

Client Satisfaction on Frontline Service Delivery of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office Sarangani

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the extent to which clients availed themselves of the frontline services of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (PENRO) Sarangani and determined their satisfaction with personnel, service processes, and service products. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed among 150 clients selected through simple random sampling from transactions involving land, forestry, biodiversity, and administrative management services. Data were gathered using an adapted and modified questionnaire based on the PENRO Citizen's Charter and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources feedback form. Weighted means described service utilization and satisfaction, while Spearman rank-order correlation tested the relationships

between service-delivery areas and satisfaction dimensions. Results showed that frontline services were availed to a moderate extent overall ($M = 2.7$). Administrative management recorded the highest utilization ($M = 3.0$), whereas forestry management was lowest ($M = 2.5$). Clients were very satisfied overall ($M = 4.3$), particularly with personnel and products (both $M = 4.4$), while process obtained $M = 4.2$. Correlation results revealed a mixed pattern of weak positive associations. Land-management utilization was significantly related to satisfaction with process and products; biodiversity management was related to personnel and process; and administrative management was related to personnel and process. Forestry-management utilization was not significantly related to any satisfaction dimension. The findings indicate that high satisfaction can coexist with only moderate service utilization. PENRO Sarangani should therefore sustain service quality while expanding information dissemination, strengthening personnel capacity, and continuously simplifying and monitoring service procedures.

Keywords: client satisfaction, frontline service delivery, public administration, environmental governance, PENRO Sarangani, service quality

INTRODUCTION

Client satisfaction is an important measure of whether public institutions deliver services that are responsive, reliable, understandable, and aligned with citizen expectations. Unlike commercial organizations, government agencies do not compete primarily for profit; nevertheless, their legitimacy and effectiveness depend on the quality of citizens' experiences during transactions. Satisfaction surveys provide direct evidence of how clients evaluate service encounters and help agencies identify operational strengths and areas for improvement (Development Academy of the Philippines [DAP], 2022; European Public Administration Network [EUPAN], 2008).

In the Philippines, the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 and the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018 require government agencies to reduce bureaucratic delay, publish clear service standards, and establish feedback mechanisms for process improvement (Republic Act No. 9485, 2007; Republic Act No. 11032, 2018). These requirements reinforce the principle that frontline service delivery must be timely, transparent, accessible, and client-centered. Client feedback is therefore not merely a compliance activity but a management instrument for evaluating public-service performance and strengthening accountability (Aceron et al., 2015).

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources carries out its mandate through regional and provincial offices that process permits, certifications, patents, clearances, and technical requests related to environmental and natural-resource governance. PENRO Sarangani serves clients seeking land, forestry, biodiversity, and administrative management services. Its operational context is especially significant because it also supports the management of Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape and deals with a diverse clientele composed of local government units, communities, private organizations, and individual citizens.

Previous research consistently links the quality of frontline personnel, procedural efficiency, and service outputs with client satisfaction. Competent and courteous personnel improve trust and perceived responsiveness, while clear requirements, reasonable processing time, and accessible approving authorities reduce transaction burden (Iberahim et al., 2016; Mengesha, 2015). Similarly, complete, accurate, useful, and readable documents shape clients' judgment of service outcomes. Studies in Philippine universities and local government offices have generally reported favorable satisfaction but also identified recurring concerns involving facilities, processing efficiency, and the clarity of procedures (Gorospe et al., 2021; Pacheco, 2018; Perez & Ilagan, 2019; Reyes, 2013).

Although related work has examined frontline services in other public institutions and in another PENRO setting, evidence specific to PENRO Sarangani remained limited. The office has a distinct environmental mandate, client profile, and protected-area context that may influence both service utilization and satisfaction. Without localized evidence, management may have insufficient basis for prioritizing communication, personnel development, and procedural improvement.

Accordingly, this study determined the extent to which clients availed themselves of land, forestry, biodiversity, and administrative frontline services; assessed satisfaction with personnel, process, and products; and examined the relationships between service utilization and satisfaction. The findings were intended to provide an empirical basis for strengthening public-service delivery and environmental governance in Sarangani.

Literature Review

Legal and Governance Foundations of Frontline Public Service

Philippine frontline service delivery is governed by a legal framework that places efficiency, transparency, and citizen feedback at the center of administrative performance. Republic Act No. 9485 (2007) established measures against red tape and required agencies to improve the manner in which applications, permits, licenses, and similar transactions are processed. Republic Act No. 11032 (2018) strengthened these requirements by prescribing processing periods for simple, complex, and highly technical transactions and by promoting streamlined and technology-supported procedures.

The legal framework also requires agencies to institutionalize feedback and client-satisfaction measurement. The Citizen's Charter translates these mandates into visible commitments by identifying documentary requirements, steps, fees, responsible personnel, and expected processing times. The report-card and feedback mechanisms discussed by Aceron et al. (2015) demonstrate how citizen assessments can reveal gaps between formal standards and actual experiences.

Public-sector satisfaction measurement is therefore closely linked to accountability and continuous improvement. The EUPAN (2008) framework emphasizes that clients are also citizens who evaluate not only the immediate transaction but the fairness and responsiveness of public administration. DAP (2022) similarly argues that agencies must use client feedback to refine service standards and improve frontline operations.

Client Satisfaction and Service Quality

Client satisfaction is commonly understood as the evaluation that follows a comparison between expected and experienced service performance. When actual service meets or exceeds expectations, satisfaction increases; when it falls short, dissatisfaction results. The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory explains this judgment as a response to confirmation or disconfirmation of prior expectations (Oliver, 1980). Satisfaction is therefore shaped both by objective service conditions and by the standards clients bring to the transaction.

Service quality and satisfaction are related but distinct. Quality reflects judgments regarding reliability, responsiveness, assurance, access, and the overall performance of a service, whereas satisfaction captures the client's broader evaluative response. Evidence indicates that perceived quality is a strong antecedent of satisfaction and loyalty across service settings (Lam et al., 2004; Qadeer, 2013; Saha, 2009). Lee et al. (2016) likewise found that perceived quality had a substantial influence on satisfaction among both satisfied and dissatisfied clients.

In public organizations, satisfaction has operational significance because dissatisfied clients may repeatedly seek clarification, elevate complaints, or lose confidence in government. Conversely, responsive service reduces transaction costs and strengthens cooperation between citizens and agencies. Public Service Motivation Theory further suggests that employees' commitment to public values, responsiveness, and professionalism can shape the quality of the service experienced by citizens (Perry & Wise, 1990).

Personnel, Process, and Product Dimensions

Frontline personnel are the most visible representatives of an agency. Their knowledge, courtesy, fairness, communication, promptness, and openness to feedback directly influence the quality of the service encounter. Mengesha (2015) emphasized that frontline employees must understand organizational goals and service standards so they can diagnose concerns and provide timely solutions. Iberahim et al. (2016) similarly associated reliability and responsiveness with favorable client judgments.

The process dimension concerns the effort required to complete a transaction. Documentary requirements, number of steps, waiting time, fees, access to approving authorities, and clarity of procedures collectively determine whether clients experience the service as manageable. The legal requirements for simplified procedures are reinforced by empirical studies showing that prompt and understandable transactions improve satisfaction (Llanera, 2016; Pacapac, 2020).

The product dimension refers to the permit, certification, patent, authenticated document, or other service output received by the client. Completeness, accuracy, usefulness, validity, readability, and presentation provide visible evidence of institutional competence. Satisfaction with the product can remain high even when a service is not frequently used, because clients evaluate the quality of the outcome once a transaction occurs.

Empirical Evidence on Frontline Government Services

Philippine studies generally show that clients evaluate frontline services favorably when personnel are competent and transactions are clear. Perez and Ilagan (2019) reported that clients of a government higher education institution were satisfied with competence and service delivery, although basic amenities received lower ratings. Gorospe et al. (2021) likewise found very high satisfaction among students and employees transacting with university offices.

Other studies highlight variation across client groups and service settings. Pacheco (2018) found differences in satisfaction among students, parents, and alumni, while Manuel (2019) reported favorable evaluations of university frontline offices. Reyes (2013) observed that reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and tangible service conditions were strongly related to constituents' satisfaction in local government units.

Within environmental agencies, Doma and De Castro (2022) examined satisfaction and expectations in DENR-PENRO Sorsogon and demonstrated the value of context-specific assessment. This evidence supports the need to examine PENRO Sarangani separately because service demand, environmental responsibilities, client composition, and resource conditions may differ across provincial offices.

Theoretical Foundations and Research Gap

The study was anchored in Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, Public Service Motivation Theory, and service-quality perspectives. Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory explains how clients compare the service they anticipate with what they experience (Oliver, 1980). Public Service Motivation Theory highlights how public employees' commitment to service and responsiveness can influence citizen outcomes (Perry & Wise, 1990). Service-quality perspectives clarify why personnel performance, procedural design, and output quality jointly shape satisfaction.

The conceptual model treated the extent of frontline service delivery in land, forestry, biodiversity, and administrative management as the independent variable and client satisfaction with personnel, process, and products as the dependent variable. The model assumes that patterns of service use may be associated with clients' evaluations of the people, procedures, and outputs encountered during transactions.

Existing studies provide substantial evidence on customer satisfaction and public-service quality, but localized evidence for PENRO Sarangani was absent. The study addressed this gap by examining both utilization and satisfaction and by testing their domain-specific relationships rather than relying only on an overall satisfaction score.

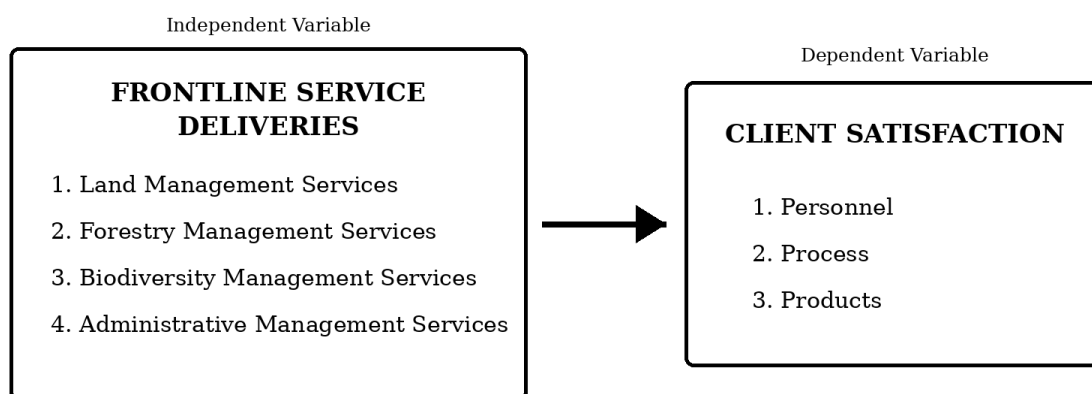


Figure 1. *Conceptual framework of frontline service delivery and client satisfaction*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component summarized the extent to which frontline services were availed and the clients' level of satisfaction. The correlational component determined whether utilization of the four service areas was significantly associated with satisfaction regarding personnel, process, and products. No study variable was manipulated.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (PENRO) Sarangani in Alabel, Sarangani Province. The office delivers land, forestry, biodiversity, and administrative management services and houses functions associated with the Protected Area Management Office for Sarangani Bay Protected Seascape.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents were 150 clients who had completed transactions with PENRO Sarangani. Simple random sampling was used to select clients availing themselves of land-management, forestry-management, biodiversity-management, and administrative-management services. The sample represented actual service users rather than members of the general public who had not transacted with the office.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted and modified from the PENRO Sarangani Citizen's Charter and the DENR Feedback Form. Part I measured the extent to which clients availed themselves of four groups of frontline services. Part II measured satisfaction with personnel, process, and products. Responses used a five-point Likert scale. Means from 4.50 to 5.00 indicated very high extent or extreme satisfaction; 3.50 to 4.49, high extent or very satisfied; 2.50 to 3.49, moderate extent or moderately satisfied; 1.50 to 2.49, low extent or slightly satisfied; and 1.00 to 1.49, very low extent or not at all satisfied. The questionnaire was reviewed and pre-tested before administration.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the PENR Officer before data collection. After approval, eligible clients were randomly selected during the period of service transactions. The purpose of the study and the instructions for answering the questionnaire were explained to each respondent. Questionnaires were administered after the clients had availed themselves of the relevant service and were retrieved immediately after completion. The responses were then organized, encoded, and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis

Weighted means summarized the extent of service utilization and the level of satisfaction. Spearman rank-order correlation was used to test the relationships between the four service-delivery areas and the three satisfaction dimensions. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level. Correlation coefficients were interpreted according to direction and magnitude, while conclusions about significance were based on the reported p-values.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted only after institutional permission had been secured. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and answered the questionnaire voluntarily. The analysis reported aggregated results rather than personally identifying information. Completed questionnaires and encoded data were handled for research purposes and used only to address the stated objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Frontline Service Delivery

The four service areas were all availed to a moderate extent. Administrative management obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.0$), followed by land management and biodiversity management (both $M = 2.6$), while forestry management obtained the lowest mean ($M = 2.5$). The overall mean of 2.7 indicates that clients sometimes availed themselves of the available services rather than using them consistently or frequently.

Table 1. *Extent of frontline service delivery by management area*

Service area	Mean	Interpretation	Description
Land management	2.6	Moderate extent	Sometimes availed
Forestry management	2.5	Moderate extent	Sometimes availed
Biodiversity management	2.6	Moderate extent	Sometimes availed

Administrative management	3.0	Moderate extent	Sometimes availed
Overall frontline services	2.7	Moderate extent	Sometimes availed

The moderate utilization should not be interpreted as poor service performance because service demand is partly determined by clients' specific regulatory and administrative needs. Administrative transactions were relatively more common, particularly the processing of payment claims ($M = 3.3$). The lowest individual means were recorded for agricultural free patents and several forestry and wildlife services ($M = 2.5$). These results point to the importance of distinguishing service accessibility from service frequency and of improving public awareness regarding less frequently used services.

Table 2. Highest- and lowest-rated utilization indicators within each service area

Service area	Highest-rated indicator	Mean	Lowest-rated indicator	Mean
Land management	Issuance of survey authority / residential free patent / special patent	2.6	Application for agricultural free patent	2.5
Forestry management	Application for chainsaw registration	2.6	Other forestry services	2.5
Biodiversity management	Issuance of gratuitous permit	2.8	Issuance of wildlife farm permit	2.5
Administrative management	Processing of payment claims	3.3	Document authentication for general circulation documents	2.7

The pattern supports the need for regular communication on the scope, eligibility requirements, and public value of PENRO services. Client feedback systems are most useful when combined with service-demand information because low utilization can reflect limited awareness, restricted eligibility, infrequent need, or access barriers rather than dissatisfaction alone (DAP, 2022; EUPAN, 2008).

Level of Client Satisfaction

Clients were very satisfied with all three dimensions of frontline service delivery. Personnel and products both obtained a mean of 4.4, while process obtained 4.2. The overall satisfaction mean was 4.3. The results show that clients generally received clear communication, respectful treatment, manageable procedures, and useful service outputs.

Table 3. Summary of client satisfaction with frontline services

Satisfaction dimension	Mean	Interpretation
Personnel	4.4	Very satisfied
Process	4.2	Very satisfied
Products	4.4	Very satisfied
Overall satisfaction	4.3	Very satisfied

Personnel ratings were consistently favorable. The capacity to provide clear answers, use understandable language, attend promptly to clients, deal fairly, and remain polite each received 4.4. Competence in providing service, although still rated very satisfactory, obtained the lowest personnel mean ($M = 4.2$). This finding indicates a strong interpersonal service culture while also identifying technical and service-specific knowledge as an area for continued development. Similar studies have emphasized that competence, courtesy, and responsiveness are central determinants of satisfaction in public transactions (Mengesha, 2015; Perez & Ilagan, 2019).

Table 4. *Highest- and lowest-rated indicators within each satisfaction dimension*

Dimension	Highest-rated indicator(s)	Mean	Lowest-rated indicator(s)	Mean
Personnel	Clear answers, simple communication, promptness, fairness, and politeness	4.4	Competence in providing service	4.2
Process	Access to approving authority, number of steps, and clarity of procedures	4.3	Length of processing time	4.1
Products	Completeness, accuracy, validity, readability, and appearance/paper quality	4.4	Usefulness and clarity of information	4.3

Within the process dimension, easy access to approving authorities, the number of steps, and clarity of procedures each received 4.3, whereas processing time received 4.1. The lower score for time remains favorable but signals the most visible opportunity for procedural improvement. Product satisfaction was highly consistent: completeness, accuracy, validity, readability, and appearance or paper quality each received 4.4. These findings align with evidence that client satisfaction depends on both the interpersonal encounter and the reliability of the service outcome (Gorospe et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2016).

Relationship Between Service Utilization and Satisfaction

Spearman correlation analysis revealed a mixed pattern of weak positive relationships. Land-management utilization was significantly related to satisfaction with process ($\rho = .182, p = .043$) and products ($\rho = .191, p = .033$), but not personnel. Biodiversity-management utilization was significantly related to personnel ($\rho = .317, p < .001$) and process ($\rho = .190, p = .034$). Administrative-management utilization was significantly related to personnel ($\rho = .247, p = .006$) and process ($\rho = .182, p = .043$). Forestry-management utilization was not significantly related to any satisfaction dimension.

Table 5. *Spearman correlations between service utilization and satisfaction*

Service area	Personnel	Process	Products
Land management	.164 (.068) NS	.182 (.043) S	.191 (.033) S
Forestry management	.117 (.195) NS	.115 (.202) NS	.144 (.108) NS
Biodiversity management	.317 (<.001) S	.190 (.034) S	.162 (.071) NS
Administrative management	.247 (.006) S	.182 (.043) S	.135 (.133) NS

Note. Values are Spearman ρ with p-values in parentheses. S = significant; NS = not significant at $\alpha = .05$.

The significant coefficients were small, indicating that the frequency with which clients used a service explained only a limited part of their satisfaction. The strongest association was between biodiversity-management utilization and personnel satisfaction ($\rho = .317$). The absence of significant forestry relationships may reflect a narrower and more specialized clientele, lower transaction frequency, or relatively uniform service experiences. The results support the view that satisfaction must be assessed directly rather than inferred from transaction volume. They also reinforce service-quality research showing that personnel, processes, and outcomes can contribute differently across service contexts (Qadeer, 2013; Saha, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The clients of PENRO Sarangani availed themselves of frontline services to a moderate extent. Administrative management was used most frequently, while forestry management had the lowest mean. The pattern indicates that the office's services were accessible to clients but were not used with the same frequency across management areas.

Client satisfaction was consistently high. Personnel and products obtained the highest ratings, reflecting favorable evaluations of staff courtesy, communication, promptness, fairness, and the completeness and quality of service outputs. The process dimension was also rated very satisfactory, although processing time received the lowest indicator mean within that dimension.

The relationship between service utilization and satisfaction was not uniform. Significant associations were weak and domain-specific: land management was related to process and product satisfaction; biodiversity management was related to personnel and process satisfaction; and administrative management was related to personnel and process satisfaction. Forestry-management utilization was unrelated to all three satisfaction dimensions. The findings demonstrate that frequency of use and quality of experience are related in selected areas but should not be treated as interchangeable measures of performance.

Recommendations

PENRO Sarangani should sustain the strengths that produced very high satisfaction, particularly courteous communication, prompt attention, fairness, document accuracy, readability, and product quality. Regular coaching and refresher training should be provided so frontline personnel can consistently explain requirements in clear and client-friendly language and respond accurately to service-related inquiries.

The office should strengthen information, education, and communication activities to increase public awareness of available land, forestry, biodiversity, and administrative services. Outreach should prioritize remote and seldom-reached communities and should use the Citizen's Charter, local government networks, digital channels, and protected-area partners to explain eligibility, requirements, processing periods, and service points.

Process improvement should focus on transaction time, documentary requirements, and the consistency of procedural information. Management should periodically review workflows, monitor compliance with prescribed processing times, analyze client feedback by service category, and use the findings to revise service standards where necessary. Adequate staffing and clear accountability should accompany these reviews.

Future researchers should examine whether high satisfaction is sustained over time and whether it contributes to client trust, repeat compliance, and organizational performance. Multisite studies across PENRO offices may also identify how staffing, digitalization, geographic access, and service demand explain differences in utilization and satisfaction.

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