

The ARTA – Report Card Survey as a Tool in Participatory, Accountable, and Transparent Governance*

One of the best definitions of a democratic government was described by the late US President Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysberg Address in 1863. With utmost conviction, he said: *it is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. A government of the people* is a government led by officials and run by a workforce who exhibit integrity, accountability, and exemplary skills in managing public affairs and property.

Such is the ideal behind Republic Act 9485 or an Act to Improve Efficiency in the Delivery of Government Service to the Public by Reducing Bureaucratic Red Tape, Preventing Graft and Corruption, and Providing Penalties Thereof. More commonly known as the Anti-Red Tape Act or ARTA of 2007, it aims to promote transparency in government through simplified frontline service procedures and formulation of service standards collectively called the Citizen's Charter.

The Citizen's Charter is the Charter of the people, the clients who are transacting with government agencies. Clients should be recipients of excellent service which can only be obtained from an agency which has established effective practices or mechanism such as the Citizen's Charter aimed at improving public service delivery and preventing red tape and graft and corruption. In crafting the Citizen's Charter, an agency invites its various stakeholders to participate in providing inputs in the final

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Citizens' Charter of the agency. Because of such collaboration between agency and clients, there is ownership on the part of the clients. The Citizen's Charter is therefore the Citizens' Charter of the people.

The National Development Agenda, based on President Aquino's Social Contract with the Filipino People, indicated transparent, accountable, and participatory governance as one of the Key Result Areas of his administration. The Philippine Civil Service Commission contributes in the realization of this goal by implementing the Anti-Red Tape Act through compliance with the Citizen's Charter. As you may know, the Citizen's Charter is an information billboard that lists the frontline services of an agency including the step-by-step procedure, person in-charge, time needed, required documents and fees. As of September, we have 4,494 government offices representing 79 percent of the entire Philippine bureaucracy that have crafted their own Citizen's Charter. Tomorrow, in our site visit to two agencies in Pampanga, you should be able to spot instantly the agency's Citizen's Charter.

Now that Citizen's Charters are in place, how do we know if the service standards committed by an agency are, indeed, being delivered as promised to its clients? Our answer to this is the Report Card Survey or RCS. The Report Card Survey is our way to obtain feedback directly from clients on how provisions in the Citizen's Charter of an agency are being followed. Another objective of the Report Card Survey is to obtain information/estimates of hidden costs paid by clients in accessing frontline services. We are proud to share that 1,026 public offices had already been surveyed since 2010 and for next year, 2013, we are targeting 770 agencies to undergo the Report Card Survey.

While it is true that behind this accomplishment is the untiring energy of the Philippine Civil Service Commission to continuously train and accredit its personnel nationwide as RCS researchers, we acknowledge that another factor for its successful implementation is our strong partnership with Civil

Society Organizations or CSOs. In fact, one of our speakers today represents a partner CSO, the Concerned Citizen's of Abra for Good Government or CCAGG.

Last August, we tapped 16 CSOs to work side by side with PCSC in doing the Report Card Survey of the 22 regional and field offices of the Philippine Civil Service Commission. We trained them on how to perform the Report Card Survey – from how to accomplish the Inspection Checklist and go about the Questionnaire for the required 30 respondents to encoding of results to report writing – although some have already been trained in 2011 when we first teamed up with CSOs. Back then, we were able to train and accredit 51 RCS researchers from 31 CSOs.

Why do we consider CSOs important in the implementation of the Report Card Survey? As proven in the past 'civil society' is closely linked to democracy and 'good governance'. CSOs are known for their varied capacity such as in information gathering, monitoring the performance of both government and private sector, and as catalyst in improving public service delivery, to name a few. As they say, to get a job done fast, work with like-minded people who share your vision. The advocacy of these CSOs, which is a call for transparency, is aligned with the objective of the Anti-Red Tape Act. The involvement of CSOs, composed of non-government organizations, academic institutions, and private volunteers, in carrying out the Report Card Survey provides check and balance. Thus, preserving the impartiality and strengthening the credibility and integrity of the RCS results. Likewise, serving as watchdog on government and public institutions, CSOs ensure that resources are maximized and targets are realized faster. All these gains are enough to maintain active relations with CSOs and further strive to increase their number especially in the war-torn Mindanao area.

The formulation of the Citizens' Charter is done through citizens'/people's participation. In the process of implementing the Report Card Survey, we are also building a *government by the people* by drawing participation in two levels: through clients who recognize the significance of responding to the

survey and through CSOs that recognize the significance of their involvement in government projects such as this.

The numerical rating of an agency in the Report Card Survey has a corresponding descriptive rating. A final score of 90 to 100 is equivalent to Excellent, 80-89 is Good, 70-79 is Acceptable, and 0-69 is Failed. To date, 59 agencies were rated Excellent, 368 are Good, 294 are Acceptable, and 278 are Failed. The Philippine Civil Service Commission organizes awarding ceremonies for agencies that are granted the Citizen's Satisfaction Center Seal of Excellence Award where they are given a glass seal and cash incentive. Candidates to this award undergo a two-phase validation to determine its eligibility to get the award. On the other hand, for Failed agencies, PCSC designed an intervention called the Service Delivery Excellence Program or SDEP. The SDEP Level 1 assistance is for simple infractions while the SDEP Level 2 assistance is for complex cases that will require systems re-engineering. After SDEP, these agencies are expected to improve their ranking in the next round of Report Card Survey which shall be done by the CSOs.

A government for the people means better public service delivery. Likewise, the Citizen's Charter for the people means better public service delivery for the people themselves. The Citizens' Charter and Report Card Survey are instruments within the Anti-Red Tape law that ensure that excellent service delivery is on its way. However, they can only be as effective depending on the support and participation of the people. After all, we create the government we deserve.

Our partnerships with CSOs will continue to be valuable in bringing about client or people involvement in shaping the future of government service. Working together, government, CSOs and the people will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of opportunities for improved public service delivery and eventually elevate the image of civil servants as persons of action and integrity.

Thank you and good day.