength is the provision of an example of how this was actually done in India, so the person going through the exercise can have a feel of how this can be done.

However, I see the following as areas for improvement that could enhance the application of the toolkit:

1. There is a need to separate the toolkit to advocate to a key decision-maker the adoption of CRC as against the technical requirements of preparing the CRC. The key decision-maker may not want to go through the details of the process and should only be convinced about its importance. The detailed steps involved in conducting the assessment could be the primary concern of the technical staff who will undertake this.
2. Later, there could be video documentation of the actual experiences of those who have applied the process in order to motivate both the decision-makers and technical persons who will implement this.
3. The intermittent voice over is somewhat distracting and makes the presentation of the toolkit uneven.
4. With respect to quality of service, its operational measures can be enhanced by suggesting some qualities to make this operational like for instance, timeliness of the service delivered, adequacy or sufficiency of the service, appropriateness of the service to the kind of problem responded to and technical proficiency of the service delivery person.
5. Cluster sampling strategy is noticeably absent in the recommended sampling schemes, although this could be a very practical approach in determining samples that are homogeneous in character. The contribution of non-probability sampling can also be mentioned particularly in instances when a list of the population of users of services is not available.
6. There could be occasional study covering non-users, in addition to users of services in order to capture if there are problems regarding access or other issues pertaining to the public service delivery system that make them rely on other service delivery systems.
7. Furthermore, linking up application of the toolkit with educational or training institutions can facilitate implementation the toolkit. These institutions can assist in overseeing how the recommended steps and processes are applied by building in activities that will indicate application of the toolkit. Furthermore, application of the toolkit can move towards certification of those who completed the

- requirements to demonstrate internalization of the steps suggested by the certifying institution. Participants who are able to complete the requirements to demonstrate one's learning of the toolkit, can obtain a certificate that could add to his/her credentials.
8. There could be occasional study covering non-users, in addition to users of services in order to capture if there are problems regarding access or other issues pertaining to the public service delivery system that make them rely on other service delivery systems.
 9. For wider coverage, the certification could also consider distance learning as a mode of instruction such as the one offered by the UP Open University (UPOU)—where e-learning technologies are applied and could facilitate interaction process with participants in distant and peripheral locations. UPOU applies e-learning technologies (online instruction through its virtual learning environment, videoconferencing or teleconferencing, which can be hooked up by its learning centers around the country). Reliance on e-technologies is less costly than face to face mode of coaching.
 10. The organizers may also want to tap the Knowledge Channel so that the information about what CRC toolkit can do, can be viewed by various stakeholders. The CD shown by the organizers is an excellent “teaser” which could be advocated for airing by the Knowledge Channel.
 11. Because of the issuance of a memorandum circular by the Department of the Interior and Local Government to implement the community-based monitoring system (CBMS) indicators to assess quality of life in local government units consistent with the agenda to respond to poverty, localities where CBMS had been installed could be a good starting point to advocate the implementation of the CRC. Citizens are already aware of and are familiar with the data gathering process. Finding out why they have problems on some basic needs gathered in CBMS could be tied to the information that could be obtained about the quality of service rendered by public service delivery systems as reported by the CRC data.

On the whole, I wish to extend my congratulations to those who conceptualized this toolkit. This is a laudable initiative and must be advocated and implemented. As a teacher in public administration, I can assure the advocates of this tool that this can be infused in my teaching of public administration.