

## Reforming the Public Sector in Malawi: A Gateway to Improved Service Delivery

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### Abstract

*This paper analyzes the quality of service under the Public Service Charter reform initiative implemented in Malawi. Public sector reform has for several years been one of the policy agenda issues in Malawi. A Service Charter is a social pact written by service providers in consultation with service users. It outlines the nature and quality of a service that beneficiaries should expect from a provider. The current understanding in Public Sector Reforms is that since 2014, the momentum towards reform has significantly increased due to, among other things, political pressure to deliver quality public services to the citizenry. Despite an abundance of literature on the public sector reform in Malawi, there is limited discussion or understanding on the quality of public service after each reform exercise. Quality of services in this paper is understood to constitute the state of how well the tangible and intangible public services match the citizen expectations on a consistent basis over and above what has been prescribed. Using a qualitative data collection approach in the districts of Salima and Dedza, the paper, among other things, finds that where the institutionalization of the Service Charters reform in the public service delivery chain in Malawi is done, citizens have experienced enhanced service delivery. Data was analysed by coding the audio transcripts in order to establish themes and patterns of the responses based on the objectives of the study.*

**Keywords:** Service charters, Quality service, Malawi, Public sector reform, Public service delivery

### Introduction

This paper is part of a larger study whose main objective was to analyse whether the public sector reforms lead to enhanced public service delivery using the Malawi Public Service Charter as a case study. Malawi became independent from Britain on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1964 and, just like most developing countries, one of the issues that was

immediately observed was that the country's public sector needed reform. The public sector was mainly geared towards maintaining law and order and not necessarily to facilitate development. For many years, the Malawi public service has faced serious criticism for failing to deliver quality services (GoM 2010). Several reforms have over the years been undertaken "to ensure increased effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and affordability...to raise the quality of public services delivered to citizens" (Tambulasi and Kayuni 2013: 253). Chasukwa and Kayuni (2018) observe that public sector reforms in Malawi tend to take the institutional mimicking approach hence lack the proper bona fide local identity. This paper discusses the public sector reform exercise that was initiated in 2015 but with special focus on service charters. Despite an abundance of literature on the public sector reform, there is limited discussion or understanding of the quality of public service after each reform exercise. In other words, the available literature has mainly focused on the nature, type and key stakeholders in the reform but the element of quality of public service has not been adequately interrogated. Service Charters aim to improve quality of public service. Therefore, investigating public sector reform initiatives from a quality of service perspective is a task worth undertaking. An analysis of the said Service Charter reform initiative shows that where the institutionalization of the Service Charters reform in the public service delivery chain in Malawi is done, citizens have experienced enhanced service delivery.

### **Methodology**

The study, from which this paper is derived, aimed to measure perceptions, experience, and feelings of people on public services they consume. This makes the choice of interpretive methodology appropriate. In this case, qualitative data was collected. Given the choice of methodology adopted, what follows is a brief discussion of research methods that were used to collect data.

The initial phase of the study was done in 2018 and a follow-up in some cases was done in 2020. The study focused on central and local government service providers. The units of the study selected were Office of the President and Cabinet as the designer of the Malawi Public Service Charter and local level service providers in Salima and Dedza District Councils. Salima District Council was selected because it was one of the first to implement the service charter reform initiative in 2008 (GoM 2010; MHRRC, 2011). In contrast, Dedza was selected as a late implementer of the service charter hence it provided a better comparative view on the impact of Service Charters on service delivery. The specific sectors analysed at local level in the said districts were health, agriculture and education. These were selected because they are some of the frequently consumed services and would, therefore, give a fair picture of the effects of the service charter system on services delivered. Desk review of the relevant literature on Service Charters in Malawi was also conducted. In total, the data collection exercise involved six FGDs, 31 KIs, and 304 randomly sampled citizens

within Salima and Dedza responded to the questionnaires. Qualitative data was analysed by coding the audio transcripts in order to establish themes and patterns of the responses based on the objectives of the study.

### **The Customer Service Charter Reform Initiative**

Tritter (2004), cited in Mahoo (2016), defines Service Charters as public agreements between citizens and service delivery providers that clearly codify expectations and standards in the realm of service delivery. Rahman et al (2022) point out that public sector leaders face numerous competing demands which may derail reforms but some enterprising leaders find ways of ensuring that the process achieves its goals. In this case, as Ohemeng and Akonnor (2022) argue, it is possible for public reforms to break the previous inertia and gain momentum. Service Charters are opportunities presented before public sector leaders to ensure that reforms are not stalled.

If designed and implemented correctly, Service Charters have the potential not only to foster greater public satisfaction with a government's service by enhancing responsiveness, among others, but also increase confidence in the government (Joshi, 2010; Tamrakar, 2010; Fox, 2014). In making the transition from comparatively unresponsive bureaucracies to adopting a clear user focus in the delivery of public services, national administrations have adopted a variety of approaches in the broader terms of public governance, often and in particular involving the adoption of an explicit statement of standards in the form of a charter (Joshi 2010). These explicit statements of standards are known by different names in various jurisdictions. Some more common nomenclatures include 'Customer Service Charter, Citizen Charters, Performance Pledges and Client Charters (Drewry, 2005).

The specific elements of Service Charters vary from place to place. Many charters, however, are largely characterized by defined services and standards that the public entity offers; the procedures to be followed in accessing services; cost and conditions required for the service to be accessed; publicizing of standards of services and location of where services can be accessed; and provision of a complaints and redress mechanism (Tamrakar, 2010, OPC, 2010). Service Charters outline the mandate of the public institution, the kind and nature of services that a particular public entity offers, including time frames for delivery of services. Service Charters also include any charges, if at all, that users of the services are expected to pay, the responsibilities of service providers as well as the service users, and finally the means of recourse in circumstances where users experience a poor service.

### **Public Sector Reforms in Malawi And Beyond**

Public sector reform has recently gained prominence because of the purported link of the said reforms to effective development. For instance, during the 24-26 June 2019

UN Public Service Forum (UNPSF) conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, it was observed that the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved if the public sector is not reformed (UN 2019). More importantly, the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011 African Union's "African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration" clearly highlights the relevance of public sector reforms especially in the area of innovativeness (AU 2011).

Research endeavours on quality of service in public services have been made by several researchers, including Wisniewski and Donnelly (1996), Rowley (1998), Wisniewski (2001), and Brysland and Curry (2001). Quality of services in this paper is understood to constitute the state of how well the tangible and intangible public services match the citizen expectations on a consistent basis over and above what has been prescribed – that is confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations (Parasuraman et al, 1985; Barbier and Tenenge 2022). In other words, quality is what Zeithaml et al (1990) describe as the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. Quality of service is embedded in the concept of customer satisfaction against perception. It can be defined as an overall judgment similar to attitude towards the service and generally accepted as an antecedent of overall customer satisfaction (Olsen, 2002).

Customer satisfaction refers to 'the utility value derived by the customer upon consumption of a product or service as attested by the independent opinion of the consumer of the product or service' (GoM, 2014). The core indicators of such customer satisfaction are speed of delivery of service /product, quality of service/product, ease of accessibility of product/service, and affordability (GoM, 2014). High quality of service is experienced if expectations are more than performance. In other words, quality is less than satisfactory when a customer experiences dissatisfaction measured against perception (Parasuraman et al, 1985). These indicators notwithstanding, it is challenging to achieve a high level of citizen satisfaction with public services because of different expectations for the same services by the citizens. In light of this, and as discussed earlier, public services in most developing nations have been adjudged not to deliver quality services to their citizens due to a number of factors, including lack of accountability and responsiveness mechanisms to citizen needs, hence the introduction of reforms as defined in the NPM. The challenge, however, is on how to measure quality in public services which are collectively and monopolistically delivered, satisfaction being subjective to individuals. To this end, models have been developed that assist in measuring quality in delivery of public services.

The public sector management reforms Malawi has undertaken since her independence in 1964 may fall into five generations. The first-generation reforms are those that were implemented between 1964 and 1980. The second-generation reforms

are those implemented from late 1980 to 1993 with the third implemented after the advent of multiparty political democracy from 1993 to April 2012. The fourth constitutes the post April 2012 reforms to May 2014. The fifth category of these reforms was instituted after May 2014 Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections. This paper focuses on the fifth category of reforms within the realm of Public Service Charters.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) became victorious after the May 2014 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. According to Kayuni et al (2018), although Malawi had previously embarked on numerous reform initiatives, the post-2014 reforms were exceptional in several ways:

First, there was a strong political will to drive the reform agenda. As Kayuni et al (2018) further explain, DPP's campaign manifesto specifically mentioned a comprehensive public sector reform programme. Immediately the DPP took over government, the President of Malawi established a seven-member Public Service Reforms Commission (PSRC) in June 2014 chaired by the Vice President of the Republic (GoM, 2015). The Commission was established against a background of general public outcry that public service delivery was poor and duty bearers were not responsive to the citizen needs. The main function of the Commission was "to chart the national direction and establish national priorities in PSRs that would ensure successful change towards a modern, efficient and effective public service" (GoM, 2015).

Second, the government's reform agenda was developed after nation-wide consultations. Specifically, meetings were organized in all regions of the country and citizens were given a chance to ask questions or contribute ideas. Special consultations were also organized involving professional bodies such as Malawi Law Society, Institute of People Management and several others. This format of consultation was unprecedented in the Malawi public sector reform initiative because it was wide and robust. Third, the commission tried not to be 'politically correct' in dealing with the critical issues affecting the sector. Finally, the commission produced a report, launched in February 2015, which spelt out steps to be taken in order to address challenges that the sector faced (GoM 2015).

The philosophy of the Fifth Generation of reforms was to find local solutions to local challenges in the delivery of public services and management of public service reforms while learning from other jurisdictions (GoM, 2015). Indeed, the philosophy of localization of solutions was considered important on two fronts. First, it embraced views of the many stakeholders that were consulted in order to gain confidence of the new reform agenda and second, it implemented quick win reforms that had immediate impact on the citizen service demands (GoM, 2010).

When Malawi was commemorating Africa Public Service Day in 2008, the president announced that government was going to introduce Service Charters as part of the reform initiatives and also as an instrument for raising quality, effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness in the delivery of public service (GoM, 2008). Many public service organizations started introducing Service Charters in their system (GoM, 2008). However, full implementation in most public sector institutions was pursued after 2014 within the ambit of fifth generation reforms.

### **Measuring Quality Service**

The model that has been most used to measure quality is the SERVQUAL (not necessarily an acronym) instrument, developed by Parasuraman et al (1985). It uses 22 statements for assessing consumer perceptions and expectations regarding the quality of a service (Ramseook-Munhurrin et al, 2010). Ideally, the model rests on five distinct dimensions that customers use to evaluate the quality of a service: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. This model has been criticized by scholars, including Cronin and Taylor (1992), for emphasising expectations. Critics have instead proposed the SERVPERF (not necessarily an acronym) Model which coincidentally consists of 22 perception items, but which excludes any consideration of expectations. As Ramseook-Munhurrin et al argue, citing Cronin and Taylor, the ‘unweighted SERVPERF measure (performance-only) performs better than any other measure of service quality, and that it has the ability to provide more accurate service quality score than SERVQUAL’ (Ramseook-Munhurrin, 2010: 4). Their argument is that performance best reflects a customer’s perception of service quality, and that expectations are not part of this concept. However, SERVQUAL is much more versatile in its application and it has been widely used in the assessment of quality in a number of services, including health, policing and public utilities services.

Parasuraman et al (1985) noted that even if it may be necessary to reword or modify some of the items, the SERVQUAL scale remains applicable in a wide range of business services. Indeed, the study opted to use the SERVQUAL Model as it relates more to the element of the Service Charters in public service delivery, in addition to its wide range applicability. The basic idea being that Service Charters set quality standards against which performance can be measured, and standards will rise as a result of the pressure that users can put on the service providers. To this end, the study chose to use the following variables to constitute some of the key determinants of quality service (a) Reliability: which is manifest through consistent performance and dependability of provision of a service; (b) Responsiveness: which relates to how timely service providers react to citizen needs and demands as well as their willingness or readiness to provide a service; (c) Competence: possession of required skills and knowledge for one to execute or provide a service; (d) Access: which

involves approachability to the service providers by service users as well as convenience of location of a service. Depending on the services sought, this may also include waiting time spent to receive a service and hours of service operation; (e) Courtesy: involves politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact persons in the public service chain; (f) Communication: this constitutes mechanisms through which service users are informed in a medium that they will clearly understand. This, therefore, involves explaining the kind of services, the cost if any; (g) Credibility: included in this are elements of trustworthiness, believability, honesty; and (h) Tangibles: included in this determinant are physical evidence of the facilities, the appearance of the human resource, tools and equipment. Some of the determinants herein applied are beyond the SERVQUAL but critical to the study (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al, 2010).

Evaluation of quality is mainly based on responsiveness to customers' needs instead of conformance to specifications, procedures and standard (Tuomi, V., 2012). Critical in public service chain delivery quality assessment is the citizens' ability to know what they can expect from the service providers for them to qualify the level of satisfaction. In turn, this requires access to information on service standards. This is what the Service Charters reform initiative seeks to achieve among other objectives.

### **Results and Discussion: Public Service Charters and Quality of Services**

Analysis of data from KI, FGDs and the questionnaire concludes that the Service Charters reforms initiative has had a positive impact on public service delivery in different dimensions ranging from improved service provider-service user relationships, satisfaction to improved access and quality of services. The perception on the quality of services was within Zeithaml et al's (1990) description of quality being the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. Quality of service is, therefore, embedded in the concept of customer satisfaction against perception. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, customer satisfaction refers to the utility value derived by the customer upon consumption of a product or service as attested by the independent opinion of the consumer of the product or service (GoM, 2014). To this end, the yardsticks used to measure the quality of services or the utility value in this paper are reliability, accessibility, responsiveness, credibility, and courteousness based on the SERVQUAL Model (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al, 2010). In view of this the findings in this section are discussed under these indicators. However, before these dimensions of quality service are discussed, an overall picture as well as mode of interpretation need to be presented.

Following the above understanding of what constitutes quality services, the focus of the paper was on perceptions of service users. This paper is largely on perceptions, experience, and feelings of people on services they consume. Therefore, the results

are treated as positives as far as services are perceived to have improved as a consequence of the institutionalization of Service Charters reform initiative. Since Dedza district started implementing late while Salima district has been implementing Service Charters for a comparatively longer period of time, a positive outlook in Salima as compared to Dedza implies that the objectives of the Service Charters are being achieved.

Given the dimension in which quality was interpreted in the study, a general position that is based on the analysis of the responses from the KI, FDG participants and the respondents from the questionnaire on the selected indicators of reliability, responsiveness, accessibility, and courteousness, is that the quality of services had improved as a result of institutionalizing the service charter reform initiative. The rating is based on the questionnaire responses on whether Service Charters have made any difference to the quality of services, as seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Introduction of Service Charters and Quality of Services

		Has the introduction of Service Charters made any difference to the quality of services?		Total
		No	Yes	
District	Dedza	82	17	99
	Salima	103	100	203
<b>Total</b>		<b>185</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>302</b>

Given the above information in Table 1, in Salima 100 out 203 respondents said the introduction of services had a positive impact on quality of service delivery translating into 49%. In Dedza 17% (17 out of 99) were of the perception that the Service Charter had a positive impact. Although the approval rate from questionnaire respondents for Dedza is very low, it can still be said that overall the average was higher if we compare with the views that were expressed during KI and FGDs.

### ***Reliability***

Reliability manifests through consistent performance and dependability of provision of a service by duty bearers (Ramseook-Munhurrun, et al, 2010). In this regard, when asked if the service providers had become more reliable when providing services as a result of the institutionalization of the Service Charters, many respondents, both KIs and participants in the FDG, were of the view that there was improvement. For example, according to the participants at the FDG, reliability included experiencing better relationships with health personnel in the three health facilities in TA Mwanza



and, as a result, more women are now giving birth at the facilities. People know that health facilities are supposed to be open from 07:30 – 16:30 hours and indeed the health facilities do open and facilities and services can be accessed off these hours on emergency (FGD, TA Mwanza June 2018).

In another case one KI (Dedza, July 2018) rated the duty bearers' reliability at 60%. His argument was that this would have been much more were it that the Service Charters were consistently disseminated. He further argued that the limited dissemination was a deliberate move by some duty bearers to bar communities from accessing information on service for fear that they would be exposed. Disaggregated data for the two study districts shows that in terms of their perceptions on how the Service Charters had impacted on reliability of service delivery, the figure is higher in Salima (54%) than Dedza (13%).

### ***Accessibility***

Accessibility involves approachability to the service providers by service users as well as the convenience of location of a service (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al, 2010). Depending on the services sought, this may also include waiting time to receive a service and the time a service is offered. Given that understanding of accessibility, KIs at the central, local and village level were of the opinion that accessibility to services had improved as a result of Service Charters. To this end, in the agriculture sector, a KI (Salima, June 2018) cited the way farmers get information at Agriculture Offices where there was increased accessibility to services as a result of the introduction of the Service Charters reform initiative as time is clearly indicated. Through the Service Charters, Lead Farmers get information regarding farming and this is passed on to all farmers.

One KI (Salima, June 2018) at the district level, in his narration, argued that Service Charters have improved relationships between service users and service providers, especially in areas where there were conflicts previously. The health sector was cited as one such sector which was characterized by conflicts. An example of an outstanding conflict revolved around the opening times of health facilities in the rural areas, and the reporting time of health attendants. The study found out that before the introduction of Service Charters, health personnel could open health service centers anytime they wished against the provisions in the Health Policy of 2017 and the Malawi Public Service Regulations which state that citizens can still access health services from 07:30 a.m. to 5:00 pm as outpatients and that citizens can access these facilities anytime beyond normal working hours in case of emergencies (KIs, Dedza July 2018). The Service Charters promoted knowledge among citizens on the operating hours and, therefore, the health personnel could no longer behave as if the health facilities were operating at their mercy. Citizens are no longer denied services as was the case before. The conflicts have significantly reduced as the Service

Charters have exposed the citizens as to what they can expect from duty bearers in the health sector.

The above assertion was well corroborated with KIs at the TA level. The study found that in Traditional Authority Mwanza, the KIs, the FGD participants were of the view that there has been an improvement in the delivery of services since the introduction of Service Charters in the sectors that had the Service Charters namely, Health, Education, Social Welfare, Police and Agriculture. The improvements included resolving conflicts that arose between duty bearers and citizens due to citizens not knowing what to expect from service providers. To that end, the FGD in TA Mwanza (Salima, June 2018) revealed that the opening time of the health center is no longer an issue as it opens on the prescribed times defined in the service charter.

Confirming that there were some improvements in accessing the health services, another KI (Dedza, July 2018) summarized the situation as follows:

the service charter is encouraging all patients to know what to expect when they go to the hospitals to seek medical attention and patients should be able to demand better services unlike just waiting as it has been happening in the past. The charter is helping people know what services are offered at the hospitals they visit so that they should know in advance that their other expectations cannot be met at certain hospitals.

In the education sector the study found out that the Service Charters were being used to lobby for more teachers to be placed in schools thereby lessening the tensions that arose due to dysfunctional pupil-teacher ratios. This assertion was well corroborated with KIs at the TA level. In TA Mwanza, for example, the FGD participants (Salima, June 2018) revealed that the number of teachers in schools within the area had improved following the introduction of Service Charters as communities were told of the standard number of teachers required at a school and wherever there was a gap they were able to demand from duty bearers to post more teachers. This in turn has enabled more children to be going to school because they are being attended to. In his own words, one FGD participant said that

we have more than 10 teachers/school which never used to be the case before we knew the minimum number of teachers in primary schools. Having known, we are now able to demand. For example, at Kalokola School, there was only 1 Teacher but after a complaint was raised with the PEA within a short period 4 more teachers were posted (FGD participant, Salima, June 2018).

The FGD participants (Salima, June 2018) also explained changes in the agriculture sector where an extension worker just disappeared from the area denying citizens the much-needed services. The Service Charter User Committee in conjunction with the ADC wrote the relevant office with the support of the Traditional Authority and a replacement was eventually made while acknowledging that it took a bit of pushing and time. The FGD revealed that agriculture productivity had also improved due to the ability of the people to reach them for advice where necessary following the empowerment experienced through the Service Charters reform initiative. One KI (Salima, June 2018) also indicated that more students are on bursary due to their increased awareness of the functions of the Social Welfare Department and more importantly they were able to demand the services. In general, the qualitative data affirm that accessibility of services had improved as a result of institutionalizing the Service Charters reform initiative.

### ***Responsiveness***

Responsiveness relates to how timely service providers react to citizen needs and demands as well as their willingness or readiness to provide a service (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al, 2010). In that vein, an informant in the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) indicated that the institutionalization of the service charter reform initiative has assisted the office in enhancing responsiveness in the course of service delivery. The informant qualified his assertions by saying:

the objective of Service Charters is to improve the service delivery in the public service. We, therefore, made commitments in the service charter that if someone just wants to enquire on a matter, he/she can be assisted within a day and within minutes depending on the complexity of the issue being enquired on. Secondly, we also committed to say when an applicant comes here for change of name or to use the protected names like Malawi, we will ensure that any applicant gets an approval or feedback by the end of 14 days. To this end, the service is forcing us to fulfil our commitments (OPC Officer, Lilongwe, May 2018).

He further said that sometimes they deliver the service before the two weeks' elapse. In that case he argued that the Service Charters have helped duty bearers in the OPC to improve on timelines, as previously they could exceed that time frame without fear of any repercussion.

In responding to whether the Service Charters had improved responsiveness to customers in the Ministry of Health, one KI (Lilongwe, November 2018) said that there were improvements at the Head Office, but he was not sure of the impact at the

district level. In affirming that service delivery has improved, he gave an example of the front desk where clients/service users commended the way they were being welcomed following the introduction of the Service Charters. In addition, the study also found out that duty bearers that were aware of the Service Charters were cautious and responsive except where resources were not available. One KI said that the service charter had improved time management both on patients' side as well as on health workers since there were disclosures on times that services would be offered and therefore improved on responsiveness.

However, another KI (Salima, June 2018) said the workers seem to be responsible, at times, but their reaction suggests they are not concerned at all. To that end, one respondent felt the duty bearers were not responsive. Said he, for example,

“Citizens arrive at the health facilities in the morning but service providers just dillydally and eventually they tell you to go back without attending to you... and those who go to health facilities at night are not attended to, instead they are just rebuked by health workers. On the list of the services they offer they indicated time as well what they offer but what they do is contrary”.

The findings from Dedza District Council on the impact of the Service Charters, particularly on accountability and transparency and citizen participation, were not very different from those from Salima. This is despite the fact that the period of implementing the reform initiative in Salima was deemed short for a meaningful assessment. To that end, an informant from the Directorate of Planning and Development (Dedza July, 2018) stated that there was some change in terms of performance. Much as he was of the opinion that the time factor was a limiting issue to assess the effect of the Service Charters, he acknowledged that there are key areas where he could say that there have been some key improvements mainly in the health-water sector and security. In that vein, therefore, he gave examples in the health sector that

“we had one health centre in TA Kaphuka where the service provider used to close during the weekends, which is not supposed to be the case. Once the Service Charter was introduced, the locals knew the standards concerning how these health personnel should conduct themselves. So, through their Citizen Forum...they raised a concern to the DHO and the Council and that problem was resolved. And as I am talking to you now, that Health Centre is operating all days of the week. I may attribute this success to the Service Charter...”.

Another case cited as an example was in the Water Sector where there are prescribed standards to be followed when the sector had to provide potable water to locals. The

informant said there are a number of players in the sector on the ground. These players include the Water Department which is the Policy Holder. There are also NGOs and Faith Based Organizations (FBO) which are also providing the same services to the locals. To augment the case on the impact of the service charter in the Water Sector, the informant narrated that there was this other FBO which, instead of drilling boreholes, it was merely providing shallow wells against the set standards of a borehole. In addition, the District Water Office was not consulted and did not even know that there was another player on the ground. Because these communities were empowered through the service charter, they informed and queried the District Water Office to provide reasons why they allowed this malpractice. The issue was resolved as well as the KI indicated. Another KI, concurring with the informant from the Department of Planning and Development, said that he was of the view that, to some extent, the service charter has had an impact as there were some communities that were aware of the standards and were able to demand services in reference to the Service Charter (KI, Dedza July 2018).

While Informants acknowledged some improvements in the efficiency of service delivery at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology head office, the study noted a number of issues that may have contributed to the improvement of delivery of some services that were not necessarily as a result of the introduction of the Service Charters. For example, the Ministry had decentralized management of Basic Education Teachers to the Local Authorities Service Commission and District Education Managers Office more or less at the same time of formulating or implementing Service Charters (KI, Lilongwe November 2018). The transfer of this function led to decongestion at the head offices which came as a result of teachers who were visiting the office to process their leave grants.

The respondents' perception on the responsiveness of duty bearers as a result of the introduction of the Service Charters in the public was at about 42% on average. But more respondents in Salima (72%) were of the view that responsiveness had improved and this owes to the fact that the service charter reform initiative was more institutionalized in Salima than in Dedza.

### ***Credibility***

According to Ramseook-Munhurrin et al (2010) credibility includes elements of trustworthiness, believability, and honesty of duty bearers in the course of discharging their duties by service users. In that regard, FGD participants (Salima, TA Mwanza June 2018) said that with the introduction of Service Charters the situation has improved and citizens are having some confidence in the duty bearers, citing the case of health services where, according to the participants, included better relationship with health personnel in the three health facilities in TA Mwanza and, as a result, more women are now giving birth at the facilities. This finding is supported by one of the

objectives of introducing Service Charters which is to build and harness trust of the citizens on the Malawi Public Service (OPC, 2010). In that regard, an informant from the MHRC (Lilongwe, November 2018), in outlining the rationale for establishing the Service Charters, said that among the objectives of the Service Charters there was the issue of building confidence of citizens in the public service by ensuring that public servants were delivering services according to law and their mandates.

On the other hand, the study encountered concerns regarding the construction of school blocks, suggesting that the service charter did not improve the quality of services in terms of credibility. A case in point is that of Ching'ombe Primary School block in Salima. Funds depleted before construction of the structure was completed, prompting some individuals to cite it as a case of corruption (Salima, June 2018). Another case of lack of credibility was when one respondent said that the duty bearers prescribed medication even before patients finished explaining their problems (Respondent to Questionnaires, Salima Boma, June 2018).

Respondents said that credibility of service users as well as services had improved by about 36% as a result of the institutionalization of the CSC Service Charters reform initiative. A number of respondents said now people have confidence in duty bearers (Respondent to Questionnaires, Salima, June 2018; Dedza July 2018).

### ***Communication and Courteousness***

Communication, on one hand, constitutes a mechanism through which service users are informed in a medium that they will clearly understand and listen and courteousness, on the other hand, involves politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact persons and it is dependent on communication skills or public relations (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al, 2010). This, therefore, involves explaining politely the kind of services, the cost, if any, in a friendly manner by the street-level bureaucrats. In that regard, out of the 304 respondents, when asked if communication to them by duty bearers on the services they expected had improved as a result of the introduction of the customer service charter, those who said yes represented about 42.3%. However, more respondents in Salima (56%) were in the affirmative to the question, a factor that could be related to the fact that Salima had implemented the service charter reform earlier and for a longer period than Dedza.

### ***Conclusion***

The objective of this paper was to present findings on the institutionalization of public Service Charters and enhancement of public service delivery. Specifically, the discussion and analysis were premised on the question of whether the public sector reforms lead to enhanced quality public service delivery using the Malawi Public Service Charter as a case. The overall conclusion is that Service Charters lead towards enhanced service delivery if the said charters are institutionalized.

The conclusion is arrived at as the KIs and FGD participants' indicated improvement in key indicators of enhanced service delivery namely, accountability and transparency, citizen empowerment, and quality of services defined in reliability, responsiveness, accessibility and credibility of duty bearers in the execution of their duties. The findings also justified the conceptual framework of the study that postulated that realization of enhanced service delivery is dependent on the institutionalizing of accountability and transparency being indicators of good governance; citizen empowerment and service quality standards in the public service delivery chain.

The paper also concludes that the service charter was duly promoted through legislated structures namely, the district councils, and area development committees. In addition, there were other informal structures like Community Citizen Forum and Social Accountability Monitoring Committee, though only in Dedza, that enhanced citizen participation. These factors are at the core of the Service Charters reform initiatives and the Service Charters, it is argued, were enablers in enhancing public services delivery (Drewry, 2005).

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