



Strengthening citizen participation: Institutionalising service charters for better governance

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- Service charters are a critical tool to institutionalise the citizen voice, improve transparency, and increase public sector responsiveness.
- Despite initial policy efforts, implementation of service charters in Zambia has faced several challenges including low public awareness, limited citizen engagement, weak monitoring and enforcement, inadequate staff capacity, and insufficient resources for implementation.
- The consequences of ineffective implementation of the charters include reduced citizen awareness of their rights and available services, decreased service quality, a lack of accountability from public service providers, diminished public trust and satisfaction with government services.
- To ensure effective implementation of service charters and enhance public service delivery, Zambia should adopt a phased strategy that seeks to:
 - Standardise and institutionalise service charters across all public institutions, with clear guidelines and oversight by a Cluster Advisory Group.
 - Raise citizen awareness and accessibility through targeted campaigns, translation, and broad dissemination.
 - Strengthen feedback, monitoring, and accountability by integrating citizen input, linking charters to staff KPIs, and rewarding compliance.
 - Institutionalise independent monitoring and learning through regular evaluations, citizen satisfaction surveys, and transparent reporting.

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Introduction

Citizen participation is the cornerstone of good governance, fostering transparency, accountability and effective public service delivery. One of the most effective mechanisms for strengthening public participation is the implementation of service charters. A service charter is a formal document that outlines the commitments a service provider makes to its clients regarding the quality, standards, and timeliness of services to be delivered, and mechanisms for feedback and redress in case of service failure.¹

The Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) places service delivery and citizen engagement a national priority for the attainment of sustainable development. It calls for participatory governance, improved citizen feedback systems and enhanced responsiveness of public institutions.² Despite some progress, most service charters in Zambia are inconsistently implemented, poorly publicised, and lack being linked to staff performance or institutional planning.

The ineffective implementation of the service charters may lead to reduced citizen awareness of their rights and available services, decreased service quality, and a lack of accountability from public service providers. Furthermore, it can result in diminished public trust and satisfaction with government services.³

This policy brief outlines strategies for strengthening citizen participation through service charters in Zambia, drawing on international best practices and IGC-supported research. The key objectives are to:

- Enhance public sector transparency and responsiveness through well-defined service charters;
- Strengthen mechanisms for citizen feedback and participation in governance;
- Improve government accountability in service delivery; and,
- Institutionalise performance monitoring frameworks linked to citizen engagement.

¹ Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2023).

² Ministry of Finance and National Planning (MFNP) (2022).

³ Derrett et al (2018). Citizen's Charter in a primary health-care setting of Nepal: An accountability tool or a "mere wall poster"?

Service charters enhance accountability and citizen trust

Service charters play an important role in enhancing accountability and building trust between the government and the public by:

1. **Setting Clear Expectations:** Service charters outline what services citizens should receive, including how and when they will be delivered. This reduces ambiguity and limits discretionary behaviour by officials.
2. **Increasing Transparency:** Service charters publicly declare service standards, making it easier for citizens to know their rights and for institutions to be held to account.
3. **Enabling Citizen Oversight:** They provide citizens with benchmarks to monitor service provider performance and a basis to seek redress when standards are not met.
4. **Building Public Trust:** Service charters promote trust between government and citizens by improving institutional legitimacy and satisfaction with public services.
5. **Create Dialogue and Feedback Platforms:** They establish structured channels for citizens to provide feedback, promoting government responsiveness and participatory governance.
6. **Drive Performance and Continuous Improvement:** Service charters serve as tools for performance management, helping institutions track progress and address service gaps.
7. **Empower Civic Participation:** They encourage citizens not just to receive services, but to actively shape and improve them to meet citizen expectations.
8. **Combat Bureaucratic Stagnation:** The charters introduce clear benchmarks and timelines, facilitating monitoring, evaluation, and identification of inefficiencies.

Zambia's experience with service charters

Progress and enabling reforms

Zambia has made commendable steps in promoting citizen participation through public sector reforms, including the integration of service charters within decentralisation frameworks. Several ministries and government institutions have developed and published service charters, aiming to define service

delivery standards and improve public accountability. For example, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development⁴ and the Ministry of Education⁵ have piloted service charters at the level of local authorities and schools to articulate clear expectations for service users.

Additionally, initiatives such as the Decentralisation Implementation Plan (DIP) and the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) Framework have further supported the alignment of service charters with local development priorities.⁶

Challenges and implementation gaps

Despite notable progress, the adoption and implementation of service charters in Zambia remain fragmented and inconsistent across sectors and institutions. In many cases, service charters exist only as formal documents and are neither actively promoted nor effectively used. Institutions often fail to operationalise their charters, and frontline public officials lack adequate training to implement the service standards outlined within them.⁷

Public awareness also remains a major barrier. Many citizens are unaware of their rights under existing service charters, which significantly undermines their potential as tools for accountability and empowerment. Additionally, the absence of strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems means that compliance is rarely assessed, and non-adherence is seldom penalised. This diminishes the credibility of service charters and discourages uptake by service providers. Institutional incentives for compliance are minimal, weakening their overall impact.

Systemic challenges compound these issues. Limited staffing, inadequate digital infrastructure, and underfunding of citizen engagement initiatives all constrain effective implementation. Digital transformation, capacity development, and appropriate financing are crucial to advancing service delivery mechanisms as highlighted in the 8NDP's governance pillar. However, service charters are often disconnected from broader institutional planning, budgeting, and performance management frameworks, restricting their influence on public sector outcomes.

To fully realise the potential of service charters, Zambia must shift from symbolic adoption to practical implementation. This requires co-designing charters with citizens, expanding digital and public access, tying service standards to performance-based incentives, and establishing independent oversight mechanisms to promote transparency and compliance.

⁴ Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2023).

⁵ Ministry of Education (2024)

⁶ Cabinet Office (2023).

⁷ Kopoka et al (2022).

Global and regional lessons: Managing performance through service charters and citizen participation

Zambia can draw valuable insights from the experience of peer countries in Africa and globally, that have implemented service charters in ways that strengthen citizen participation, accountability and civil service performance. In Africa, countries including Kenya⁸, Uganda⁹, Rwanda¹⁰, and Ghana¹¹ have all institutionalised service charters within their performance management and civil service reform frameworks. The efforts in these countries provide evidence on how service charters can provide a foundation for evaluating civil service performance, particularly when integrated with citizen feedback mechanisms. Further, at the domestic level, the innovations adopted by the Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority (ZAMRA) have demonstrated how digital platforms can enhance enforcements of service charters in Zambia.

India: In India, several state governments have enacted Public Service Delivery Laws which explicitly link service delivery timelines to penalties for non-compliance by public officials. These laws require government departments to publish citizens' charters that specify which services are covered and the stipulated timeframes for delivery. If services are not delivered within these timelines, officials may face monetary penalties, and in some states, citizens are entitled to compensation (Islam, 2020).

Rwanda: Rwanda offers a strong institutional model through its Citizen Report Card (CRC) system, introduced in 2010. The CRC collects citizens' feedback on service quality across local governments and informs planning and prioritisation. Rwanda has also adopted *Imihigo* performance contracts, which link service delivery outcomes to performance evaluations. These mechanisms have improved responsiveness and accountability among public officials (World Bank, 2018).

Uganda: Research from the Citizen Charter Development Project highlights how structured deliberation between citizens and bureaucrats can help align service expectations and reduce elite bias in decision-making. This underscores the importance of co-design processes that bring service users and providers together in defining standards (Humphreys et al., 2020).

Kenya: A study conducted in Kericho District, located in the South Rift Valley region of Kenya, found that 65% of respondents had seen their local health facility's service charter. However, issues such as illegibility, language barriers, and poor adherence limited its effectiveness. The study emphasised the need for enforcement mechanisms, capacity building, and improved public awareness to ensure service charters fulfil their purpose (Atela et al., 2015).

Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority (ZAMRA). ZAMRA has developed and deployed the Integrated Regulatory Information Management System (IRMIS) which has effectively digitized its core regulatory functions, linking operational workflows with real-time service monitoring and public interaction. A standout innovation is the integration of ZAMRA's Service Charter directly into IRMIS, allowing clients to track application progress in real-time. This approach not only empowers citizens with transparent information but also strengthens internal accountability by linking staff performance with client-facing timelines. Citizen participation is further enhanced through multiple feedback channels including the IRMIS portal, email, and WhatsApp, enabling clients to lodge complaints or provide feedback seamlessly (Interviews, 2025).

8 The Office of Chief of Staff and Head of the Public Service (2023).

9 Humphreys et al., 2020.

10 UNDP (2017).

11 The Public Sector Reform Secretariat (2023). Client Service Charter.

The above examples demonstrate that service charters are most impactful when they are integrated into broader systems of citizen engagement and performance management (See the Annex for detailed benchmarking). The studies also show that integrating citizen feedback into performance systems improves trust, efficiency, and service quality. Drawing from these lessons, this policy paper calls for a systematic and participatory approach to service charter implementation in Zambia - one that empowers citizens, ensures meaningful accountability, and strengthens institutional performance.

Defining eligible institutions for reform

For the purposes of this reform initiative, the term “public sector institutions” refers to line ministries, agencies, and local authorities that deliver citizen-facing services and are mandated to uphold transparency, responsiveness, and accountability standards. This excludes institutions whose core functions involve national security, defence, intelligence, and other sensitive operations where disclosure of service standards or operational procedures may compromise national interests. Accordingly, reforms such as the institutionalisation of Service Charters and participatory feedback mechanisms are intended for civilian service entities whose mandates align with the principles of open and accountable governance.

Policy recommendations: A four-phase implementation strategy

To translate Service Charter reforms into tangible governance outcomes, Zambia should adopt a phased and action-oriented implementation strategy. This includes standardisation, citizen engagement, performance monitoring, and learning from global best practices.

Phase 1: Standardise and Institutionalisation of Service Charters

Actions:

- Mandate all government ministries, agencies, and local authorities to develop standardised service charters.
- Establish the Cluster Advisory Group (CAG) to provide strategic oversight, coordinate implementation efforts, and ensure quality assurance across institutions.
- Leverage the CAG to facilitate institutions learning from each other in the CAG, promote citizen engagement, and monitor compliance with service charter standards.

Key metrics:

- Number of institutions with charters aligned to government standards.
- Coverage and scope of services within charters.
- Compliance with standardisation criteria.

Phase 2: Citizen Awareness and Accessibility**Actions:**

- Launch nationwide awareness campaigns using diverse media (radio, TV, community meetings, digital platforms).
- Translate charters into Zambia's main local languages.
- Disseminate charters through accessible platforms (online and offline).

Key metrics:

- Percentage of citizens reporting awareness of service charters.
- Number of public access points for viewing charters (e.g., community centres, websites).
- User satisfaction with access to charter information.

Phase 3: Feedback mechanisms, performance monitoring, and accountability**Strengthened Feedback and Citizen Engagement***Actions:*

- Establish interactive platforms such as citizen scorecards, town halls, mobile apps, hotlines, and suggestion boxes.
- Integrate citizen feedback into planning and service improvement processes.

Key metrics:

- Volume of feedback received.
- Percentage of complaints resolved within defined timeframes.
- Number of services improved based on citizen feedback.

Performance Monitoring and Public Accountability*Actions:*

- Develop real-time dashboards to track charter implementation.
- Link service charter performance to KPIs in public servant assessments.
- Conduct annual reviews of service charter compliance.

Key metrics:

- Number of institutions reporting on charter performance.
- Integration of charter compliance into appraisal systems.
- Trends in institutional compliance rates.

Incentives for Compliance and Performance

Actions:

- Recognise high-performing institutions using awards, public recognition, or budget incentives.
- Penalise persistent non-compliance where appropriate.

Key metrics:

- Number of institutions or officials recognised or rewarded for charter compliance.
- Budget allocations tied to performance scores.

Phase 4: Independent monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)

Actions:

- Institutionalise internal and external M&E systems, including civil society monitoring and citizen satisfaction surveys.
- Use M&E findings to inform policy revisions and enhance accountability.
- Publish annual public performance reports.

Key metrics:

- Policy or programming changes informed by MEL evidence.
- Public trust ratings in service delivery institutions.

Conclusion

Institutionalised service charters present an opportunity for Zambia to deepen citizen engagement, enhance public service delivery, and rebuild trust in government institutions. However, symbolic adoption alone is not sufficient. Through a systematic, participatory, and performance-linked approach, Zambia can embed service charters as a core governance tool, thereby, transforming intent into tangible impact.

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Appendix

International and domestic benchmarks on service charters

A. India: Citizens charters and right to public services reform

- India has been a pioneer in institutionalizing Citizens' Charters as a tool to enhance public service delivery, promote transparency, and foster citizen engagement. Introduced at the national level in 1997, Citizens' Charters initially served as voluntary declarations of service standards by government institutions.¹² Over time, they have evolved into more structured and legally enforceable instruments in several Indian states.
- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) has played a central role in guiding and coordinating the initiative across central and state governments. The Charters typically outline:
 - The range of services offered by public institution,

¹² Islam, M.M., (2020). Performance of Service Charters.

- The standards and timelines for service delivery;
- The channels for grievance redress and feedback.

From voluntary charters to legal guarantees

- Several Indian states have gone beyond voluntary adoption and enacted Right to Public Services (RTPS) legislation, legally mandating timely service delivery and linking non-compliance to financial penalties or compensation. These laws represent a “citizen entitlement model”, where public service becomes a legally enforceable right, and administrative accountability is strengthened through statutory instruments.

Figure 1: Examples of State-Level Public Service Delivery Legislation

STATE	ACT	KEY FEATURES
Karnataka	<i>Sakala Services Act (2011)</i> ¹³	Guarantees timely delivery for 265 services; INR 20 per day compensation for delays.
Madhya Pradesh	<i>Public Service Guarantee Act (2010)</i>	Penalties up to INR 5,000 on officials for service delays; compensation to citizen.
Bihar	<i>Right to Public Service Act (2011)</i> ¹⁴	Financial penalty for non-compliance; clear service timelines.
Delhi	<i>Citizen’s Right to Time-bound Services Act (2011)</i>	Automatic compensation for service delays; integrated grievance redress.
Rajasthan	<i>Rajasthan Guaranteed Delivery of Public Services Act (2011)</i>	Escalation ladder and time-bound service guarantees.

Observed challenges and limitations

- **Equity and Access:** Evidence suggests that urban and more educated populations benefit disproportionately, while marginalized groups face barriers to awareness and use (Islam, 2020).
- **Awareness Gaps:** Many citizens remain unaware of their rights under the Charters or the legal provisions entitling them to services.
- **Uneven Implementation:** Despite strong legal frameworks in some states, overall enforcement across the country remains inconsistent and depends heavily on local administrative capacity.

¹³ Islam, M.M., (2020). Performance of Service Charters.

¹⁴ Bihar State (2011). The Bihar Right to Public Services Act 4 of 2011.

Relevance and recommendations for Zambia

- India's experience offers valuable lessons as Zambia strengthens its civil service performance through citizen-oriented reforms. The combination of legal mandates, grievance redress, and digital dashboards provides replicable model.

LEARNING FROM INDIA	RECOMMENDATION FOR ADOPTION
Legal mandate	Consider enacting a Public Service Delivery Guarantee Bill to institutionalize charters
Compensation for Non-Delivery	Pilot mechanisms for redress (e.g., apology, escalation, financial compensation for critical services)
Digital access and dashboards	Use Smart Zambia infrastructure to digitize service tracking and feedback (dashboards)
Public engagement and awareness	Launch awareness campaigns and citizen engagement platforms to improve visibility and uptake
Monitoring and evaluation	Link charter compliance to Results-Based Management (RBM) and public service appraisals. Further, conduct research on citizen satisfaction and reform outcomes to guide scale-up

B. Rwanda: Citizen report cards, service charters, and performance contracts

- Rwanda offers another compelling example of how citizen feedback mechanisms, and performance-based accountability can be integrated into civil service to make service delivery efficient and effective. Although the term "Citizens' Charter" is not used legislatively as in India, Rwanda has institutionalized a robust framework of citizen engagement and service performance monitoring through three core instruments:
 - Citizen Report Cards (CRC).
 - Service Delivery Charters (institution-level).
 - Imihigo Performance Contracts.
- These mechanisms are embedded in national development and decentralization frameworks, significantly strengthening transparency, accountability, and citizen-centred governance (World Bank, 2018).

Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) – Introduced in 2010

- Designed to capture citizen feedback on the quality of public services at sector and district levels.
- CRCs are conducted regularly and results are published to promote transparency and facilitate citizen–state dialogue.

Service delivery charters

- Developed by frontline public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and local government offices.
- Clearly outline:
 - The services offered
 - Delivery standards and timelines
 - Citizens' rights and responsibilities
 - Complaint or enquiries channels.
- Display publicly and increasingly available online.

Imihigo performance contracts institutionalized 2006

- Originating from traditional Rwandan practices, Imihigo contracts are signed annually between local leaders and central government (President or Prime Minister).
- Contain SMART service delivery targets (e.g. education enrolment, health access).
- Monitored via annual scorecards and publicly ranked to drive competitive performance.

Figure 2: Institutional and legal framework

INSTRUMENT	STATUS	OVERSIGHT BODY	LEGAL/POLICY BASIS
Citizen Report Cards	Mandatory for local governments	Rwanda Governance Board (RGB)	National Decentralization Policy (2012); ¹⁵ Vision 2050
Service Delivery Charters	Required for service institutions	Line Ministries & Local Authorities	Ministerial Service Standards Directives
Imihigo Contracts	Constitutionally recognized	Office of the Prime Minister	Presidential/Ministerial instructions since 2006

¹⁵ Ministry of Local Government (2012). National Decentralization Policy. Kigali.

Figure 3: Core Values Underpinning Rwanda's Model

VALUE	EXPLANATION
Accountability	Officials are held directly responsible for meeting/not meeting service delivery commitments.
Transparency	Results of CRCs and Imihigo performance are made public, increasing pressure for good performance.
Citizen Empowerment	Citizens influence local planning through feedback and CRC surveys.
Performance Orientation	Targets are SMART and tied to annual performance reviews.
Inclusiveness	Feedback is collected from urban and rural populations across all districts.

Key outcomes

- Improved responsiveness in education and health services.¹⁶
- Reinforced performance culture across local government leaders.
- Increased public trust in government service delivery (Afrobarometer).¹⁷
- Real-time monitoring through pilot digital dashboards is underway.

Challenges and limitations

- Resource constraints may limit the implementation of planned improvements based on CRC findings.
- Risk of data manipulation due to pressure to meet performance targets.
- Limited grievance redressal mechanisms in some sectors despite widespread feedback systems.

Relevance and recommendations for Zambia

- Rwanda's integrated approach to citizen engagement and performance management offers highly relevant insights for Zambia's civil service reforms. The use of data-driven feedback, public performance tracking, and localized charters is adaptable within Zambia's existing planning and performance frameworks.

Figure 4: Lessons from Rwanda and Recommendations

¹⁶ World Bank Group (2018). Improving Public Sector Performance through Innovation and Inter-Agency Coordination.

¹⁷ Asunka, Torsu, Sanny (2024). Afro Barometer.

LEARNING FROM RWANDA	RECOMMENDED ADAPTATION FOR ZAMBIA
Citizen Report Cards	Institutionalise CRCs at local and ministerial levels in the medium to long term
Service Charters at Institution Level	Roll out and display service charters in citizen facing institutions such as clinics, schools, and public offices.
Public Dissemination of Results	Publish performance scorecards of ministries and provinces to improve transparency
Use of Data for Planning	Integrate CRC and service charter compliance into the national planning and budgeting cycle

C. UGANDA: Pilot Innovations in Participatory Service Charter Design

- Uganda offers a pioneering example of participatory public sector reform through its pilot initiative on Service Charter co-design, led by the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) in collaboration with the International Growth Centre (IGC). This approach tested whether deliberative citizen consultations could reduce elite bias, enhance inclusiveness, and ensure that service standards genuinely reflect local priorities.
- Rather than relying solely on top-down administrative inputs, the pilot embedded structured public dialogue into charter development. The process provides a credible model for countries like Zambia to anchor citizen voice at the heart of service delivery reforms. The figures below illustrate how citizen participation was integrated into the design of the Service Charter and the positive outcomes that followed.

Figure 5: Design and Delivery Mechanisms

INSTRUMENT	DESCRIPTION
Citizen Consultations	188 structured meetings were conducted in Kampala to inform the Citizen Charter design for Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA).
Randomised Participation	Citizens were randomly selected and invited, ensuring diverse representation by gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity.
Facilitator Variation	Consultations were moderated by either KCCA officials or neutral facilitators from Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) Uganda.
Charter Content Areas	Included service standards for waste collection, education, infrastructure, and local governance.

Source: Humphreys et al., 2020.

Figure 6: Key findings from the pilot

ISSUE	FINDINGS
Inclusiveness	Broad and diversity representation achieved, though wealthier and more educated citizens were more vocal in the deliberations.
Deliberative Equity	No subgroup (e.g. men, elites) was disproportionately able to influence outcomes, even with uneven participation.
Elite Bias Mitigation	Citizen preferences were not overridden by bureaucratic priorities (civil servants). The outcomes reflected grassroots concerns.
Facilitator Impact	Outcomes were not significantly biased by whether meetings were led by KCCA staff or independent facilitators.

Source: Humphreys et al., 2020.

Relevance and recommendations for Zambia

Although Zambia has introduced service charters and performance contracts in several ministries, these efforts often lack participatory grounding, systematic citizen input, and ownership by frontline users. Uganda's approach shows that broadening citizen engagement during the design phase can increase legitimacy, align services with grassroots priorities, and improve policy credibility. To enhance Zambia's service delivery frameworks, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Institutionalise Citizen Co-Design:** Line ministries and agencies should embed structured public consultation into the drafting and revision of service charters. This will foster shared ownership, clarify expectations, and improve accountability.
- **Guard Against Elite Capture:** Use demographic quotas (gender, age, disability) and random invitations to ensure inclusivity and avoid dominance by elite voices. Neutral facilitators such as academics or civil society could moderate these sessions.
- **Promote Participation of Marginalised Groups:** Provide accessible formats (translations, pre-briefings) to empower underrepresented communities such as rural women, youth, and persons with disabilities to contribute meaningfully.
- **Engage Independent Facilitators:** Civil society organisations, universities, and non-partisan experts should be engaged to moderate citizen engagement sessions.

- **Strengthen Monitoring and Feedback Systems:** Regular citizen satisfaction surveys should be conducted to validate whether services are meeting public expectations as outlined in the charters.

Conclusion

Uganda's experience shows that inclusive citizen participation in service charter design can increase legitimacy, reduce elite bias, and align public services with grassroots priorities. For Zambia, integrating this approach into ongoing civil service reforms would enhance the effectiveness, equity, and credibility of service delivery, especially if backed by data-driven monitoring and institutional support.

D. Kenya: Assessing the effectiveness of service charters in enforcing accountability in public service delivery

Kenya's adoption of service charters as part of broader public sector reforms particularly in the health sector offers key insights for Zambia. Service charters in Kenya were designed to improve transparency, empower citizens, and strengthen institutional accountability. However, implementation challenges have limited their full potential. A case study from Kericho District, involving 1,024 respondents and 16 focus group discussions, provides empirical evidence on their strengths and weaknesses in practice (Atela et al., 2015).

Key insights from the study

1. Visibility and public awareness

- 66% of respondents reported having seen a service charter at their local health facility.
- Of these, 84% had read the information, and 83% found it useful, indicating good levels of visual engagement and perceived value among the public.

2. Perceived benefits

- Charters helped clarify service expectations and provided a basis for demanding accountability.
- Citizens reported feeling more empowered when charters were visible and comprehensible.

3. Critical challenges identified

- Non-compliance by health workers: Despite visible charters, frontline staff often failed to adhere to the outlined service standards.

- b. Language and accessibility barriers: Most charters were written in English and used technical language, limiting comprehension among non-English-speaking and low-literacy populations.
- c. Lack of enforcement: There were no institutional mechanisms or sanctions for non-compliance by staff, reducing the charter's credibility.
- d. Weak citizen feedback loops: Facilities lacked structured systems to capture, respond to, and act on complaints or suggestions.
- e. Capacity constraints: Facility managers lacked training in charter monitoring and data collection, and staff were not incentivized to meet charter standards.

Implications for Zambia

Zambia has introduced service charters in selected ministries and public institutions. However, much like in Kenya, these efforts are often symbolic rather than transformative. In many cases, charters are displayed without accompanying enforcement, awareness campaigns, or performance tracking systems. The Kenyan case shows that effective implementation, not just adoption, is key to impact.

Recommendations

Localization and accessibility

- Translate service charters into local languages and use simplified language to improve comprehension.
- Display charters prominently in all service delivery points and ensure they reflect realistic and measurable service standards.

Capacity building

- Train frontline workers and managers on citizen rights, charter provisions, and accountability frameworks.
- Embed service charter training into induction programmes for civil servants, especially in frontline agencies (e.g. health, education, registration services).

Feedback and monitoring

- Institutionalize citizen feedback mechanisms, such as digital platforms, SMS systems, toll-free numbers, and community scorecards.

- Link these feedback channels to complaint resolution protocols and require periodic reporting on resolved cases.

Incentives and accountability

- Integrate charter adherence into performance contracts for Permanent Secretaries, Directors, and frontline staff.
- Develop performance scoreboards that publicly show how institutions are meeting charter standards, updated quarterly or biannually.

Community participation

- Encourage community participating in designing of Charters and implementation monitoring e.g. through health committees, school boards, and civil society.
- Use participatory tools such as citizen report cards and social audits to increase transparency and public oversight.

Digitization and integration

- Link service charters to online platforms and dashboards under Smart Zambia's e-Government systems to enable real-time monitoring and publication of delivery metrics.

Conclusion and transferable lessons

The Kenyan experience underscores that service charters alone cannot improve service delivery. Service Charters must be backed by enabling systems for training, citizen engagement, monitoring, and enforcement. Zambia can build on its existing efforts by integrating charters into a broader results-based service delivery framework, supported by digital platforms and participatory monitoring.

E. ZAMBIA medicines regulatory authority (ZAMRA): Leveraging digital service to enhance citizen participation and service delivery

ZAMRA presents a homegrown example of how digital innovation, citizen engagement, and service charters can converge to improve public sector performance. Through the development and deployment of its Integrated Regulatory Information Management System (IRMIS) in 2022, ZAMRA has digitized its core regulatory functions while enhancing transparency and accountability in service delivery.¹⁸

¹⁸ ZAMRA (2025). Interview and observational.

Key innovations and institutional practices

- **Digitally Embedded Service Charter:** ZAMRA's Service Charter is integrated directly into the IRMIS platform. Clients can monitor the progress of applications such as licensing, certification, and product registration in real time. This transparency empowers service users and holds staff accountable by linking timelines to individual performance metrics.
- **Multichannel Citizen Feedback Mechanisms:** Citizens can lodge complaints or provide feedback via the IRMIS portal, email, and WhatsApp. This feedback loop enables quick adjustments to workflows, communication strategies, and service models, contributing to continuous service improvement.
- **Data-Driven Accountability:** IRMIS generates digital reports used for monitoring institutional and individual compliance with service benchmarks. Although formal reward and sanction frameworks are still being developed, supervisors already use system data in performance reviews.
- **Cost-Efficient and Scalable Innovation:** The entire IRMIS platform was developed and deployed at an estimated cost of USD 200,000, showcasing that impactful digital reforms can be achieved without large-scale investment. Planned features include SMS alerts and interoperability with HR and laboratory systems.

Observed challenges and limitations from the ZAMRA benchmark

1. Incomplete institutionalisation of performance management
 - a. Although staff performance is tracked through the Integrated Regulatory Information Management System (IRMIS), formal performance management structures such as clear reward and sanction frameworks are still under development. This undermines the full accountability potential of the digital system and may limit motivation for sustained performance improvements.
2. Limited integration with national digital governance ecosystems
 - a. ZAMRA has operated largely in isolation from national ICT institutions such as the Smart Zambia Institute and the Zambia Revenue Authority. This fragmented approach limits interoperability, standardization, and opportunities for cross-

institutional learning. It may also increase cybersecurity vulnerabilities and redundancy in system investments.

3. Human resource constraints in ICT support
 - a. The institution faces capacity gaps in managing and maintaining digital systems, particularly in ICT support staffing and digital literacy among frontline users. These constraints jeopardize system sustainability, slow responsiveness to technical challenges, and hinder further innovation.

21

Key lessons for other institutions

1. Digitally embedded service charters enhance transparency as it enables citizens to track services in real time while linking staff performance directly to service delivery timelines.
2. Citizen complaints and feedback systems such as online portals and messaging apps allow institutions to adapt quickly to client needs and improve satisfaction.
3. Digital systems can drive internal accountability. Workflow tracking tools, performance dashboards, and automated reporting systems help enforce service standards and identify bottlenecks at both individual and institutional levels.
4. Institutional reform does not require large budgets. ZAMRA's IRMIS was developed and deployed at a moderate cost, offering a scalable model for line ministries and agencies seeking to digitize services and improve client engagement.

Recommendations for line ministries and agencies

- Adopt workflow management systems that track tasks from submission to completion, linking them to staff performance reports and improving accountability.
- Upgrade digital platforms to fully integrate Service Charters, allowing citizens to track service delivery progress against defined standards in real time. This should be complemented by strengthened collaboration with the Smart Zambia Institute and other digital governance institutions to ensure system interoperability, enhance cybersecurity, and promote adherence to shared national standards.
- Institutionalize feedback mechanisms that allow clients to easily provide input and lodge feedback through multiple accessible channels (e.g., portals, SMS, WhatsApp).

- Invest in staff capacity and digital literacy, especially for frontline service teams and ICT support units, to ensure sustainability of digital reforms.