

Case Study Series: Learning from Innovative Civil Servants

Case Title:

Simplifying the Land Mutation Process Through Digitization

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The cases for this series are collected by interviewing the civil servants working in different South Asian countries. This collection initiative is an attempt to document different innovative initiatives taken by different civil servants and encourage other civil servants to be more proactive and innovative through the ideas of these cases. If you know of any innovative case, then please send us an email (farin.ritu@northsouth.edu), we will communicate with you for further details.

Case 5: Simplifying the Land Mutation Process Through Digitization

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Challenges of Land Mutation in Bangladesh

People of Bangladesh have long been tormented when it comes to accessing government services relating to land mutation. They need to regularly visit or call the upazila land offices to inquire about the status and subsequent steps of their applications, in addition to any other issues that might occur and the estimated time of completion. In some cases, the process can take months or even years to complete. Additionally, brokers control the khatiyani (the record of rights for identifying land), rent payments, “miss” cases (when anyone illegally takes someone else's land, they file a case known as a “miss” case), hearings, and so on. Not only that, service providers lack efficient tools for monitoring applications and identifying where and why they are stranded to begin with.

Challenges of Land Mutation in Bangladesh

When our subject, Mr. X, was working as an Assistant Commissioner (Land) for a particular upazila, he would get roughly fifteen to twenty calls a day concerning the mutation updates of the callers (wanting to know the office currently handling their application, reasons for delay, next steps, etc.). The

application numbers would be forwarded to his assistant who would then send the application numbers to five different tahsil offices (sub-divisional offices) as they had no clue regarding which tahsil office was in charge of which case. These tahsil offices are subordinate to the upazila land offices. Afterwards, those offices would check Register-9 (a manual registration book containing information on all past and current land mutation applications) and send the revisions to the assistant, who would then convey the updates to Mr. X. Mr. X also suspected that only a small percentage of those affected were getting in touch regarding their applications, with the rest more or less ignorant of the status of their applications.

Problem

People experience significant challenges when it comes to land mutation, such as having to contact the AC Land Office frequently for application updates, applications taking longer to resolve, service providers lacking effective monitoring tools, and so on

Solution

Introduction of a mobile application to allow the AC Land and the DC Office to keep track of all ongoing cases while also allowing the general public to view their own application details online

Outcome

- Providing citizens with online access to their application status as well as the option to file complaints;
- Monitoring for the higher officials became easier, making the overall process more transparent; land officers becoming more responsive and files being released in a shorter period of time

Issue with Correcting Information in NID and Educational Certificates

After a while, Ms. Y sat for the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination. She was initially selected for a Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and it was time for police verification again. However, the verification procedure for this civil service examination was far more stringent and demanding than the one Ms. Y was subject to for her bank role. So, naturally, Ms. Y was worried and decided to ask for Mr. X's assistance again.

As per Mr. X's recommendation, Ms. Y went to the Election Commission Office, which is the repository of individual-level personal data at the upazila level. However, they advised her to go to her university and have all of her certificates corrected. She reported to her university, but she was told that, before they could change her certificates, she needed to get her NID corrected from the Election Commission Office. This subjected her to a loop of inaction and, even after several attempts, no solution was found.

Proactiveness of a Civil Servant

Mr. X also felt helpless from this, so he issued a letter from his office elucidating the nature of the problem and instructed Ms. Y to forward the letter to officials concerned with her problem at the university. Ms. Y took the letter to her university, and her problem was finally addressed at the university's monthly meeting. On the basis of the issued letter from the UNO office, the committee decided that her father's name would be corrected. Within a month, she had corrected certificates in her hands, and her father's name in NID was eventually corrected as well. As a result, her background check for employment with the Bangladesh Civil Service went smoothly, and she was assigned to the Education Cadre. Mr. X was concerned enough about this issue and helped this citizen at every turn. Thanks to Mr. X's sincerity, persistence, and leadership skills, a good career was allowed to blossom.

About the Authors

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Baniamin, H. M., & Jamil, I. (2021). Effects of representative bureaucracy on perceived performance and fairness: Experimental evidence from South Asia. *Public Administration*.

Baniamin, H. M., Jamil, I., & Askvik, S. (2020). Mismatch between lower performance and higher trust in the civil service: Can culture provide an explanation? *International Political Science Review*, 41(2), 192-206.

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