

**Case Study Series 1 : Learning from Innovative Civil Servants**

**Case Title:**  
**Consular Service Decentralization during  
COVID-19**

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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 ([parvez.yousuf@northsouth.edu](mailto:parvez.yousuf@northsouth.edu)), we will communicate with you for further details.

## **Consular Service Inaccessibility during COVID-19**

Before COVID-19, a Bangladeshi Embassy in a Middle Eastern country, Country Z, provided passport and visa processing services to an average of 800-1,000 Bangladeshi nationals daily. This stopped during the pandemic when government lockdowns forced offices to close down and people could no longer access crucial consular services. Bangladesh Embassy officials quickly recognized the potential costs to migrant workers from service inaccessibility and the need for alternative means of service delivery. They also feared that if requests were not addressed promptly, they would accumulate and overwhelm the Embassy officials once the restrictions were lifted and their offices opened up.

## **Decentralization of Services and the Involvement of the Private Sector**

Mr. X was stationed at the Bangladesh Embassy in Country Z during that time and implemented an innovative strategy for service delivery while adhering to lockdown measures. He realized that Country Z had a large number of typing centers that its government had authorized to process official documents, such as home-country visa applications, business licenses, etc., and many were owned and operated by the Bangladeshi. Mr. X proposed an initiative whereby these centers would be authorized to provide passport-processing services to migrant workers on behalf of the Bangladesh Embassy in the country. Normally, this would cost USD 100; however, Mr. X agreed to let the centers charge USD 110 and retain the additional USD10 as a service charge while transferring the rest to the Embassy. To ensure that the typing centers were reliable and capable of delivering quality work, Mr. X utilized a mix of interviews and community leaders' feedback and selected 50 centers.

### **Problem**

The Bangladesh Embassy in a Middle Eastern country was unable to assist Bangladeshi nationals during the pandemic because of government lockdowns.

### **Solution**

The Embassy authorized typing centers in that country to partially process passport applications on their behalf.

### **Outcome**

Having provided uninterrupted services during the lockdown and reduced accessibility barriers for migrant workers, the Embassy's initiative became a post-COVID-19 permanent method of service delivery.

## **Confidentiality, Compliance, and Feedback Measures**

Confidentiality was a key concern, as these documents had been generally handled by trained government personnel. To ensure their security, Mr. X employed two financial and legal compliance mechanisms. The financial measure required the typing centers to make a safety deposit of the local-currency equivalent of USD 816 to the Embassy, which they would lose if they mishandled documents. Additionally, these centers were required to sign a contract stipulating their commitment to strict security standards, whereby non-compliance would leave them open to lawsuits or revocation of their business license. Officials made frequent visits to local towns to address issues outside the typing center's authority. They also used this opportunity to collect feedback on this initiative and found that the targeted beneficiaries were generally satisfied with these changes.

## **Recipient Benefits and Post-COVID-19 Roadmap**

The initiative's success during COVID-19 rendered it a permanent service delivery strategy for the Embassy in Country- Z. It eliminated logistical bottleneck issues and allowed migrant workers to access Embassy services at higher rates than prior to lockdowns. Now, they could avail these services without having to travel physically to the Embassy, which would require them taking their time off from work and likely of losing a day's wage, as well as spending on food and lodging. An additional benefit to the Embassy offices was their reduced service load, as officials now only had to process 200-300 requests in-office, while the rest were partially handled by the typing centers and usually only required final approval by the Embassy officials. Given its success and efficacy, this service-decentralization strategy can be replicated by Bangladeshi Embassies in other countries where typing/service centers are authorized by the government to provide such services.

## **Declarations**

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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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