

7. MALAYSIA

AN EVALUATION OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION TOWARDS GOVERNMENT PROJECTS: A CASE STUDY OF CONSTITUTION XYZ⁶⁸

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INTRODUCTION

The set-up of the Malaysian public administration consists of 24 line ministries, including the Prime Minister Department. On the highest rung, there are five central agencies: the Economic Planning Unit, the Public Service Department, the Malaysia Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit, the Treasury and the Implementation Coordination Unit. These central agencies are individually tasked with specific roles with respect to the planning, implementation and evaluation of national policies.

With respect to executing public projects, line ministries are responsible for implementing, monitoring and evaluating their own projects. However, the Implementation

68 For confidentiality reasons, the constitution is referred to as XYZ.

Coordination Unit is mandated as an independent monitor and evaluator. This structure encourages self-auditing by the project-owners (line ministries), and simultaneously infuses a check and balance by an independent party (the Implementation Coordination Unit).

Evaluation in the context of Malaysian development occurs at every level: project (by line ministries), programme and policy levels (by the Implementation Coordination Unit). In this respect, the traditional use of evaluation is for planning policies and budgets, and for improving financial resource allocations to programmes and public services. However, there are instances where a stakeholder conducts an evaluation to address a specific cross-cutting issue.

For example, the Implementation Coordination Unit was tasked to study the perception of government projects (physical and non-physical) implemented from 2005 to 2010 in one constitution. The objective was to evaluate public perceptions (among direct beneficiaries, projects implementers and local leaders) by identifying the following:

- What were the outputs and outcomes achieved during the period?
- Were there any grouses or dissatisfaction that arose from the public?
- Was there any misalignment between the demand and supply of public projects?
- Did it lead to negative impacts on the ruling government?
- What did the public want from the government?

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study used primary and secondary data to evaluate the outputs and outcome achievements of eight clusters (basic infrastructure, public infrastructure, worship, health, education, security, and recreation and welfare). Each cluster covered the physical aspects and activities of attached programmes. For primary data, a behavioural exercise was employed; a field survey based on stratified sampling was performed with two sets of questionnaires. In addition, a group interview was performed to gather additional information on certain issues.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES USED IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

A three-month time frame was given to complete the exercise. Coverage included 5,995 projects with an allocation of approximately \$234 million and a population of 72,504 people, with 4,096 direct beneficiary respondents and 128 executing agency respondents. From the perspective of the projects, it cross-cut through several agencies and issues (e.g. health, security, welfare, education, land, humanitarian and transportation). Complications included overlapping and redundancy of projects among agencies, which posed challenges in harmonizing data collection and aggregation. For example, there were extreme variations within groups (e.g. ethnic group, age, educational status, locality and income). Post-completion challenges included convincing stakeholders to take bold and quick actions and communicate findings to politicians, local leaders and implementing agencies.

Because of this diversity, a communication plan was important for follow-up and follow-through of remedial actions. In moderating the challenges, several strategies were adopted.

FIGURE 1. CITIZEN SATISFACTION INDEX

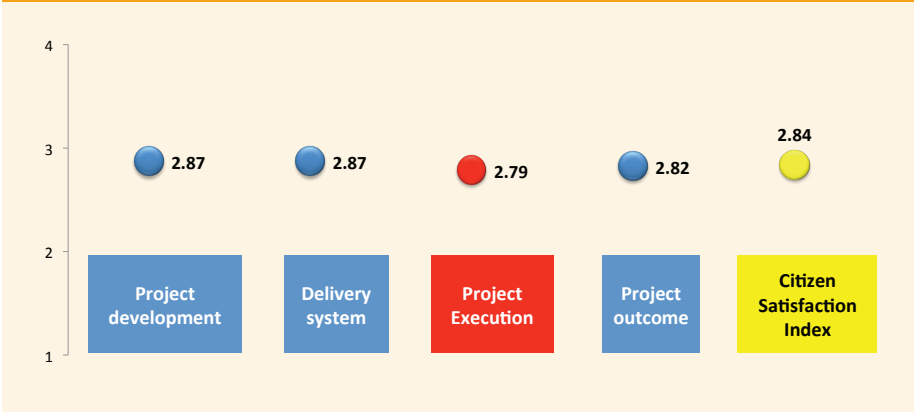
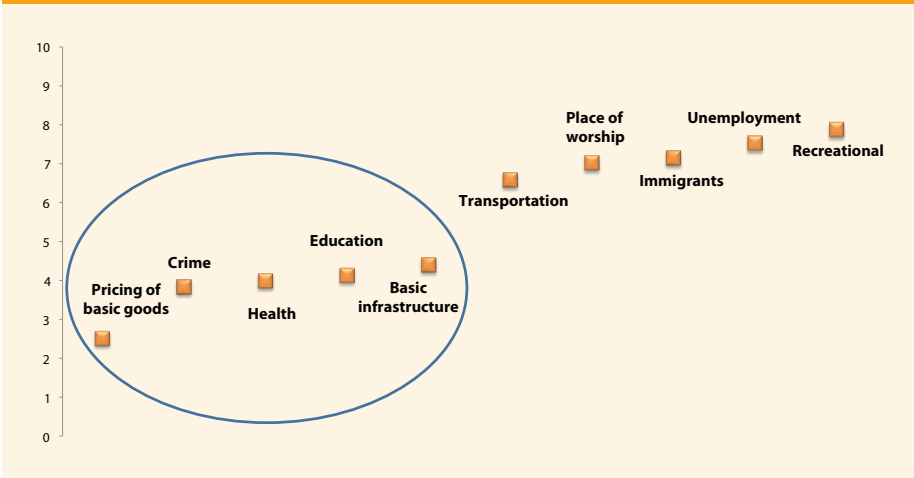


FIGURE 2. PUBLIC PRIORITIES



In this study, a task force comprising representatives from stakeholders' offices was crucial, and a strategic alliance was established with local leaders and local agencies.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Citizen Satisfaction Index, which stood at 2.84 (on a scale of four) or 71 percent, showed a moderate level of satisfaction. The index is comprised of four elements (evaluation of development projects, delivery system, projects execution and outcome of projects) (see Figure 1).

It is plausible that the moderate Citizen Satisfaction Index resulted from a lack of public engagement, improper planning, sub-standard quality of output, a mismatch between public needs and stakeholders wants, a dialogue gap and a lack of public confidence in government procurement processes (which reflects on their integrity and transparency).

Despite heavy investment, public priorities focus on basic needs, which are public needs (e.g. cost of living, health, education and basic infrastructures) and safety issues (see Figure 2). This makes a good reference point for planning development programmes.

The findings provided many lessons learned, including:

- Implementing agencies must improve their project management planning;
- There is a pressing need for more engagement and dialogue sessions with the stakeholders;
- Immediate reforms are required on certain procedures and processes that slowed down development results;
- Implementing agencies must improve their management information systems to obtain, manage and utilize development information and development data for better planning;
- Implementing agencies must balance production capacities, manpower and resources; and
- Implementing agencies need to instil effective planning and monitoring.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The findings and recommendations from the lessons learned were presented to stakeholders and implementing agencies, helping them re-evaluate and devise a more comprehensive inventory system. A model system was devised and is to be rolled out to the entire country. Identification of mismatched issues helped ease the gaps among leaders, agencies and the public, where public complaints are being prioritized. Additional budget and resources allocations have been deployed to mitigate critical issues. Political leaders also benefited from the study, where the information helped them focus on what the public wants, which led to higher public support.

THE WAY FORWARD

The study paved ways to a new approach in project management, where it prompted the Economic Planning Unit to develop the Rural Happiness Index and the Rural Socio-economic Indicator. A stronger collaboration among implementing agencies has been established, and an effective communication plan is underway to mitigate the misperceptions and misinterpretations among the parties involved. In idealizing a stronger collaboration among implementing agencies, a Blue Ocean Strategy was adopted. Finally, the Public Service Department is undergoing a revision and approval on additional posts for enforcement agency and health officers.

CONCLUSION

The study involved a multidimensional evaluation that examined achieving outputs and outcomes of development programmes in a specified time frame and location. This was followed by an analysis of public perceptions towards development programming, which were compared between two main players—programme beneficiaries and its implementing agency (which plays a dual-role as implementer and user). A pre-presentation was made to local implementing agencies and local leaders. Results were presented to the Secretary General and finally to the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. Relevant parties are conducting a closely monitored post- evaluation to ensure follow-up and follow-through.

Selected to showcase the use of evaluation, the study also depicted the other two themes of the Third International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities (independence and credibility). The Implementation Coordination Unit is indeed independent and free from undue influence, and has full authority to submit reports directly to appropriate levels of decision-making. The Implementation Coordination Unit is credible, as it is mandated as an independent M&E system on behalf of the government and has had its own Outcome Evaluation Division since 2005.

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