Protracted Public Service Improvement at the Local Level: A Quest for Certification?

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ABSTRAK


The article aims at examining the suitability of the policy agenda of public service certification for the prevalence of local governments’ performance. I conduct qualitative approach with intensive data collection, considering of local context specificities upon which decentralization has been mainstreaming in the state structural reform in Indonesia. Although the public service standard takes into effects based on certain regulations derived from the Public Service Act 25/2009, efforts made by local government is deemed necessary. To make the study manageable, I conduct a case study qualitatively in Surabaya considering its prominence in local bureaucracy reform and innovation. I conduct a series of policy document analysis and in-depth interviews for data enquiry. I suggest that the implementation of public service certification is likely to lead to various adjustments towards strengthening the standards to be applied. Apart from categorizing the government services according to the different characteristics of each type of service, various structural adjustments are necessary according to the local context of each region. The local community involvement mechanism still needs improvements as standard enforcement in all regions so that public service certification is not only relevant but also an integral part of the local development improvement strategy.
INTRODUCTION

Public service is a focal point that any efforts made under the administrative reform agenda ought to proceed. Nevertheless, this is a tricky field. Abundant literature has elucidated which ways government agencies might get it delivered, from service quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Parasuraman, 1988, Rave and Giraldo, 2014) to service satisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1994; Rhee and Rha, 2009). Nevertheless, broader literature discussing public service manufacturing has spread into different spectrums, from institutional framework of organizational development and participatory governance (Speer, 2012; Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia, 2017), to ethics and motivation (Miao et al., 2018; Lawton, 2005). Nevertheless, right at this point, public service issues are a melted point in which objectivity of assessment and implementation meet subjectivity of multiple stakeholders in perceiving and using it. To moderate effects between the two, it is common for public service framework to have a basis for standardization.

The public service standard consists of the minimum level of quality expected from public service manufacturing and delivery as well as the distribution of rights, obligation, and authorities among parties and stakeholders. It also covers dispute mechanisms if any. From the standard, the government derive into a standard operating procedure and a specific expected level of performance. The overarching goals are, of course, to ensure that any government agencies maintain and increase service quality assurance.

Governments across the world usually develop a set of standards to get the most of public service. Nevertheless, Indonesia seems to be pioneering when it comes to bringing a policy agenda of public service certification in a single row of measures as there is no single country recorded to have it that way. The Indonesian Ministry of Administrative Reform has proposed this issue since 2016. The basic idea is that public service delivery nowadays across government agencies at different levels have not taken heedfully to the Public Service Act 25/2009 (Holidin, et al., 2017). While quality assurance is a mainstream concern in private sectors, this is ambiguous when it comes to the public sector as any measurement would end up in a vague state.

Despite the core idea behind the proposed policy agenda, Indonesia has also ratified and adopted multiple editions of standardization issued by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for quality assurance of in a wide array of sectors of public service under the responsibility of different government ministries. To this prevalence, MAR would like to ensure coordinated standardization of general public service under the certification framework. This standardization aim and scope are different from things under the authority held by the National Standardization Agency (Badan Sertifikasi Nasional, BSN).

Regardless of potential conflicting issues of authority exercised across government ministries, local governments hold a crucial role in succeeding this agenda. Literature has to highlight this issue in different foci, from capacity building of local government to perform service manufacturing and delivery to the differentiation of roles played by various government actors (Prasojo and Holdin, 2018). At the practical level in Indonesia, the government has emphasized decentralization as primary ways of exercising government affairs since the dismantling of the authoritarian regime in 1998 (Prasojo, Maksum, Kurniawan, 2006). Since then, despite the small number compared to hundreds of local governments, they had become pioneered bureaucracy reform and innovation when the country had at the very early stage of transition to the reform era (Holidin, Haryati, and Sunarti. 2017; Prasojo, 2009).

This article seeks to examine the suitability of the policy agenda of public service certification concerning the prevalence of local governments’ performance of doing so. Needless to say, while a few of them are champions in this matter, certification initiated and imposed by the national government would give considerable impact to them.

To make the study manageable, I conduct a case study qualitatively. I pick City Government of Surabaya as the case for three respects. Theoretically speaking, abundant literature affirms its prominence in bureaucracy reform at the local level (Pramusinto and Purwanto, 2018), especially under the leadership of Mayor Tri Rismaharini (hereinafter refers as to Risma). At a practical level, for six year in a row (2014-2019), the Indonesian MAR has acknowledged it as one of ninety-nine local governments committing public sector innovation. This achievement also makes it qualified for nomination as Indonesia representative to the United Nations Public Service Award (UNPSA) held annually. Third, when it comes to a quest for public service certification, one might note that any local government perceived as the best is suitable enough for making it as a benchmark for an evaluation study.

Resuming this introductory section, I explain the qualitative research method of data collection and analysis, including internal and external validity testing. I subsequently provide analysis of the results into two parts, they are, implementation of public service standards by the City Government of Surabaya and its response to the policy agenda. I conclude and outline how the policy agenda is supposed to come into effect further.

METHODS

The public service standard takes into effects based on defined regulations derived from the Public Service Act 25/2009. Nevertheless, efforts made by local governments are deemed necessary. Therefore, I conduct a qualitative approach with intensive data collection, considering local context specificities.

I firstly unpack legal consideration in the Public Service Act to obtain logics of the public service standard at a minimal level. Besides the Public Service Act 25/2009, regulations under examination include but not limited to primary rules and procedures, e.g. Government Regulation 96/2012 concerning the implementation of the public service act, the Ministerial Regulation of Administrative Reform 20/2006 concerning the formulation of public service standards, the Ministerial Regulation of Administrative Reform 36/2012 concerning technical guidelines of public service standards, the Ministerial

My subsequent attempt is examining the progress of public service improvements undertaken by the City Government of Surabaya under the Risma Administration. This way, I find out hints about discrepancies between the legal instructions and its practice.

I employ enumerators to conduct a series of in-depth interviews in a row with key local agency officials, academics from reputable universities in East Java Province, as well as leading non-governmental organizations therein. The enumerators make reliable transcriptions afterwards and doing a two-tier coding process from it. First-tier coding is more general than the second, covering broad issues encountered by the local agency administrator in various fields of public service. The second tier deals with five primary nodes, i.e., mechanisms for improving public service across agencies which include information and communication technologies (ICTs) enabling system, community engagement, public service oversight, complaint-handling mechanism, and response to policy agenda of public service certifications imposed by the national government.

My internal validity testing of the results deals with consistent information elucidated from triangulation process over results of multiple data collection process. My external validity testing benefits from a national seminar presenting the research result which was attended by representatives across ministries. The seminar is facilitated by the Indonesian MAR and a leading non-governmental organization working on economic, social, and cultural fields of human rights fulfilment: YAPPIKA-ActionAid.

The whole duration of research undertakes five months from May to September 2017, excluding writing up the research report. One-time re-evaluation of the result as a part of policy communication between YAPPIKA-ActionAid and the Indonesian MAR was undertaken a year later in 2018 to proceed with further evaluation of the public service certification policy agenda.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Legal Considerations of Service Standards

The primary value in setting service standards departs from the principles of public service delivery, as stated in Law 25/2009. Meanwhile, the concrete embodiment in the form of norms departs from the standard service component, principles of public services which include public interest, legal certainty of equal rights, balances between rights and obligations, professionalism, participation, equality of treatment/non-discrimination, openness, accountability, facilities and special treatment for vulnerable groups, timeliness, speed, convenience, and affordability. This group of principles is in line with the general principles of good governance (algemene beginselen van behoorlijk bestuur) in the basic framework of state administrative law.

Derivative regulations from the Public Service Act not only simplify the process of preparing service standards but also classify the service process between those in the kitchen domain and the institutional infrastructure for service manufacturing and its implementation to service recipients (service delivery).

Public service certification reviews the fulfilment of all the scope of this regulation, including guaranteeing the compensation mechanism. However, the derivative regulations have the tone of easing the obligation for administrative organs to involve the public, something that is required not only by the Public Service Act 25/2009 but also the Administrative Procedure Act 30/2014. Service certification plays a role in accommodating space for the possibility of increasing community participation who are simply invited and present to become active involvement, particularly in encouraging service providers to mitigate this.

Implementation of Public Service Standards

City Government of Surabaya (from now on refers to municipal government) embodies the implementation of public service standards through the development of standard operating procedures (SOP) but the preparation and enforcement are uneven. The application of SOP until the middle of 2017 has been still limited to local government work units (Organisasi Perangkat Daerah/OPD) and technical organizations, such as one-stop integrated services, sub-district (kecamatan) and neighbourhood (kelurahan) offices, local public hospitals (Rumah Sakit Umum Daerah/RSUD). It appears as a tendency to manifest public service standards to strengthen organizations in providing direct services to the public. Even so, not all OPDs that deal directly with the community have implemented service standards. While service standards are a structural instrument for the bureaucracy in improving service quality, it appears that non-structural aspects are also influential, such as responsiveness, discipline in meeting corridors and deadlines for standard procedures. The experience of civil servants in dealing with such OPD shows the matter, for example, social services remains reactive. Initiatives are absent in dealing with social problems and tend to wait for reports from communities before taking action to address them, as a result of this efforts to anticipate and prevent cases from occurring within a specified period are not found.

Moreover, when handling the flow of social services, it is uncertain. However, it remains known about the uncertainty of this service mechanism due to absent ad incomplete service standards or even indiscipline in the implementation. This uncertainty results in neglected fulfilment of community rights, including the rights of the community who are partners of the municipal government in carrying out their functions.

I scrutinize matters of service standards codified in OPD dealing with directly with the local communities in the context of the City Government of Surabaya. Some things are closely related to these trends. First, the leadership of Risma has so far shortened the distance between the city government and the local community through various field activities. The close intact of the mayor express her close attention and active participation in the daily life of residents, especially in certain strategic issues, such as
trade, urban planning and social crises. Second, a strong orientation and implementation of the municipal government have been in utilization of information and communication technology (ICT). The ICT is utilized to exercise duties and functions (tugas dan fungsi/tusi) of the municipal government (as known as e-government) which surely requires preparation of a kind of operation protocols, even right since the information systems architecture is drawn into the design. This e-government design stage not only plays a role in generating SOPs but also plays a role in improving existing service operating procedures. Third, the socio-cultural character of the urban community of Surabaya City still shares some of the rural characteristics of societal association. The cultural characteristics explain the existence of the role of civil society which is not only capable but also willing to urge quality public service practices, especially those directly give impact to the society.

There are efforts made the city government implement public service standards more evenly by all OPDs through discussion of their preparation plans of the Surabaya medium-term development (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah/RPJMD). The discussion for the planning deal with the internal municipal government across agencies and the outer sphere with the local communities (the so-called musyawarah rencana pembangunan daerah/musrenbangda) usually takes place a year ahead of its implementation. Likewise, the statements of the two speakers from the municipal government show unclear proportions the number of OPDs that already have and implement public service standards. The absence of a clear baseline like this indicates that monitoring and evaluation have not been effective so far. In a more general scope within the local government environment, the regulatory framework for implementing service standards is the mayor’s regulation. As practiced in other innovative-reformist local governments in Indonesia, this executive regulatory framework is the shortcut and easiest way to present the legal basis for implementing service standards. Compared to any legal products promulgated in cooperation with the local council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah/DPRD), the executive regulatory framework is more dynamic in following needs for service performance improvements and stakeholders’ aspirations; easier to amend anytime when necessary.

In preparing public service standards so far, academics from adjacent universities, for example, Universitas Airlangga, have often been involved in enriching and ensuring the quality of these service standards. This kind of technocratic tendency, on the one hand, puts forward the basis of competence in the process of activities but, on the other hand, tends to ignore openness to the broader community who are constitutionally entitled to know the selection process of the parties involved in the preparation of service standards. The pattern applied by the municipal government raises an irony, that service standards are compiled through a process that produces products without the presence of the community as subjects who receive the impact of the service standards. This process accumulates into a kind of top-down approach and a pattern of relationships that tend to be rigid between the bureaucracy and the public in service.

The absence of the role of the broader community in setting public service standards cannot be interpreted as a disconnection between the city government and its citizens. Information dissemination to the broader community is still carried out. Not only is this a constitutional mandate through the Law on Public Information Disclosure and the Law on Public Services, Surabaya becomes a pilot municipal government for implementing e-government and certainly carries out ICT instrumentation in the dissemination of public service information. This mode of online dissemination is primary over any offline means of socialization. One of the flagship programs implemented by the city government is the Surabaya Single Window (SSW), a portal that provides a variety of coordinated and integrated information regarding services to the community. SSW enables a single delivery of data and information, single and synchronous processing of data and information and decision-making per the duties and functions of each Regional Work Unit in terms of licensing and non-licensing services. SSW can be accessed via https://ssw.surabaya.go.id. The digitalization of this service is still a priority for the development of city government administration towards the administration that develops regions. In this case, Veit and Huntgeburth (2014) and Stagars (2016) reveal that with the use of ICT, prevention and eradication of corruption related to budgets in the public service sector can be maximized.

Although the city government’s ICT initiatives are considered satisfactory by non-governmental stakeholders, the problematic relationship between local governments and ICT-based local communities lies with some communities, especially those who are classified as middle socio-economic. Some populations are still unable to optimize the use of digital facilities provided by the municipal government due to limited digital literacy. For this too, the municipal government has made efforts to establish a computer learning centre, namely, "Broadband Learning Center" (BLC) for the wider community. Even so, public awareness of citizenship rights in policy-making participation, and public service delivery still needs to be built. The municipal government still needs to improve non-ICT aspects in the dissemination of public information, for example through planning more organized socialization activities without being trapped in ceremonial activities so that continuity of correspondence between the city government and community members can be realized. The marketing and advertorial approaches in the business world can be studied and applied by the municipal government in the process of disseminating public information that is more educational and adds value-added to the community as the target of the dissemination.

If the above e-government implementation situation is associated with the absence of identification of the exact number of OPDs that have implemented service standards, the issue of monitoring and evaluation (monev) becomes apparent. The e-Money application operated by the municipal government has been used to improve the performance of the municipal government. Our observation of the e-Money shows that the application is
limited to internal performance of the municipal government. The application does not yet include the opening full access to information for the public who keen to know the dynamics of the performance recorded by e-Money. Thus, the Surabaya case shows a marked difference between the pattern of setting service standards and providing access for external parties (the public) in its implementation.

Apart from the e-Money mechanism, local people actually get variants of access to convey their aspirations and complaints to the municipal government. Apart from the use of conventional media, several ICT-based channels can be used. These channels include but not limited to utilization of the touch screen application for community satisfaction index given right after the service delivery. Online interaction " Sapawarga" through social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the official website of the municipal government) also plays the role. Recently, the municipal government also launch a 112 command center that can be accessed 24 hours by telephone, mimicking the 911 line call center in the United States. The management team has a primary task of forwarding the submitted reports to relevant OPDs. However, this kind of mechanism accommodates more input from citizens and does not necessarily lead to an evaluation mechanism and its later feedback. This mechanism is confirmed by the statements of the informants, who stated that selecting and processing various input information from the public based on urgency and related situations is a challenge today.

Furthermore, the existence of this mechanism is a double-edge influencing factor. On the one hand, this mechanism triggers the availability of complaint channels, expressions of citizen satisfaction, and a quick mechanism for providing feedback for improving public services. On the other hand, this mechanism triggers indirect discrimination against other OPDs that do not directly deal with the community and provide public services as part of their duties and functions. Such OPDs do not have social incentives to immediately set and implement service standards because external monitoring facilities are absent.

Of the various types of public services, the external evaluation and feedback mechanisms require discipline in the application of service standards. Despite utilizing ICT, absent service standards also contribute to the absence of guaranteed effective follow-up of the aspirations and complaints of the community in the form of continuous service improvement. The use of the community satisfaction index, which has been a general trend in the implementation of regional government since the early 2000s, even before the Public Service Act was enacted, does not compensate for the deficit in external evaluation and feedback on the aspirations and complaints submitted by the local community. This index is only opened especially for people who have recently received services. Consequently, giving value based on public perception every time a citizen get public services does not provide a general trend of public perception, a big picture of the acceptance of the value of a public service that is received by vast communities. External evaluation based on individual perceptions has a relative value to the quality of public services as a whole. Community satisfaction is determined by various factors that make it different between each individual's experience, for example, the level of expectations before getting service, the level of education of the respondent, the breadth of insight into the anatomy of the service itself. Thus, the results of measuring the community satisfaction index never stand alone so that their use as a tool for evaluating public services must be integrated with other assessment frameworks that are applied technocratically and objectively.

As a general phenomenon of public services in Indonesia empirically and the limitations of their normative regulatory tools, the mechanism for providing compensation for the negligence of administrators in free public services has not been implemented in the city of Surabaya. For this type of public service, losses are still assessed as an administrative matter, particularly in grants. The compensation mechanism is returned to handling the required file documentation again, for example, due to loss due to negligence of service providers. The focus of work to improve public services by the municipal government is strengthening the application of e-government in the administrative processing of licensing and non-licensing services. This process is done by strengthening the completeness of the database and particular code calling protocols so that documents can be easily, quickly, accurately found and verified.

Municipal government bureaucracy makes the documentation of work activities as a measure of the performance of the service, particularly in the implementation of service standards, aimed at improving ICT-based innovation. Constraints that often arise come from the efforts of some parties to do cracking which disturbs the information systems, especially service databases, and requires routine maintenance of servers and data for each agency. From here, interoperability and data dissemination between OPD lines can be easier to do as a basis for decision making. The rest is a problem of potential human error. In anticipation of human error in the capability of ICT-based service delivery resources, training will continue to be carried out by the municipal government to their civil servants. The obstacle that is considered the most influential resource person is in the internal environment of the city government, namely the heads of offices and some civil servants who do not have high awareness in implementing service standards. Even though the mayor's efforts are manifested through the direct involvement of OPD and the community, this obstacle still raises obstacles for an OPD to implement service standards, let alone innovate. Apart from the online and offline monitoring and evaluations mechanisms, the role of the leadership, especially the mayor, in conducting unannounced inspections (sidak) is still necessary in creating collective awareness of all OPDs.

Local response to the certification

The city government, in the view of the informants, is in a relative position to the idea of organizing public service certification. In this context, the implementation of public services requires an evaluation of the quality of any third parties. The implementation also need to neglect a dichotomy of the relationship between the municipal
government as the organizer and the local community as stakeholders who receive the impact of its implementation. This certification requires a categorization formula for each type of public service so that the assessment can be more in line with the character of the service. This categorization is in line with the definitive limitation of standardization of public services which then leads to the formulation of assessment and monitoring methods later. Problems arise concerning parties considered independent, credible, and with integrity in carrying out public service certification. In this situation, the municipal government, according to the sources, is not in a position of absolute agreement.

The choice of the party who can administer the certification can fall on the government or professional non-governmental organizations. "Professionalism" is the keyword to determine it. In addition to fulfilling professional work methods, the certification organizer must also be a subject of supervision by other parties, especially local communities. This professionalism also includes all definitions of competence related to social aspects of the community and the local context of the region so that services are not considered as independent entities but contextual according to the regional scope and the target community value preferences.

According to the above criteria, the government as the initiator and holder of the regulation of the Public Service Act can be an independent and credible party in providing public services. However, its integrity relates to guarantees of non-interference from political interests. Within its institutional framework, the government is also subject to the possibility of making the certification of public services an instrument of political pressure on regional governments, unless it is consistent with the principles of good governance. In this case, the corridors in various laws, such as the Public Service Act itself, the Public Information Disclosure Act, and the Administrative Procedure Act will significantly help make it happen. Non-governmental parties, such as private institutions and civil society organizations, actually also approach the criteria of independence, credibility and integrity. However, specific regulations and codes of ethics are necessary to legally bind the performance of non-governmental entities consistently with the initial objectives of reorganizing public service certification and resoluting conflicts of interest to each other.

The local community involvement mechanism still need improvements as standard enforcement in all regions so that public service certification is not only relevant but also an integral part of the regional development improvement strategy. An innovation, e-musrenbang, for example, involve the community as a whole but is constrained by the limited access to participation inherent in the system itself because access to participation is limited to the authority of the neighbourhood chiefs. Although the input given by the village head is considered to have gone through a discussion process with the local community, however, the community’s efforts to guard the aspirations conveyed by the village head and measuring the success of their articulation are still questions.

CONCLUSION
The implementation of public service certification is likely to lead to various structural adjustments towards strengthening the standards to be applied. Apart from categorizing the government services to different characteristics of each type of services, various adjustments are needed according to the local context of each region. While the municipal government has implemented service standards, various adjustments are also necessary. The adjustment is about to digitize the same application-based management information system and service performance system so that it is compatible with carrying out interoperability, especially in data exchange and decision making. Especially in the effort to integrate services, this is increasingly urgent, especially when the municipal government wants to implement a public service mall as a form of strengthening one-stop public service delivery.

Certification of public service at large is about which basis and by whom legitimately administering the process. The choice of parties as providers of this certification must take place in the framework of their relationship with local communities who are the subject of service impact recipients. Any party administering certification must comply with regulations that ensure that local communities can directly monitor it. When referring to the Public Service Act, the instrument of citizen charters, complaint handling mechanisms that ensure follow-up and guarantee of the compensation would have to take into effect. That way, local communities are still involved in the public service certification process.

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