The Citizen Support Portal

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In August 2015, Government of Mauritius developed “Vision 2030”, which is a key policy document that charts out the path to transform Mauritius into a high-income, sustainable, innovative, and inclusive economy with modern infrastructure, global connectivity, and advanced skills and technology. In line with “Vision 2030”, government has elaborated, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat, a Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy, which is built around 10 implementation pillars and which has as main objective to promote and implement a holistic reform and business transformation framework for the public service in Mauritius. It is in this context that the Prime Minister’s Office implemented a Citizen Support Portal (CSP) in April 2017 to place the citizens at the centre of government services delivery by bringing a radical transformation in the process of managing complaints and suggestions received from the public. The CSP enables the citizens to register their complaints/suggestions/general inquiries online on the web address (www.csu.mu), which is subsequently dealt with in a transparent, rule-based, efficient, and timely manner. This government-to-citizen interaction has earned the Citizen Support Unit (CSU) recognition by the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), the African Association of Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), and at local level with the conferment of the Silver Award at the Public Sector Excellence Awards 2018 amongst others. With its advanced data analytics tool, the CSP enables detailed analysis of complaints and suggestions in order to ensure the production of statistics for government and the public, monitoring and evaluation, planning, informed decisions, as well as policy formulation. Backed by regular media campaigns and radio programmes, the initiative of the CSU has been a resounding success with 83% of cases resolved to the satisfaction of the citizens out of a total of around 91,000 tickets received to date.

Keywords: citizen centric, empowerment, all-inclusive, sustainable, transparency, accountability

Introduction

The public sector remains the bedrock for the socio-economic development and prosperity of a country. As a matter of fact, the role played by government machinery in implementing the objectives set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 of the African Union cannot be underestimated.

However, it is observed that public reform programmes and initiatives in the African Continent and

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undertaken under the Structural Adjustment Programme of World Bank since the 1980s have had a mitigated effect in sustaining the socio-economic development of the continent. The performance of such reforms in Africa remains hindered by a myriad of factors, including lack of efficiency, lack of accountability, ineffective management practices, and corruption.

Whilst the benefits of Structural Adjustment Programmes brought by Government of Mauritius has enabled the country to be elevated from a mono-crop low income economy in the 1970s to a vibrant, resilient, and diversified services based economy, such strategy has proven its own limitations. As a matter of fact, Mauritius has for the past decades remained in what economic experts term as a “middle-income economy” trap situation. It has become therefore crucial for Government of Mauritius to bring about a paradigm shift in strategies adopted in various sectors of socio-economic activities to meet the ambition of the country in joining the league of high income economies in the next years. The reform initiative which is presently unfolding and in line with the Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy approved by government in February 2017 aims at fostering the concept of “New Public Management (NPM)”.

New Public Management is a label used to describe a management culture that emphasizes the centrality of the citizen or customer underpinned by the accountability for results.

It is a set of broadly similar administrative doctrines, which dominated the public administration reform agenda of most OECD countries from the late 1970s (Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1993; Ridley, 1996) (Khaled, Chowdhury, 2010, p.44). It captures most of the structural, organizational, and managerial changes taking place in the public services of these countries, and a bundle of management approaches and techniques borrowed from the private-for-profit sector.

The implementation of the Citizen Support Portal (CSP) by the Citizen Support Unit (CSU) is a true reflection of the NPM model which is in direct opposition to the traditional model of organization and delivery of public services, based on the principles of bureaucratic hierarchy, centralized planning, and direct control.

The NPM modelled by the CSU provides for smaller, faster-moving service delivery organizations that is kept nimble and lean and that would need to be user-responsive and outcome-oriented in order to succeed. Such set up has developed flatter internal structures (i.e., fewer layers) and devolved operational authority to front-line managers across more than 300 government entities connecting to the CSP. With a downsized number of staff, many services are contracted out instead of assuming that in-house provision is best.

Rationale of the CSP

In February 2017, a survey was conducted across all the 24 Ministries of Government in order to gauge how complaints and suggestions were being handled in the public sector. Ministries responded with outcomes clustered around a system riddled with bureaucracy wherein complaints were recorded and processed manually relying on a paper intensive method and out of date business processes. It was also observed that the processing of certain complaints was taking undue time with the occurrence of lost/misplaced files or documents.

Against such a bleak situation, government was called upon to take a bold stand and strive to establish a high standard in public service delivery system and process for people seeking government services irrespective of their social position, geographical location, race, and other differences. However, in order to build an all-inclusive society, it is primordial to hear the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable and take the right step to enable them join the mainstream of socio-economic development.
Objectives of the CSP

- Evaluate how CSP can contribute in efficient, round the clock, and timely citizen centric public service delivery by adopting innovative technologies.
- Explore how participatory development connected the citizens and state for more informed decision making at the highest echelon of the government.
- Analyze to what extent CSP has reinforced organizational learning, accountability, transparency, and efficiency in the public system.
- Analyze how CSP has created a single window for operations, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, communication and IT operations to examine citizens’ needs and for policy formulation in government service delivery.

Advent of the CSP

The CSP, which is operational since April 2017 has been developed and hosted by Mauritius Telecom (MT), the largest telecommunication provider of the island. It is based on open source and extremely affordable technologies (i.e., Php, MySQL database) which has been customized in accordance to the requirements of the government in regards to complaints/suggestions management.

The online CSP platform allows any citizen to register their complaints/suggestions/general inquiries online on the web address (www.csu.mu) through their smartphones/laptops/tablet. Once a citizen registers his/her complaint/general inquiry/suggestion, a ticketing system operates to provide the end user with a unique ticket number for tracking and reference purposes through SMS notification.

Any citizen can avail of this facility even for those who do not have the means to register a complaint/suggestion on their own. They can simply approach one of the 35 offices of the Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) located across different regions of the island. There is a dedicated CAB officer who provides assistance and advice to the citizens and coordinates with the various government agencies to get the status of the ticket being processed. Also, citizens can use this internet based platform across the 95 post offices of the island. As for those visually impaired, the CSP has inbuilt features to allow them to use the platform comfortably. CSP is indeed an indispensable support for the citizens as it is operational on a 24/7 basis.

CSP has also been launched in Rodrigues, a dependency island of the Republic of Mauritius. The system is managed by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and customized in its local context.

The CSU

The CSU operates under the aegis of the Prime Minister’s Office and is the central body which manages the CSP and ensures that complaints and suggestions received are handled in an efficient and timely manner. The unit comprises of different sections having their share of responsibility to meet the desired objectives and these are namely the operation and training, monitoring and evaluation, marketing and communication, technical (IT) and statistics sections. In all there are 14 officers who work at the CSU with different professional backgrounds and expertise.

How the CSP Operates?

The process of registering complaints/suggestions/general inquiries is markedly different from what it used to be prior to launching the CSP. There has been a radical change in the business processes, organizational
arrangement, and resource management.

How users register their complaints on the online platform (www.csu.mu) to how complaints are processed and feedback obtained from customers is clearly depicted in Figure 1.

Registering the Complaint/General Inquiry/Suggestion

The citizen makes a new request on the CSU website (www.csu.mu) or walks in to 1 of the 35 CAB or 95 post offices to register his/her complaint/general inquiry/suggestion online. Once the online form is filled and the nearest CAB specified, a unique ticket number is provided to him/her by email or on his mobile phone.

Processing of the Ticket by CAB

Based on the CAB specified in the online application form, the complaint/general inquiry/suggestion is subsequently automatically transferred to the CAB office. Thereon, the CAB will direct the ticket to the relevant government body for necessary actions at their end. There are 300 participating government entities/departments on the CSP.

Processing by the Government Body

When a complaint or suggestion has been duly transferred to a government body, a high ranking officer, the department supervisor, who is responsible for handling of complaints or suggestions, takes ownership of same. The department supervisor can personally address the complaint or suggestion or he/she can assign the complaint to one of his subordinates, the department officer.

The suggestion or complaint can be reassigned to another department officer or transferred electronically to another government body where the same process as described above is adhered to.
During processing, the citizen may be contacted by phone or notified by email. Once the complaint or suggestion has been dealt with, the ticket is closed and the citizen is automatically notified.

**Internal Follow Up**

The Citizen Advice Bureau and CSU officers, as well as officers of a given government organisation have the possibility to monitor, query officers, or post an internal note on the CSP during the processing of complaints or suggestions.

The CSU of the Prime Minister’s Office has dedicated officers to follow up on all complaints received on the portal and intervene promptly to ensure that citizens are provided with the quality government services at all times.

**Keeping the Citizen Informed at All Times**

The CSP provides for the citizen to be informed by email during the processing phase of the complaint or suggestion. The citizen receives an email when his ticket has been closed by the government body dealing with the complaint or suggestion.

**Checking Status**

The citizen can at any time check the status of his/her complaint by providing the ticket number received when the post was first made.

**Feedback**

Once a ticket is closed, the citizen is invited to fill in a feedback from where he/she will have the opportunity to provide relevant comments and rate the level of service obtained.

**Benefits of the CSP**

**Round the Clock and Inclusive Service**

Making complaints used to be a stressful, tedious, and unwelcoming activity in the earlier days. But now by putting digital government at the forefront, the CSP has encouraged citizens to use a service available at the click of a button without any time or physical constraint.

Also, there are citizens approaching the CABs to avail of this service and during this interaction rapport is built with the citizens. They are informed about the public services and procedures, encouraged to share their issues and overcome the fear of consequences.

**Accountability and Transparency**

Tickets registered are treated on a first come first serve basis. Updates on the status of the ticket can be tracked by the citizen through the ticketing number and even officials can monitor progress and the efficiency of a service they provide. Through this approach, effective delegation and accountability is now a reality.

**Upholding Confidentiality**

The protection of personal data handled by the CSP is an essential condition in upholding trust and confidence among users. The CSU, therefore, ensures that complaints and suggestions that are received on the CSP are treated in strict confidentiality by authorized officers in strict compliance with the Data Protection Act. Moreover, the CSP has been developed to include strong and resilient protective security features which comply with internationally benchmarked cyber security standards.
Organisational Learning and Upgrading the Skills of Officers

It is remarkable how CSP has been able to drive radical change in behavior and working culture of the public sector. By having onboard all the government entities and creating the sense of belonging and responsibility, CSU has put organisational learning at the forefront. Public officers are continually trained and are made to accept and recognize the importance of adapting to changes.

CSU ensures that their skills are upgraded and in line with the objective of the CSP which is aligned with that of the government. The public institutions are well coordinated and communication flow across government entities for informed decisions.

Public Trust and Reduced Scope of Nepotism

The CSP enables every citizen to be treated indiscriminately irrespective of his origin, social status, locality, or creed. This is a key factor in creating a trustful environment for an enhanced government-citizen interaction. Furthermore, the citizen has now an opportunity to be aware at all times about the status of his/her complaint or suggestion as well as obtaining an update from the officer handling the case while in process.

Methodology

It is an undeniable fact on how the CSP has generated actionable, accurate, and strategic insights since its coming into operation in 2017. The implementation of the much awaited change was underpinned by the lean yet strong organizational setup of the CSU as has been illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Pillars of the CSU (Source: CSU).](image)

Unleashing innovation and transformation efforts in the public sector has yielded results which are beyond expectations. Through the rigorous tasks and endeavours of the knowledgeable, experienced, and competent
teams at CSU, researches pertaining to the broad spectrum of CSP’s influence in citizens’ lives are undertaken. Both quantitative and qualitative data are generated to gauge the achievements of its set objectives. Different methods have been explored to add value to the monitoring and evaluation of its social, organizational, and economic obligations.

**Reports From CSU Dashboard and Kibana Data Analytic Tool**

The complaints registered on the online platform are captured in the CSU databases namely CSU Dashboard and Kibana Dashboard. The data filled in the form by the citizens are distilled in informative and comprehensible data fields. In this way, the numbers of tickets pertaining to each Ministry, Constituency, and/or Department are extracted and sorted as per timeframe, ticket status/types and according to the needs of the relevant stakeholders. Recently, CSP was upgraded with 254 complaint categories (main and sub) so that each ticket registered could be classified according to the nature of the issue. These help CSU and government entities to derive detailed information and steer actions towards the identified problem areas.

From the data on dashboards, statistical reports are prepared by CSU to identify the different issues affecting citizens’ lives, examining the priority areas, making recommendations on how to tackle those issues, and improving public service delivery. Quarterly reports are submitted by CSU to the Cabinet of Ministers comprising of in-depth analysis and recommendations. Hence, monitoring and evaluation is done at the highest echelon of the government. Ministries are also encouraged to submit monthly reports to the Cabinet. The statistics become the fundament for decision making. Framing the problem areas of citizens is in fact the vital base for policy making, budget allocation, and defining programmes and activities for the government.

**Investigative Research Through the Right Mix of Communication Strategies**

Fending for participatory development and for the needs, safety, and happiness of the population requires the outgrowth of open and responsive communication practices. The right mix of impactful communication and marketing strategies have undeniably supported this major project in being accepted, used, and continuously upgraded. The communication campaigns have helped enormously in building up credibility and comprise of the following:

- Since April 2017, the CSU has embarked on a vast communication campaign in order to cover the whole population and to ensure that the citizens are made aware of their rights and benefits provided by government;
- Radio programmes twice per week (Tuesdays and Saturdays) which comprise interaction with citizens to resolve their complaints and sensitize the population and procedures and policies of the government in all sectors;
- Weekly TV programmer every Thursdays broadcasted on MBC TV channel during peak time to bring solutions to the problems faced by vulnerable persons;
- Sensitization campaigns by the Task Forces live on radio in each region across the island and in shopping malls to ensure more proximity with the citizens;
- Broadcasting of video clips showing new and innovative features on the portal on the national television for more awareness and video clip on CSU song;
- Active on social media platform namely Facebook and YouTube.

Creating platforms to encourage citizens to come and share vital information has aided CSU in delving into realities which might not have gained so much attention previously and which require quick intervention even if they affect only minority groups in particular regions. In fact, the face to face interaction
during CSU campaigns contributed immensely in finding out the kind of expectations citizens have from the government, their opinions on the quality of public services then and now and creating greater proximity than ever before.

In the same vein, since July 2018, the government has set up Task Force Meetings chaired by Parliamentary Private Secretaries to monitor closely the issues prevalent in their respective electoral constituencies and find out viable solutions. The representatives from different government entities attend the meetings to monitor progress and undertake discussions to sort out intricate matters. Till date, more than 190 Task Force Meetings have been conducted pointing towards the positive impact it is having on matters reported.

**Document Review of Different Activities of CSU**

Orchestrating the interaction with more than 300 government departments and coordinating efforts towards resolving the tickets has been one of the most significant aspects of the operation team of CSU. Embedding the use of innovative technologies required the mobilization of savvy talents with the right skills set and attitude. Documenting on the training needs of the public officers to use the portal and efficiently handle issues was implemented.

Till date, more than 1,200 public officers have been provided with the necessary ongoing training to acquire the right and upgraded skills in using the platform and for effective service delivery. Meetings and workshops are held from time to time challenging public officers to break through the conventional way of functioning and pushing them beyond the boundaries of their comfort zones. Emphasis is being laid on building greater connectivity, ensuring effective communication, and lifting up the notion of accountability, transparency, and efficiency through close monitoring of tickets.

**System Analysis for the Upgrading of Service Provision**

Besides, the CSU has made an informed choice to use free and affordable open source software (PHP and MySQL) development platform for the implementation of the CSP. Through the technical expertise of staff and coordinated efforts with MT this project was successfully completed with a short time frame while at the same time opening avenues for the harnessing of innovation in other areas of public administration. Through regular meetings with MT, discussions are undertaken on how to innovate further to meet the requirements of different stakeholders and any trouble shooting issues are tabled.

**Findings: Reports on CSP and Recommendations**

Since the inception of CSP, due consideration has been given for the relief in the life of citizens through the provision of efficient delivery of public services by adhering to the principles of good governance. The task of CSP was not bounded only by just developing a one click transaction system, receiving and closing tickets, but the impact of the whole process on the society that matters.

Against the backdrop of its vision and objectives, CSP has been tapping on the real time data for an impact-based evaluation on how successful it has been in creating the desired outcomes. On a monthly basis, statistics of the CSP are prepared by the Business Information Unit and uploaded on the CSU website highlighting on the cases resolved, percentage of cases in each constituency, top categories of problem areas, and representation of age and gender. The statistics as at 31st July 2019 have been illustrated in Figure 3.
Figure 3. Statistics of CSP as at 31 July 2019 (Source: CSU).
As can be seen in Figure 3, a total of 91,323 tickets were received on the CSP with 83% cases resolved. This pinpoints to the extent of CSP being embraced and used by the Mauritian population across different regions of the island. Efforts are being harnessed to help citizens find solutions and pare down scourging situations. By identifying the top categories of complaints, crucial issues are reported to higher levels of the government for decision taking and better execution of responsibilities. Further investigations are conducted to scrutinize the causes of issues pertaining for instance to consumer affairs, water, national housing development council matters amongst others, probe into the segments of the population being affected, what actions are required, and the different stakeholders concerned.

In view of the quarterly reports which are prepared by the monitoring and evaluation team of CSU and submitted to Cabinet of Ministers, in-depth analysis was done to have an insight into not just pertinent issues affecting the lives of citizens but systemic concerns as well. For instance, following more than 190 Task Force Meetings across the 20 constituencies of the island, the 2nd Task Force Meeting Report was prepared for the period July 2018 till May 2019. The positive impact of the Task Force Meetings has been remarkable; the number of total resolved tickets on CSP soared from 70% to 80%. This novel government tactic of reporting these matters has unlocked possibilities of improving service delivery. Government entities are made to investigate on the constraints they are facing in addressing issues which can emanate from areas like human resources, financial or legal.

Additionally, recommendations were made on how to improve the existing system and devising strategies to fill in the gaps. The report highlighted on crucial areas like the quality of service and process to reinstate the trust of each and every citizen. It was pertinent to explain to the citizens the complaint handling process and provide them with clear feedback once a particular investigation was completed. Besides, it was proposed to have a community welfare plan at the level of each constituency for the development of essential programmes and activities region-wised fostering a harmonious society.

Also, 254 complaint categories have already been integrated in the system for detailed statistics. In furtherance to this latest development, a new exercise is currently in progress to obtain the Service Level Agreements for each category from Ministries/Departments. This will help establish a pre-defined and reasonable timeframe to handle and resolve a particular category of complaint. To stay in the fast track lane and for sweeping advances, each and every public officer will have to been encouraged, motivated, and trained to realize the call of his/her responsibility.

As far as participatory development is concerned, gender equity is a requisite and it is commendable that CSP has become a platform which has sparked the participation of women in the public sphere. In its catapult for wider outreach, the CSP has been engaging in such communication and marketing strategies that has helped to bridge the gap not only between the state and the citizens but also, derive a fair representation of women in using the CSP as has been illustrated in Figure 4.

As can be seen from the diagram, the representation of male varies from 57% to 61% compared to female which is between 39% and 43%. Based on the latest data pertaining to the period as at July 2019, the difference between male and female complainants extended to around 11%. Hence, participatory development has been promoted with an all-inclusive approach.

The information/data gathered from the Kibana Dashboard pertaining to the period 1 January 2019 to 31 May 2019 sheds light on the context-specific differences that exist between gender relations and their social and economic conditions as can be seen in Table 1.
Figure 4. Percentage of male/female complainants (Source: CSU).

Table 1

Top 10 Categories of Issues for Male and Female Complainants (Source: CSU)

| Category                              | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------------|
| Street lighting                       | 9.2      | 8.2        |
| Drains & road infrastructure          | 9.2      | 6.9        |
| Water                                 | 9.0      | 6.5        |
| Consumer affairs unit                 | 7.4      | 6.4        |
| Cleaning of bare lands & derelict buildings | 5.8    | 5.8        |
| Building and permits & planning & trade fee | 5.8    | 5.4        |
| Housing                               | 3.7      | 4.6        |
| Public health issues                  | 3.3      | 3.5        |
| Police                                | 3.1      | 3.2        |
| Road development authority            | 3.0      | 2.6        |

These statistics provide insights on the division of work, responsibilities, and power and the interlock patterns of opportunities, disadvantage, or deprivation which can help in defining policies, budgets, and programmes from gender lens.

Besides, the CSP is operated under a robust, reliable, and secure ICT Infrastructure which is a key condition for a project of this scale. The implementation of the CSP across all government entities has been possible as the necessary infrastructure such as the MT Data Centre, the Government Intranet System, and necessary computing tools at the level of users were readily acquired by the CSU. Reports comprising log in information of public officers and enquiry on how tickets are processed clearly indicate the level of
commitment that they are showing. The focus is transforming from just the routine administrative tasks to coordinate to achieve national targets through communication that cuts across ministries and departments.

**Discussion: Major Steps and Achievements**

The spectacular growth of CSP has been fueled not just by the restricted vision of delivering citizen centric services but has gone well beyond that motive. CSU has challenged its own limit by collaborating with various stakeholders and meticulously devising new ways to nurture the self-development of a citizen as a whole in a harmonious society. Figure 5 shows the different stakeholders of CSU.

![Figure 5. Stakeholders of CSU (Source: CSU).](image)

A crucial step was made by CSU in being part of the National Emergency Operations Command for disaster risk reduction. The Portal is used to facilitate lifesaving communications in reaching appropriate bodies for prompt actions. In addition, CSU has been collaborating with NGO’s to combat societal afflictions and help vulnerable groups find cogent solutions. Through the media, the citizens are sensitized and bold steps taken for result oriented interaction and setting the trail for others to follow. All these have been possible through the joint work of various stakeholders.

A thick demarcation line has been created for CSU from being an entity prevalent just for complaints management to englobing the all-round development of a citizen. CSU is involved in major projects of the country like:

- "Moris Nou Zoli Pei" (Mauritius my beautiful country)—In collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and Outer Islands, National Cleaning and Embellishment Campaigns were carried out across different regions to spark the concept of cleanliness and sustainability and were still an ongoing project.
- “Active Mauritius Debark KotTwa” (Active Mauritius comes to you)—In collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, various activities will be held across the island encouraging people of different age groups to participate and seed the notion of healthy activities, eating and ageing.
- Domestic Violence—In collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Child Development and Family Welfare efforts are being directed to help victims, educate citizens, and combat violence through training of CAB officers, video clips, and workshops.
With regard to the journey CSP has accomplished so far, it is undeniable how it has successfully innovated in different areas which have been depicted in Figure 6.

![Figure 6. Areas of innovation (Source: CSU).](image)

It can be rightfully said that the scope of expanse of the CSP has been indeed remarkable since its emergence and in fact, it is progressing at lightning speed. The project has won the Bronze Award at the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) Award. Hence, even at international level, CSP is inspiring nations. The African Development Bank has shown interest to replicate this type of project in African countries. CSU will be participating in the 2nd International Conference in Uganda revolving around the concept of good governance and public service delivery.

**Conclusions**

The culture of continuous improvement is deeply ingrained in this project. Navigating new frontiers to unleash both economic and social values will always be a top priority for CSP. It is important to understand that when a project at the level of the government is undertaken for the citizens, there has to be the right blend of economic, social, and holistic perspectives throughout which responsive strategies are devised and implemented. This is not about competition with others but all about competing with the current difficult situations to shape a better tomorrow.

There is more to explore for CSP and elevate its level higher by reaching out the most vulnerable groups and making the society free from hunger, poverty, pollution, crimes, and problems affecting the lives of citizens. The battle against hard core realities will be ongoing and this requires a consolidated nation. More projects and collaboration will be needed for effective community building not just whereby authorities are resolving citizens’ issues but creating a society where citizens help themselves. The growing delivery capabilities of CSP have no bound if each stakeholder strives for optimum performance in a connected world.

**Acknowledgement**

The CSP Project became a reality due to the unfaltering belief and efforts of the whole CSU Team and the support of each and every stakeholder. The well balanced CSU team has made excellence a habit in every task being undertaken to move towards the vision set for the country. The journey till so far has been enriching and revitalizing in the quest of continual innovation and progress.

The initiation of the project, keeping and working together to realize a dream came true, was all thanks to the vision of the Prime Minister’s Office, hard work of the CSU, CABs and government agencies, expertise
contribution of MT, support of the Media, NGO’s, Trade Unions, Parastatal bodies, and the expectations and hope of the citizens.

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