

Institution: University of Essex		
Unit of Assessment: 17		
Title of case study: Introducing a competency framework for improving public service delivery and accountability in the Indian state of Kerala.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Thankom Arun Pawan Adhikari	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Global Development and Accountability Reader in Accounting	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: January 2016 - July 2020 September 2011 - July 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Through a partnership with the Institute of Management in Government (IMG), the apex training institute of the Government of Kerala, the research has led to the development of a Competency Framework for public administrators in four key government departments in Kerala, India. The Competency Framework provides administrators with better visibility as to how responsibilities associated with their roles contribute to departmental objectives, and how they can achieve the required competence and skills to address the needs of 35 million people in the state in terms of better public service delivery and accountability. The Administrative Reforms Commission and the Kerala Institute of Local Administration used the research findings and adopted the Competency Framework.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Arun and Adhikari have been conducting programmes of research into public sector accountability and governance for the last two decades. Their work centres on the principle that improved systems of accountability and governance can be embodied in explicit frameworks and implementing such frameworks can have a material effect on both the quality of public sector service delivery and public sector accountability. This research has included two key threads: designing the features of systems (frameworks) that are beneficial for improving public sector accountability (and consequently improving public service delivery) and identifying the factors that contribute to such frameworks being implemented and applied resulting in wider benefits.</p> <p>Arun's work on the features of frameworks that contribute to their potential to improve governance and service delivery has included a theoretical analysis of legal and constitutional systems and empirical case study research [R1, R2, R3]. The research has generated extensive insights into the competency framework method, prioritising the identification of citizens' requirements and expectations, and the role of continued learning for public administrators. The research has provided evidence on national systems that have not undergone such accountability and governance reforms, and how they can be improved via the competency framework. Adhikari's research has examined the consequences of public sector reforms, including public sector accounting reforms focused on accountability improvements in Nepal and India [R2, R4, R5]. This work has further supported the need to create broader accountability strategies for government departments by adopting the competency framework.</p> <p>The Competency Framework's key purpose is to generate a deep understanding of citizen-centric governance by reinventing the mechanisms for learning and discharging public administrators' accountability through better service delivery. The Competency Framework includes developing</p>		

standards for each selected state department by identifying citizens' requirements and expectations. Arun was involved in creating this competency project since 2016, specifically the conceptualisation of the project. The research undertaken by Arun and Adhikari was presented to the Institute of Management in Government (IMG) as a draft paper in 2017, and shows the challenges involved in the framework's development and implementation while emphasising continued learning to mitigate such challenges in the public sector [R2]. Central to their research was setting up a culture of continuous learning for better public service delivery and accountability.

Essex research studying the diffusion of governance and accountability processes and frameworks has spanned both African and South Asian contexts [R2, R3, R4, R5]. These studies have examined the features that enable reforms to become embedded and institutionalised within the public sector, and how they can be transmitted between parts of central government (departments/agencies), to influence practice in increasingly wide aspects of a nation's public sector.

3. References to the research [available from HEI on request]

[R1] Adhikari, P and Arun, T. (2019), "Competency framework: Can it be a tool for improving public administration in Nepal", *Journal of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nepal*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 16-19 (available on request).

[R2] Arun, T.G, Adhikari, P. and Mohan, R. (2020), "Learning accountability in the public sector: The experience of Kerala", *Financial Accountability and Management*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/faam.12248>

[R3] Mushonga, M, Arun, T.G. and Marwa, N.W. (2018), "Divers, inhibitors and the future of co-operative financial institutions (CFIs): A delphi study on South African perspective", *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, Vol. 133, pp. 254-268. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2018.04.028>

[R4] Adhikari, P. and Jayasinghe, K. (2017), "Agents-in-focus' and 'Agents-in-context': The strong structuration analysis of central government accounting practices and reforms in Nepal", *Accounting Forum*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 96-115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accfor.2017.01.001>

[R5] Adhikari, P., Kuruppu, C., Wynne, A. and Ambalangodage, D. (2015), "Diffusion of the cash basis International Public Sector Accounting Standard (IPSAS) in less developed countries (LDCs) –the case of the Nepali central government", *Research in Accounting in Emerging Economies*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Vol. 15, pp. 85-108. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/S1479-356320150000015004/full/html>

4. Details of the impact

As part of a drive to establish more service-oriented and citizen-centric public administration, state governments in India have sought to develop initiatives to professionalise public administration. In 2014, the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions set up a project '*Pathways for an Inclusive Indian Administration*', led by the IMG to professionalise public administration by introducing competency-based administrative reforms. As a former Technical Secretary to the State Planning Board and an active researcher on Kerala's issues, Arun has extensive experience of the state's public administration challenges and the IMG approached him to contribute his research base to the project. Arun and Adhikari's research and expertise on public sector accountability [R3, R4, R5], particularly in the South Asian context, enabled them to substantially contribute to the implementation of the project [S1, S2]. The IMG project lead confirms "*we found the papers such as Arun et. al. 2018 [R3], Adhikari et al. 2015 [R5] were useful in the proposed development of an accountability framework for civil servants in the state of Kerala*", adding "*I appreciate the value of the base research done by you (Arun) and Dr Adhikari in conceptualizing and implementing the competency project in Kerala*" [S1]. As of January 2020, selected officials of four state government departments in Kerala were trained in the Competency Framework approach, focusing on the learning aspects of accountability identified by Arun and Adhikari's research [R2]. These departments cover vital public service functions like law enforcement, town and country planning, urban affairs, rural development, and poverty eradication:

- Kerala State Social Justice Department (responsible for implementing social welfare

programmes)

- Kerala State Police (responsible for managing state police forces).
- Kerala's Scheduled Tribes Development Department (responsible for uplifting the lives of ethnic groups of historically disadvantaged people, some 480,000 people in 37 tribes).
- Kerala's Local Self Government Department (responsible for overseeing the decentralisation of powers to over 1000 Panchayats, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations in the state).

Drawing on Arun and Adhikari's research and expertise on public sector accountability [R4, R5, R2, R3] the IMG developed employee handbooks [S2, S3] outlining roles and responsibilities, which are now used by both new and existing employees in the four state departments.

The Competency Framework has become a key component in fulfilling the demand for citizen-centric governance and multiple accountability relationships in these four state departments [S2, S3]. As a result, citizens are benefiting through the delivery of high-quality public services. The Competency Framework has also benefitted these four state departments through improved understanding and better human resources management, including recruitment, defining roles and expectations, identifying training needs and gaps, evaluating future development needs and succession planning and promotion [S1]. The Former Chief Secretary of the Government of Kerala commented – *"The exercise [Competency Framework] has brought considerable clarity on the responsibilities... this is the first such attempt in the country. So it is an exercise of national relevance"* [S2].

The Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in Kerala, whose role is to recommend measures improving the State Administrative System's efficiency, has acknowledged the significance of the outcomes of the Competency Framework project and state *"ARC has taken note of these initiatives as part of reform recommendations"* further adding *"ARC has drawn from these reports and has recommended institutionalization of competency frameworks for good governance"* [S4]. ARC referenced the Competency Framework in their 2018 report, where they have made recommendations for developing competency frameworks for each department in the State [S5] and re-emphasised this in their 2019 report on Personnel Reforms [S6]. The 2020 Governor's annual report [S7], also acknowledged the competency framework's significance for improving public service delivery and accountability.

Kerala's Government has internalised the importance of competency management in its new state training policy released in 2017 [S8]. The IMG Project Lead confirms *'The project has further enhanced the scope and content of the training programmes for civil servants in the State of Kerala, which is well acknowledged in the State Training Policy'* [S1].

The Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), an autonomous institution functioning for local governments in Kerala, has incorporated the elements of the Competency Framework in its training programme from 2018-2019 onwards. The Director of KILA acknowledges that the handbooks have been of immense value *"especially in designing training programmes, Training Needs Assessment and also in developing modules"* concluding that *'The concept of Competency framework itself has been of much value as it also guides us on how the capacity development activities have to be designed'* [S9].

The nature of accountability and governance in this region has been systematically changed due to the sustained embedding of the research in all aspects of the competency process over an extended period of time.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] Testimonial from the Institute of Management in Government, Kerala.

[S2] IMG Final Report, Competency Framework for Functionaries of Panchayats (pp. 4, 11).

[S3] Competency Frameworks in:

- a) Kerala State Police

- b) Kerala State Social Justice Department
- c) Kerala's Scheduled Tribes Development Department

[S4] Testimonial from Administrative Reform Commission about the contribution of competency project in the report.

[S5] Government of Kerala Administrative Reforms commission 2nd Report Capacity Development of Civil Servants March 2018. Chapter III, Competency Framework (pp. 15-20).

[S6] Government of Kerala Administration Reforms Commission Fourth Report: Personnel Reforms August 2019 (Chapter 5, p. 47).

[S7] The project is mentioned in the Governor's address to the legislature on 29th January 2020, (p.11).

[S8] Government of Kerala's state training policy 2017.

[S9] Testimonial from the Director of Kerala Institute of Local Administration about the use of findings on the competency project in training Panchayat employees.