

One-Stop-Shop Public Service Delivery Model: the Case of Azerbaijan



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Cover image

ASAN Service center in Masally, Azerbaijan
Photo courtesy of ASAN Service

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Executive Summary

In almost all societies the public sector is the largest service provider. Thus, any changes in the public sector – whether positive or negative – have an immediate impact at a nationwide scale, affecting the wellbeing of millions of people. The performance of the public sector is measured by the efficiency of public service delivery.

The introduction of the concept of the New Public Management into the public sector has changed the philosophy of the public service delivery. Borrowing management approaches and techniques from the private sector, which puts the customer, in this case the citizen, at the centre of the whole business process, public administrations around the world are increasingly opting for citizen-centric and citizen-oriented models to ensure efficient delivery of public services. One-stop shop models of public service delivery have emerged as a result of the quest for better optimization, simplification and alignment of public services with citizens' needs and expectations.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations Member States in September 2015 brought the importance of reinventing the public service delivery area in many countries to the forefront. Failing to ensure a public administration system that transforms from being reactive to proactive as regards the delivery of public services, guarantees implementation shortfalls across all 17 sustainable development goals.

Different countries may apply different versions of one-stop shops. However, key underlying elements that underpin the most successful ones are, *inter alia*, efficiency, transparency, accessibility, public participation and innovativeness.

Azerbaijan successfully applies a one-stop shop model of public service delivery branded as "ASAN xidmət" (ASAN Service) since September 2012. The necessity to reshape the public

service delivery in Azerbaijan was dictated by a number of pervading problems in government entities, which were still salient despite a series of legislative and administrative measures taken by the Government throughout the 2000s. Overwhelmingly, the level of their public services had remained weak and inefficient, though some ministries had been performing relatively well. Red tape, petty corruption, unjustified bureaucratic hurdles, lack of adequate professional capacity of civil servants had been conspicuous.

The case study therefore aims to provide an in-depth analysis of ASAN Service, which was established as part of public administration reforms in Azerbaijan. It sheds light on challenges that led to the choice of overhauling the whole fabric of the public service delivery system in the country, and by scrutinizing the statutory documents and practical aspects of ASAN Service looks into its main success factors and puts forward certain considerations for the future.

ASAN Service overseen by the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has a peculiar concept based on multi-actor involvement, but with clear delineation of their functions to avoid any duplication. Thus, ASAN does not provide any service, but allocates space for public and private entities in premises called ASAN Service centres to render directly their services to the citizens. Moreover, the State Agency sets uniform standards and principles, which are transparency, efficiency, responsibility, courtesy and comfort, monitors and assesses the work of service providing public entities in conformity with those standards and principles, trains their staff and measures customer satisfaction.

Through its law-based and innovative approach to delivering services to all residents around the country via physical centres and mobile buses, ASAN Service has managed to form a system, which *a priori* invalidates any condition that

may be conducive to corruption, red tape and malfeasance, and holds very high customer satisfaction rate.

ASAN Service unites under its umbrella over 230 services of 10 ministries and 25 groups of private entities, thus exemplifying Public-Private Partnership in the public service delivery.

The path to achieving changes was not smooth. As a pilot project during its inception period, ASAN Service had to overcome a number of serious challenges. The major question was how to ensure the citizens' equal access to the most needed services across country, since constructing and commissioning physical centres would take some time. The solution came with the introduction of Mobile ASAN Service, which entails large well-equipped buses that travel to regions and remote areas that do not host ASAN centres yet.

The next challenge was the lack of adequate professional capacity, in other words maturity and required integrity of public service officers to work under new standards and conditions. It took strong commitment to transform that attitude and raise a new generation of civil servants by introducing effective human resources management system with an accent put on a merit-based recruitment, performance appraisal and tailor-made training system.

While providing an empirical overview of the key aspects of ASAN Service, the study also draws a number of recommendations for consideration on ways forward. One recommendation is to gradually distance from the alternative nature of ASAN Service, whereby the citizens can still access the same services in the same area directly in offices of public entities. Although the citizens give preference to ASAN Service for its transparent procedures, corruption-free environment and comfortable conditions, phasing out parallel

service delivery means can be an important step towards simplification and optimization of resources.

Another recommendation is to bring under the ASAN umbrella other frequently accessed, but not rendered by ASAN, public services, in particular those of the public entities that are already present in ASAN centres, where serious deficiencies and negativities are still prevalent. This step would positively resonate with the public and add further value to the achievements in the area of public service delivery.

The case of ASAN Service as a role model for reinventing the public service delivery has received widespread recognition. ASAN has been acknowledged by the United Nations through its prestigious Public Service Award as one of the advanced mechanisms and best practices in public service delivery. In their global outreach efforts international organisations promote the best practice of ASAN Service. Recently, the Government of Afghanistan launched its national one-stop shop mechanism called "Asan Khedmat" based on the bilateral agreement with Azerbaijan.

At the same time, it has to be underlined here that copying one country's system without due regard to national specificities is not feasible and will not produce desired outcomes. Therefore, countries seeking to modernize their public service delivery systems through the introduction of a one-stop shop model should employ several priority approaches, such as identifying a proper conceptual framework, upholding good governance principles, exerting political will, being innovative and inclusive, developing adequate human and technical capacities, ensuring measurement and assessment tools, and, last but not the least, building dialogue and communication channels with the core target of their endeavours in this sphere – their citizens.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASAN	Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network
EGDI	E-Government Development Index
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and communication technologies
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSS	One-stop shop
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SAPSSI	State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNPSA	United Nations Public Service Award

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Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 defined a set of goals and targets that the United Nations Member States should achieve progress in the next fifteen years. Delivering on these commitments necessitates the States to build and sustain efficient public administration, including public service delivery systems that fully entail fundamental components of good governance and are designed to foster a favourable environment for, *inter alia*, social stability, the enjoyment of human rights and economic growth.

Modernization of the public service delivery is critical for overcoming challenges hindering the achievement of the sustainable development goals. This mission requires that the states put in place sound strategies tailored to the needs and interests of their citizens. A paradigm shift toward citizen-centricity should therefore be at the core of any modernization and transformation in this crucial area.

The search for solutions to the perennial problems in the public sector has evoked the introduction of new models of service delivery, which, drawing from the experience of the private sector, aim to put citizens at the core of every decision, from strategy elaboration to implementation. Hence, public administrations around the world are increasingly opting for one-stop shop (OSS) citizen-centric service delivery models for a single access point to information and service transactions.¹

From the perspective of this case study, the key tenets of an OSS model of service delivery are:

– **Efficiency** – the shortest possible timeframe of service delivery, transparent

and simplified procedures, cost-effective and satisfactory outcomes.

– **Transparency** – unhindered access to information, openness and clarity of procedures.

– **Integration** – well-structured and coordinated system of multiple actors, and seamless service process.

– **Accessibility** – various channels for service delivery, customers' free choice of means of access to services depending on their specific needs and preferred time.

– **Engagement** – public participation and customer feedback, responsiveness to customer needs.

– **Innovativeness** – applying innovative approaches, methods and means to raise quality across all aspects, moving from one-stop shop to "No Stop Shop".

The aim of the current case study is to analyse the process of modernization of the public service delivery in Azerbaijan through the introduction of ASAN Service² – an OSS-based service delivery mechanism. The study largely focuses on providing an empirical overview of the application of the above-mentioned OSS key tenets within ASAN Service and their effect in the process of reinvigorating public services in Azerbaijan.

The case study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter reviews *status quo ante* by providing brief information on key country development indicators, analysis of persistent challenges and other drivers of transformation of the public service delivery in Azerbaijan, and the strategic framework that determined the Government's actions.

² The official name of the OSS-based public service delivery mechanism in Azerbaijan is "ASAN xidmət" (pronounced "asan khidmat"). The name has been patented nationally and by the World Intellectual Property Organisation. As a literal translation from Azerbaijani it means "easy service". As an acronym "ASAN" stands for "Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network". For the benefit of the international audience, the title of "ASAN Service" or just "ASAN" will be used throughout the text.

¹ "Transforming the citizen experience: OSS for public services", PricewaterhouseCoopers, April 2016, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/government-public-sector-research/pdf/one-stop-shop-2016.pdf>

The second chapter concentrates on the evolution, conceptual basis, principles and standards of ASAN Service. It examines the key success factors determining “a quantum leap”³ in the public service delivery in Azerbaijan and outlines ways for further improvements.

This chapter also reflects on the international reaction to the positive changes brought about by the ongoing reform of the public service delivery in Azerbaijan and steps taken to disseminate this best practice regionally and globally.

Finally, the third chapter dwells on the lessons learned by highlighting a number of challenges that needed to be addressed in order to lay a solid foundation for a viable OSS in Azerbaijan. It also puts forward a number of considerations to be taken into account by countries seeking to apply an OSS mechanism based on the experience of ASAN Service.

³“A Quantum Leap in Public Service Provision”, *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, Special Issue, (January-February 2015), accessed October 19, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/country-focus/Azerbaijan-2020-turning-strength-into-sustainability>

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1. Key country indicators

The Republic of Azerbaijan is the largest country of the South Caucasus region with a territory of 86.6 thousand sq. km and an estimated population of over 9.6 million.

The country is rich in natural resources, notably oil and natural gas. Between 2002 and 2013 thanks to rising oil prices the country achieved high growth rates, accumulated large foreign exchange reserves and reduced its foreign debt. Economic growth averaged 13 percent⁴ per year. Alongside its economic advancement, Azerbaijan has experienced significant and steady poverty reduction, accompanied by a strong increase in wages and the introduction of a well-targeted social benefit system that contributed to the empowerment of the middle class. The poverty rate declined from 49.0 percent in 2001 to 5.3 percent in 2013.

Azerbaijan is an upper-middle-income country in the high human development category. It ranks 78 out of 188 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index, with a score of 0.751.⁵

The 2015-2016 Global Competitiveness Report has placed Azerbaijan in a high overall rank of 40 among 140 countries. This is the highest score in the region due to the country's strong macroeconomic environment rank (10th) characterized by low inflation and favourable public finances.⁶

The Government of Azerbaijan has been investing greatly in the development of the non-oil sector of the economy with a view to decreasing heavy dependence on earnings from hydrocarbon exports. Consequently, the non-oil sector grew at 9.4 percent in 2011 and 9.7 percent in 2012⁷, mainly driven by a large public investment programme. Therefore, despite the recent global economic slowdown owing to the plunging oil prices, Azerbaijan's GDP showed moderate growth.⁸

A comprehensive "E-Government" project was carried out in line with the "National Strategy on Information and Communication Technologies for the Development of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2003-2012", and several state programmes on the development of ICT's in the country were successfully implemented.⁹ The central e-government portal www.e-gov.az was launched that provides a gateway to citizens, non-residents and businesses to hundreds of e-services of state entities.

Azerbaijan has been steadily improving its position in the United Nations E-Government Survey. Whereas in 2003 Azerbaijan was ranked 94 with 0.3635 EGD (E-Government Development Index), the country moved further up to 68 with 0.5472 EGD in 2014 and to 56 with 0.6274 EGD in 2016 among 193 countries.

⁴ *The World Bank Group Country Partnership Framework for Azerbaijan, 2016-2020*, accessed August 14, 2016, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/07/21/090224b083014397/2_0/Rendered/PDF/Azerbaijan000C0the0period0FY2016020.pdf

⁵ "Work for Human Development", *UNDP Human Development Report 2015*, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AZE>

⁶ *The Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016, Azerbaijan*, World Economic Forum, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/economies/#economy=AZE>

⁷ *The World Bank Group Country Partnership Framework for Azerbaijan, 2016-2020*, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/748271467998502035/pdf/95860-REVISED-Box385353B-OUO-9-R2015-0122-2.pdf>

⁸ *2015 UN Resident Coordinator's Annual Report*, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://www.az.undp.org/content/dam/azerbaijan/docs/RCreport/2015%20RC%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

⁹ *State Programme on the development of communication and information technologies in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2010-2012 (Electronic Azerbaijan)*, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/19936>

1.2. Problem analysis

In the years preceding the establishment of ASAN Service in 2012, the Government had taken consistent steps to reform and reinforce areas related to the public service delivery through the adoption of a series of laws and regulations on civil service, ethical conduct of civil servants, anti-corruption, access to information, ICT and e-government, etc.

However, those measures on strengthening the legislative and institutional basis did not fully root out persistent problems that pervaded government entities, in particular as regards the efficiency of their public services. The quality of their public services was disparate, some entities performing relatively well and others experiencing serious deficiencies.

The following considerations necessitating the reform of the public service delivery were explicitly laid out in a statutory document that introduced an OSS mechanism in Azerbaijan:

- increasing transparency in the activity of state entities;
 - delivering public services in a more qualitative, comfortable, innovative manner and with the application of advanced technologies;
 - ensuring ethical conduct toward and courteous treatment of the citizens;
 - achieving the citizens' satisfaction;
 - overall improvement of public services;
- and
- acceleration of transition to e-government.¹⁰

The stated objectives of ASAN Service are also self-evident in terms of understanding the drivers behind the modernization of the public service delivery in Azerbaijan. Thus, the centres are designed to form a new approach towards

ensuring citizens' satisfaction with the work of civil servants and to elevate the quality of relations between civil servants and the citizens to a new level.¹¹ Their objectives are to:

- reduce extra expenses and loss of time by the citizens;
- achieve adherence to ethics rules and courteous treatment of the citizens;
- increase the level of professionalism of civil servants;
- strengthen the public confidence in state entities;
- increase transparency and strengthen the fight against corruption;
- ensure a greater use of electronic services;
- increase the efficiency of institutional reforms in this area.

Hence, the challenges, which the introduction of an OSS based service delivery mechanism was intended to address, can be summarized as follows:

1. lack of the required level of transparency, accessibility, efficiency and accountability;
2. unnecessary bureaucracy, lengthy procedures, subjectivity and incompetence;
3. red tape, unduly delayed consideration of applications and petty corruption;
4. low level of implementation of the legislation;
5. absence of uniform standards in rendering public services;
6. lack of the gender-based approach and the negligence of the needs of social groups;
7. low quality of relations between civil servants and citizens, as well as the lack of the public confidence in government entities;

¹⁰ "Measures concerning the establishment the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the improvement of services rendered to the citizens by state entities", *Presidential Decree 685*, 13 July 2012, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/23926>

¹¹ "Ensuring the activity of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan", *Presidential Decree 706*, Annex 3 on "Regulations on the organisation of activity of ASAN Service centres and the delivery of services", 5 September 2012, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/24212>

8. absence of a unified body responsible for management, standardization, coordination and electronization of public services provided by various ministries.

Manifestly, the incorporation of the elements of the New Public Management concept aimed at designing an effective solution for ensuring citizen-centric public service delivery was imperative in terms of overcoming residual negativities by building on the previous achievements.

1.3. Strategic framework

In December 2012 the leadership of the country approved the Development Concept "Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future". It is a roadmap that takes stock of the past achievements, outlines concrete goals for the future development and sets a framework for the country's transition from a traditional, input-based economy to a knowledge-based, diversified and competitive economy.

The main strategic view of the Concept is "to take account of the current opportunities and resources and reach a stage characterized by sustainable economic growth and high social welfare, effective state management and supremacy of the law, the full enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms and the active status of the civil society in the country's public life".¹²

Such a mechanism would provide efficient, accessible and affordable public services for all, including residents, non-residents and vulnerable groups. It would also ensure widespread support to state entities, and deliver on the "customer" promise by aligning multiple government departments around the citizens' needs. And last but not the least, it would boost the development of innovative and advanced tools for improving the efficiency of service delivery.

The Concept gave a strategic outline for the modernization of public service delivery in Azerbaijan. It resolved to strengthen institutional potential in the country by developing human resources in the public sector, expanding the fight against corruption, enhancing electronic government and continuing institutional reforms. In this context, it undertook to continue complex measures to improve methods and mechanisms of governance in government agencies and to ensure that citizens and organisations can use services in a simple, easy and free manner, while increasing the number of state services provided to the public through electronic channels.

¹² "Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future", *Development Concept*, accessed September 5, 2016, http://www.president.az/files/future_en.pdf

CHAPTER II: OVERVIEW OF ASAN SERVICE

2.1. Establishment and evolution

The establishment of ASAN Service is directly associated with the public administration reforms initiated by President Ilham Aliyev. All milestone decisions concerning the introduction of an OSS in Azerbaijan emanated from his office. Given the ambitious concept of ASAN Service, which is based on inter-ministerial cooperation and multi-actor involvement, it is obvious that vigorous political will was an absolute pre-requisite for taking the process forward as swiftly as possible.

The origins of ASAN Service date back to Presidential Decree 685 dated 13 July 2012 on “Measures concerning the establishment the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the improvement of services rendered to the citizens by state entities”¹³.

The Decree undertook the following:

- established the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SAPSSI) as a central body with executive power responsible for the unified management of ASAN Service centres, coordination of the work of personnel of state entities rendering services in those centres, carrying out monitoring and assessment activities, mutual integration of state entities’ databases, acceleration of the process of electronization of services, and improvement of management in the field of electronic services;
- established ASAN Service centres to ensure the delivery of services rendered by state entities to the citizens;
- tasked ASAN centres to (a) deliver services in all calendar days to all citizens without regard

¹³ “Measures concerning the establishment the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the improvement of services rendered to the citizens by state entities”, *Presidential Decree 685*, 13 July 2012, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/23926>

to their places of registration on the basis of the principles of efficiency, transparency, courtesy, responsibility and comfort; (b) ensure the delivery of services in a mobile and other forms based on the citizens’ applications submitted directly, via phone or online; (c) organise ethics courses and trainings on managing citizen flow, greeting, listening and explanatory skills for personnel of state entities rendering services at those centres.

The next Presidential Decree issued on 5 September 2012 approved the Statute and the structure of SAPSSI, and the Regulations on the organisation of activity of ASAN Service centres and the delivery of services. The Decree also specified the list of public services and state entities that would render those services in ASAN Service centres. In the period between 2012 and 2016 the Decree underwent certain changes predominantly due to the enhancement of public services and addition of new state entities rendering those services.¹⁴

Within only three months the very first ASAN centre was inaugurated in Baku by President Ilham Aliyev on 29 December 2012¹⁵. As a sign of his continuous support and commitment to the process, he would personally inaugurate all the subsequent service centres located either in Baku or in other cities of Azerbaijan.

The first centre opened its doors to the public on 15 January 2013. As a pilot project, it offered only 23 public services of nine ministries and only to residents of two districts of Baku with the

¹⁴ “Ensuring the activity of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, *Presidential Decree 706*, 5 September 2012, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/24212>

¹⁵ “Ilham Aliyev attended the opening of ASAN Service centre No 1 of the State Agency for Public Services and Social Innovation”, *Official website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 29 December 2012, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/7019>

possibility of acquiring information on services and taking queues online or via 108 Call Centre.¹⁶

Within the first five days since the opening date the number of persons applying for services reached over 1500. The most applied services related to the issuance of ID cards and renewal of driving licenses.¹⁷

The testimonies of the citizens, who benefitted from the centre's services, showed their satisfaction with the expediency, efficiency and transparency of services, as well as the environment free from corruption, bureaucratic hurdles and red tape.¹⁸

This successful start encouraged the Government to roll out the presence of ASAN Service centres throughout Baku and elsewhere beyond it. It is remarkable that only in 2013 SAPSSI managed to launch two more centres in Baku, as well as centres in Sumgayit and Ganja – the largest cities of Azerbaijan after the capital city.

The geographical expansion continued in the subsequent years as well bringing the total number of the centres to 11 as of September

2.2. Concept

ASAN Service has a pivotal conceptual element that may distinguish it from other OSS mechanisms in other countries. ASAN does not employ the "universal operator" approach, when a centre official only accepts applications from citizens, sends them to relevant ministries for processing,

2016. Thus, in 2014 and 2015 two additional centres were commissioned in Baku. The regional coverage of ASAN Service also included the regions of Sabirabad and Barda in 2015. In August and September 2016 two new centres were inaugurated in Gabala and Masally, respectively. The process of launching new centres with the aim of covering the whole territory of Azerbaijan is announced to continue in 2017 and beyond.

Since May 2013 SAPSSI has been delivering services to residents of the regions that do not host ASAN Service centres and those living in remote areas via specially equipped large buses. Commenced with only two buses at the time of inception, this service later increased the number of buses to ten.

In February 2014, SAPSSI launched another project under Mobile ASAN Service with the aim of enabling the residents of Baku to order services to any location of their choice without visiting the centres.

facilitates the process and informs citizens once their documents are ready to be collected. Nor did the Government take away all public services from relevant ministries and bring them solely under the umbrella of one state entity, in this case SAPSSI.

¹⁶ "ASAN Service centres to cover whole Azerbaijan", *Today.Az*, 14 January 2013, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.today.az/news/society/117687.html>

¹⁷ "ASAN Service centre serves 950 people in Baku within first week of operation", *Trend News Agency*, 21 January 2013, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/2110472.html>

¹⁸ "A citizen satisfaction oriented service – ASAN", *Moderator.Az*, 29 November 2013, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.moderator.az/news/37456.html>

Instead, the founding documents resolved that ASAN Service centres would realize the delivery of services rendered by state entities to the citizens¹⁹, and instructed several ministries to fill the spaces of the centres allocated to them by SAPSSI with necessary staff members, technical communication and information resources in order to ensure the realization of their services in ASAN centres.²⁰

Furthermore, the Statute of SAPSSI defined its specific responsibilities. Thus, it is mandated, *inter alia*, to:

- ensure the organisation of the activity of the centres, their unified management and the coordination of activities of employees of state entities working at those centres;
- exercise control over the provision of the services in the centres in line with the principles of efficiency, transparency, courtesy, responsibility and comfort to all citizens regardless of place of registration and in all calendar days;
- assess the provision of each service in the centres in accordance with law, quality and transparency;
- monitor the compliance of the employees of the state entities acting at the centres with the ethics rules;
- prepare reports on the results of monitoring and assessment, present to relevant authorities recommendations for mandatory implementation aimed at the elimination of identified shortcomings and deficiencies, and inform the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan thereabout;

- ensure the organisation of ethics courses and various trainings, the development of skills in the management of citizen flow, greeting, listening and explanatory skills for the employees of the state entities acting at the centres;
- define rules of organisation of rendered services at the centres in a mobile form and carry out their mobile delivery;
- consider inquiries and complaints about its activity and take measures as defined by law;
- make proposals to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the simplification of service delivery procedures (required documents and durations) of the state entities.²¹

Hence, this “innovative and unique”²² concept of ASAN Service rests on the premise that SAPSSI, which is an entirely new and neutral body, manages the operation of ASAN centres, sets standards and oversees the application of its principles in the service delivery process, provides space for state entities to render their services, coordinates, monitors and assesses their work, trains their personnel, and applies innovations in order to improve their service delivery capabilities. In their turn, ministries are directly responsible for rendering their own services.

The logo of ASAN Service (Picture 1) is designed to conform its concept. Hence, the circle in the middle represents the State Agency, and the petals around it embody the service providing entities.

19 “Measures concerning the establishment the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the improvement of services rendered to the citizens by state entities”, *Presidential Decree 685*, 13 July 2012, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/23926>

20 “Ensuring the activity of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, *Presidential Decree 706*, 5 September 2012, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/24212>

21 *Statute of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/24212>

22 “Moving towards citizens: The “ASAN Service” Model”, *Report by Vision – the Think Tank*, London, 10 March 2015, accessed September 5, 2016, accessed September 5, 2016, http://www.visionwebsite.eu/UserFiles/Vision_ASAN_Report.pdf

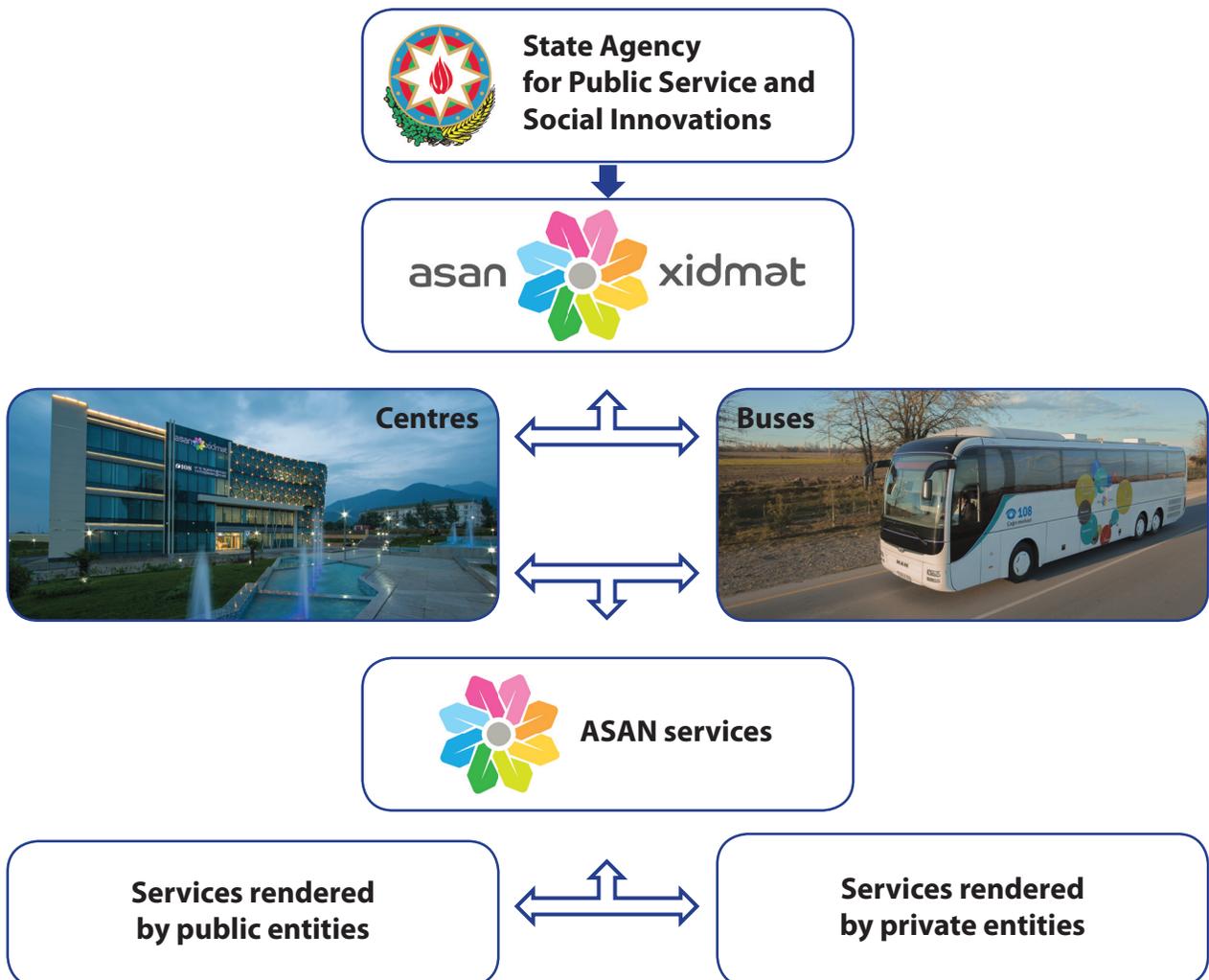
Picture 1. The official logo of ASAN Service



Such an arrangement clearly delineates roles and responsibilities between the manager, which does not render any service to the citizens and reports directly to the top leadership of the country, and the service providers. This obviously prevents any conflict of interest and duplication of functions among the involved ministries (Figure 1).

On the other hand, the concept of ASAN Service is based on inter-ministerial cooperation and multi-actor interaction. Ministries preserve their public services assigned to them legislatively. SAPSSI, however, can come up with recommendations and proposals on simplifying and improving service delivery procedures in order to make them more transparent and efficient. The ministries are bound by the standards and principles defined by SAPSSI.

Figure 1. Graphic view of the ASAN Service concept



2.3. ASAN services

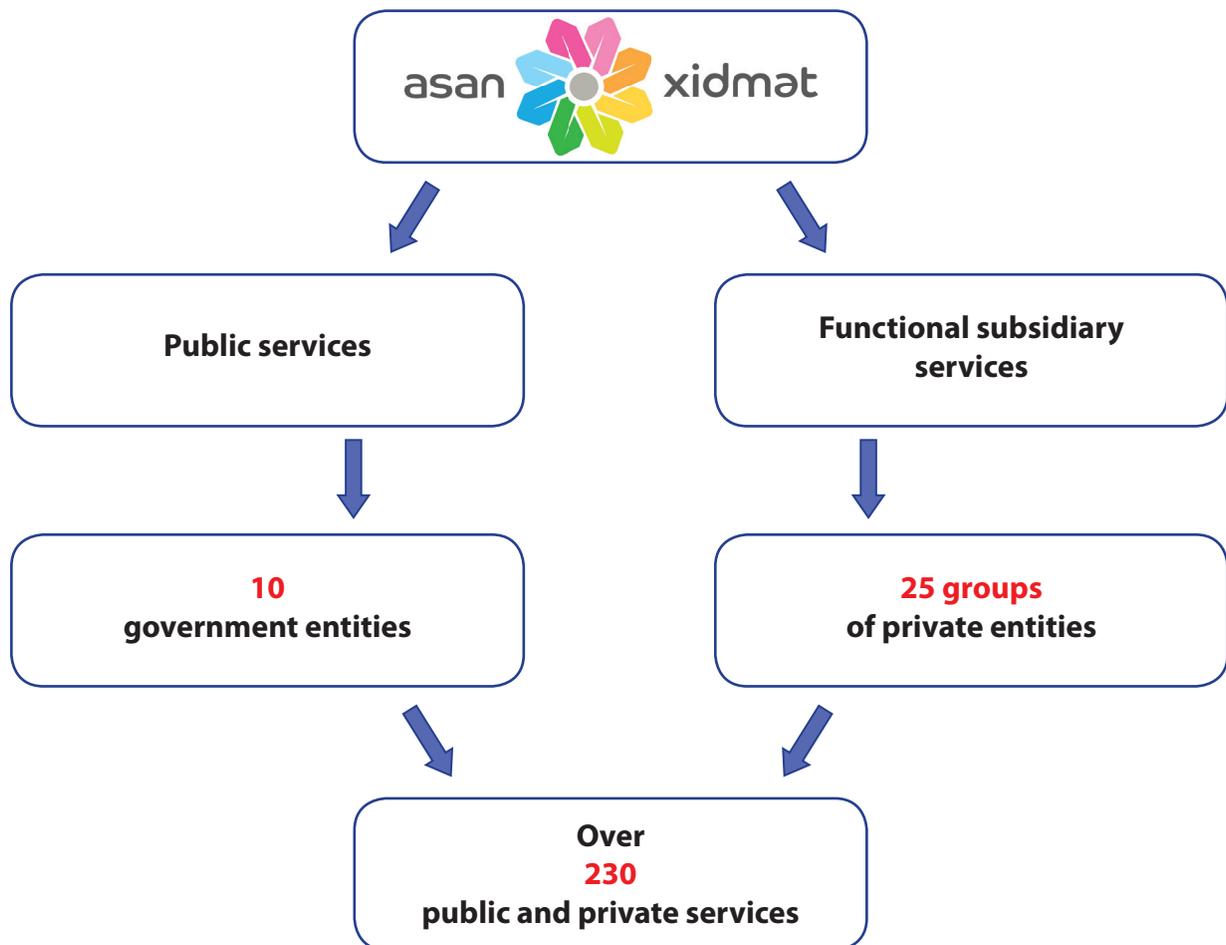
The services rendered in ASAN Service centres are divided into two groups – public services by state entities and functional subsidiary services by private companies.

This approach (Figure 2), first and foremost, enables the access of the citizens to public and private services from a single location in a comfortable manner and avoiding loss of time and money. For example, a person having acquired a passport from a Ministry of Internal Affairs desk in a centre can immediately choose a preferred destination for vacation and purchase a ticket from a tourism company.

Secondly, a number of public services envisage

certain procedures that are not within the purview of the service providing public entities. For instance, a foreign national seeking a temporary or permanent residence in Azerbaijan must obtain a special permit of the State Migration Service. Before submitting documents to the latter, the foreigner is required to have some national documents translated into Azerbaijani and notarized. Since hardly any government entity provides a translation or a notary service, the foreigner would have had to look for an outside private company. Therefore, the functional subsidiary services in ASAN Service complement the efficiency of public service delivery.

Figure 2. Graphic description of ASAN services and service providers



Thirdly, having public and private entities work hand-in-hand and render their services to the citizens based on uniform standards and principles exemplifies the notion of Public-Private Partnership²³ in public service delivery.

Over 230 services are rendered by public and private entities under the umbrella of ASAN Service.

Public services

Public services rendered in ASAN Service centres are specified in Presidential Decree 706 (Table 1). The assignment of new public services and, if required, new state entities to ASAN Service is realized through the introduction of changes to the statutory documents.

Table 1. List of public entities acting in ASAN centres and their services

No.	State entities	Public services
1	Ministry of Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State registration of civil status acts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – registration of birth; – registration of death; – registration of marriage; – registration of divorce; – registration of child adoption; – registration of determination of paternity; – registration of changes to given name, patronymic and surname; – issuance of certificates (renewed certificates) on state registration of civil status acts. • Notary services.
2	Ministry of Internal Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance and renewal of identity cards; • issuance and renewal of passports; • renewal of driving licenses; • issuance of conviction records; • issuance of reference notes on domicile registration.
3	Ministry of Taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration of commercial legal persons and tax payers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – tax registration of an individual; – state registration of commercial legal entities with local investment; – state registration of commercial legal entities with foreign investment; – state registration of a representation or a branch of foreign commercial legal entities.
4	State Committee on Property Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration of real estate operations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – issuance of extracts and technical passports on initial and re-registration of the ownership rights on apartments; – issuance of reference notes from the State Registry on the description of real estate and on state registered rights and their restriction (encumbrance); – issuance of extracts and technical passports for the re-registration of ownership rights over private houses.

²³ "A Quantum Leap in Public Service Provision", *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, Special Issue, (January-February 2015), accessed October 19, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/country-focus/Azerbaijan-2020-turning-strength-into-sustainability>

No.	State entities	Public services
5	State Customs Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of customs declarations and documents for customs clearance. • Extension of registration period of temporarily imported vehicles by individuals.
6	State Migration Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance (extension) of temporary residence permits to foreign citizens and stateless persons; • issuance (extension) of permanent residence permits to foreign citizens and stateless persons; • issuance of work permits for paid labour activity to foreign citizens and stateless persons; • receipt of and response to queries on the identification of a person's affiliation to the citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
7	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination of occupational pensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – age pensions; – disability pensions; – allowances for the death of a household head.
8	State Service for Mobilization and Conscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military registration and removal of military registration of conscripts and citizens with military duty in cases of the registration and removal of registration of residence.
9	Ministry of Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance of special permits (licenses) for entrepreneurship activities (except national security related activities).
10	National Archive Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance of archive references to individuals and legal entities.

Before assigning any public service to ASAN Service, as part of inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination, relevant state entities are requested to come up with their proposals on the delivery of their services in the centres. Quite often, in order to enable more efficient and comfortable access of people to those services, SAPSSI is instructed to work with those ministries and present proposals on the simplification of service delivery procedures, including shortening of service duration, reducing state fees and eliminating requirement for certain documents that can be deemed redundant.

It should be noted that state fees, service procedures and timeframe are strictly regulated by the national legislation. Some services (for instance, issuance of conviction records, issuance of ID card for persons under 16, military registration, determination of pensions, etc) are not subject to state fees.

The overwhelming majority of services rendered through ASAN Service are alternative. It means that the citizens can access public services

through ASAN centres or choose to apply directly to relevant state entities.

Though people predominantly prefer to access those services through ASAN centres due to the transparent procedures and comfortable conditions, sustaining parallel offices of public entities outside of ASAN in the same region causes additional expenses to the state budget. In cities and regions that host ASAN centres, the Government should consider phasing out services rendered in local offices of public entities that anyway deliver services under the ASAN umbrella.

In December 2015 all licenses for entrepreneurship activities (except those related to the national security) were united under the Ministry of Economy, which should render licensing services in ASAN Service centres.²⁴ This decision signified an important step toward optimization of state resources and institutions.

²⁴ "Certain measures in the area of licensing", *Presidential Decree 713*, 21 December 2015, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/31676>

Another consideration is about a number of frequently accessed public services outside of ASAN's framework, where serious deficiencies and negativities are still prevalent. The leadership of the country has publicly announced its plan to "ASANize" those services, and the soonest realization of this intention will be a very positive step forward.

Functional subsidiary services

Functional subsidiary services in ASAN Service are divided into two groups. The first group combines services that are assigned by the statutory document²⁵ (Table 2).

Table 2. List of the Decree-assigned functional subsidiary services.

No.	Type	Functional subsidiary services
1	Banking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – opening current bank accounts; – currency exchange; – payment of state fees and service fees for the services rendered in ASAN Service centres; – payment of fines for administrative offenses.
2	Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – insurance of vehicles; – insurance of real estate; – travel insurance.
3	Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – oral and written consultancy on legal issues, issuance of explanatory and reference notes; – provision of legal assistance on court claims; – drafting of applications, complaints and other legal documents; – other forms of legal services.
4	Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – translation of all types of documents from different languages (25) into Azerbaijani and vice versa; – editing; – proofreading.
5	Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – issuance of health certificates to person under 16 years old applying for an ID card (determination of a blood type); – issuance of health certificates to persons above 16 applying for an ID card (determination of height, eye colour and blood type); – issuance of medical check-up references to persons wishing to enter into marriage; – first aid.
6	Official internet resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – taking queues in real-time regime; – receiving the citizens' queries and responding to them in real-time regime; – informing the citizens about all types of services rendered in "ASAN service" centres; – electronic receipt of the citizens' queries addressed to the state entities regarding services rendered at "ASAN service" centres and responding to them through e-ASAN section.
7	Special terminals installed in the centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – payment for mobile communication and internet services; – payment for utility services; – loan and insurance payment.

²⁵ "Ensuring the activity of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan", *Presidential Decree 706*, 5 September 2012. Annex 3 on "Regulations on the organisation of activity of ASAN Service centres and the delivery of services", accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/24212>

The list of the functional subsidiary services is non-exhaustive, since Decree 706 stipulates that “the centres can offer other functional subsidiary services”²⁶. Therefore, the second group combines the following private services that are not mentioned in the statutory document:

- photo;
- utility services: electricity, gas and water;
- cell phone services;
- tourism;
- document delivery;
- issuance of excerpts from the Centralized Credit Registry;
- ticket sale (movies, theatres, concerts).

Furthermore, the Decree does not specify private companies that can render their services in the centres. Hence, SAPSSI is granted leeway to decide independently on types of private services, as well as on private companies, which it wants to see offering services in the centres. For instance, four different private banks are represented within ASAN Service. Such diversification of companies helps prevent the monopolization of private services in the centres.

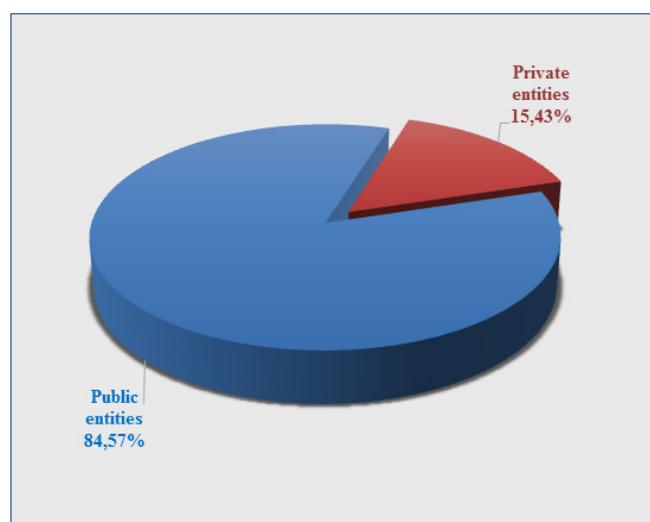
2.4. ASAN Service centres

Modernly designed centres have all necessary facilities to create comfortable conditions for the citizens (Picture 2). The centres, including

SAPSSI is tasked with providing information service on all services rendered in ASAN centres. Toll-free nationwide 108 Call Centre, the official website and Facebook page of ASAN Service are managed by SAPSSI for that purpose.

Between 2013 and 2016, over 12 million applications from the citizens have been processed by ASAN Service centres.²⁷ The overwhelming majority of applied services belong to public entities (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ratio of applications for public and private services



their exterior and interior, usually differ from each other, but all of them have uniform service process standards.

²⁶ “Ensuring the activity of the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, *Presidential Decree 706*, 5 September 2012. Annex 3 on “Regulations on the organisation of activity of ASAN Service centres and the delivery of services”, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/24212>

²⁷ *Statistical Portal of SAPSSI*, accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.vxsida.gov.az/statistics/>

Picture 2. Exterior of ASAN Service centre in Gabala



Picture 3. Interior of ASAN Service centre in Masally



The centres are spacious, well-organised and citizen-oriented. All provide parking lots, children's playground, baby-care room, café, coffee machines, free wi-fi access, computers with free internet connection, landline phones, small library and wheelchairs, trails and Braille text for the handicapped (Picture 3).

Eleven ASAN centres have been commissioned so far. Five centres are located in Baku, and six in other major cities and regions. The geographical expansion is envisaged in the forthcoming years. Launch of four centres are planned for 2017-2018.

ASAN Service centres hold a certificate on OHSAS 18001:2007 standard on occupational health and safety management systems and the International Safety Award conferred by the British Safety Council.

The current premises of the centres, whether in Baku or elsewhere in the regions, host only administrative buildings designated for the

2.5. Service delivery process

As a holder of the certificate on the ISO 9001:2008 standard on quality management systems, ASAN Service attaches paramount importance to preserving the highest level of service delivery process that lives up to the citizens' expectations and increases their satisfaction. Maintaining and constantly improving the process-oriented approach allows for the consistent, efficient and effective alignment of the centres' work with the citizens' needs.

Thus, ASAN centres are open to the public seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. during weekdays and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends. Such schedule allows for more convenient access to the services, whereby the citizens may wish to visit the centres after the working hours or on their free time.

Before coming to an ASAN centre, a person can obtain information about a particular service he/she wants to apply for. The most widely used means of making inquiries is 108 Call Centre of ASAN Service, which is operational five days a week from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays. Although it is located in Baku, it can be reached from landlines and cell phones from any part of the country.

The website of ASAN Service – www.asan.gov.az – contains detailed information on the locations of all service centres, maps, transport guide, contact details and contact persons, and on all services rendered by the centres, including required documents, procedures, service timeframe and

delivery of services. However, the latest regional centre in the southern city of Masally, which is called the "ASAN Life" Concept, incorporates not only a service centre, but also provides other public facilities, such as a parking lot, park, children's playground, indoors movie theatre, exhibition hall, food zone, shopping area, consultancy office for household businesses, etc.

applicable fees. Also, the citizens can contact an ASAN representative through a chat room available on the website.

The website has several useful functions aimed at helping the citizens effectively manage their time and schedule before visiting ASAN Service centres. For instance, a person can take an online queue for any service and at any centre starting from the next day throughout a week. The preferred time is fixed for that person and he/she should only approach the selected centre about 10 minutes before the appointment.

Another very useful function is queue statistics. A person wishing to visit a centre can learn in advance about the actual situation updated in a real time regime as regards the number of persons having received services and the number of persons waiting in queues for any service. For example, a person may walk to a nearby centre in Baku to renew an ID card without consulting the website. Unaware of the number of people who have already taken their queues, he/she may end up waiting for an hour. Instead, after observing the queue situation in the centre, he/she may drive to another closest centre and spend significantly less time for a service.

The service delivery process in the centres is arranged in the following order. A person entering the centre may approach an information desk placed at the entrance of every centre and inquire about any service. An official behind the information desk is obliged to respond to

the person's question and check the order of documents required for the requested service. Once the documents are in order, the official swipes that person's ID card through a reading device and prints a queue ticket that shows the number of a window of a respective state entity, the number of persons waiting in line for that service, and the floor where the window is located.

If a person has taken a queue online prior to visiting the centre, he/she can approach the information desk and have a ticket printed. Visitors can also take a queue for a particular service from a special terminal at the entrance by swiping their ID cards.

The citizens can follow their queues on special monitors mounted in visible places inside the centres. They can also get acquainted with the services and applicable fees from other monitors. In case of long queues, the citizens may spend their time at a café. They can also leave their kids at children's playground for two hours under supervision of a dedicated ASAN employee.

The person should then approach the respective window shown in his/her ticket. A representative of a service providing entity accepts the documents for processing. If a service requires a payment, the applicant is given a bill to be paid

2.6. Mobile ASAN Service

Since May 2013, SAPSSI has been operating Mobile ASAN Service, which involves 10 well-equipped large buses that travel to the regions to deliver services in rural and remote areas that do not host physical service centres (Picture 4).

Mobile ASAN Service started functioning in 2013 with 2 buses. Later, 8 more buses with special equipment were introduced, thus bringing the total number of buses to 10. This has ensured the coverage of Mobile ASAN Service to all the regions of the country.

at a bank section. Only upon the submission of a proof of payment, an entity official can proceed with servicing.

Monitors placed above every window show a person's photo, name and surname, queue number as well as service duration.

Upon the completion of the process, the applicant may leave feedback about his/her satisfaction with the service through special tablets or exit-poll monitors, or handwrite in a complaint journal, etc.

In order to prevent any condition that may be conducive to corruption and other negative phenomena direct payment to service providers is totally prohibited in ASAN Service. Accepting cash by a public or private service officer is a grave violation of relevant ASAN regulations that begets harsh consequences. Applicable fees for services must be paid only to bank sections located on every floor of the centre.

Moreover, ASAN Service has a special internal guideline regulating the terms and procedures of refunding wrongly charged or overpaid state fees to the citizens.

The buses are a transformed version of Neoplan Cityliner L. This model is the latest modification of a Neoplan Cityliner bus, manufactured by the Neoplan Bus GmbH Company since 2006. They are equipped with IP telephones, internet and electric grid, satellite connection, solar batteries, 12 KW power generator, 140x80 cm LED monitor, safe boxes for document storage, surveillance cameras, microphone and an audio system for announcements.

Picture 4. Mobile ASAN bus



Also, the buses have computers with anti-shock SSD discs and high-tech servers connected to the central server of ASAN Service through a satellite.

At present, services of four state entities are rendered through Mobile ASAN Service. These are:

- Ministry of Justice – notary services and registration of civil status acts (birth, death, marriage, divorce, change of name, etc).
- Ministry of Internal Affairs – issuance and change of ID cards and passports, renewal of driving licenses.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population – identification of labour pensions.
- State Committee on Property Issues – registration of real estate operations.

Functional subsidiary services in the buses include bank, photo, insurance and medical services.

The website of ASAN Service provides an interactive map showing current stationing of the buses throughout the regions of Azerbaijan, as well as a timetable of their previous and planned locations.

Between 2013 and 2016, over 840 thousand residents in 67 locations and in 41 regions and cities of Azerbaijan have received services via Mobile ASAN Service.²⁸

There is no service fee for the delivery of service via buses. The citizens only pay state fees for services, as applicable.

²⁸ Statistical Portal of SAPSSI, accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.vxside.gov.az/statistics/>

Another type of Mobile ASAN Service is intra-city mobile services launched by SAPSSI in February 2014. The service is available for residents with permanent registration in Baku, as well as for residents of Baku with permanent registration in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan. This service enables people to benefit from ASAN services without the need to visit ASAN Service centres at any location of their choice. For that they only need to dial 9-108 number of the Call

Centre and order the service at their home, office or any other address.

This type of mobile service is chargeable, whereas those who order it to their addresses should pay a service fee in addition to an applicable state fee for a particular service. However, in order to promote social solidarity among the society and as part of its corporate social responsibility SAPSSI provides this service free-of-charge to handicapped people and children with disabilities.

Those who personally apply for a service at ASAN Service centres can also order this service for the delivery of their ready documents at their addresses.

2.7. Monitoring and assessment

The monitoring and assessment portfolio of SAPSSI has a primary role in managing the coordinated activity of state entities in ASAN Service centres, organising the delivery of services in conformity with the ASAN principles and legal norms, and conducting regular assessment of quality and transparency of services with the ultimate goal of preserving the high customer satisfaction rate.

Mobile ASAN Service is known as an innovative approach to ensuring easy access of the citizens to public services throughout the whole territory of Azerbaijan. This proactive type of service has been characterized as “unique and ground-breaking in terms of its content and technical solutions both in Azerbaijan and possibly beyond”²⁹

Through this undertaking the state delivers its services to the citizens’ address. The objective is to provide services to the citizens in a more comfortable, modern and innovative way, to make such services universally accessible and to increase public satisfaction.

Considering that ASAN buses do not provide the whole spectrum of services that static centres offer, and in some cases given the difficulty of travelling to cities and towns that have ASAN centres or station ASAN buses, central or local executive authorities may think about opening small offices in remote localities to enhance people’s access to services. Located in premises of municipalities or elsewhere such mini-centres can collect applications of local residents for services, then using small ASAN cars transfer them to main ASAN centres for processing and returning ready documents. Such an arrangement can significantly raise the efficiency and accessibility of services.

A dedicated department within SAPSSI employs a number of tools, such as surveillance cameras recording the service process in the centres, on-site presence of the department’s representative and oral, paper-based and online surveys among citizens. It also collects and analyses statistical data on rendered services, citizen flow and applications, assesses performance of service rendering officers, prepares periodical reports, investigates the citizens’ complaints and violations

²⁹ *ASAN Journal*, No.6, July 2016, ISSN 2518-1637

of service-related rules and regulations by service rendering officers and takes necessary measures in that regard.³⁰

2.8. Public participation

In order to succeed, it is imperative for any service delivering organisation to know what citizens want and how they evaluate the services. A systemic approach to enabling public participation is crucial for improving the quality of services and service delivery procedures.

SAPSSI has introduced various communication channels for the citizens, which in itself is a two way learning process. On the one hand, by heeding the public feedback, it improves services rendered by ASAN Service centres and ultimately increases the public satisfaction rate. On the other hand, by disseminating useful information on public services SAPSSI raises public awareness on its services and informs people about their rights, and the responsibilities of the Government.

Thanks to these channels SAPSSI is able to regularly measure the public satisfaction rate with the services rendered in ASAN Service, which is 98 percent.³¹

The following are the means of enabling the public participation in decision-making concerning areas overseen by SAPSSI:

- 108 Call Centre responds to the citizens' questions on the services, registers their suggestions and complaints, and directs them to a dedicated department of SAPSSI, which in turn has specific internal rules for reacting to the public feedback.
- The official website of ASAN Service (www.asan.gov.az) provides necessary information on services and service centres, and through special

pages and questionnaires allows the citizens to leave their feedback, complaints and suggestions.

- Social networks: Daily activity of ASAN Service is widely highlighted on its official Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages³². The citizens can post any question or register complaints, which are responded to immediately. It is remarkable that the official Facebook page of ASAN Service has over 400 thousand followers, a figure unseen in any public entity in Azerbaijan and probably beyond.

- Bank of Ideas³³: Launched in November 2012, it is designed to collect innovative ideas and perspectives of the public on further improvement of the activity of SAPSSI and ASAN Service centres. All ideas are evaluated by a special commission, and authors of the most interesting ideas are rewarded.

- Complaint journals, feedback tablets and exit-poll monitors available in all ASAN Service centres enable the citizens to register their views, complaints and suggestions about the services and service procedures. The results are transmitted to a special department of SAPSSI for processing and relevant actions.

- Electronic complaint booths: Installed in all ASAN Service centres, via these booths the citizens can video connect to the Call Centre and express their satisfaction, make suggestions and convey complaints.

- Surveys: SAPSSI conducts periodic paper-based and online surveys among the citizens on ASAN services rendered to them through the centres and Mobile ASAN Service buses.

³⁰ Statute of the Monitoring and Assessment Department of the State Agency, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.vxsida.gov.az/redirect/post/pid/560>

³¹ ASAN Journal, No.6, July 2016, ISSN 2518-1637

³² <https://www.facebook.com/asanxidmat>, <https://twitter.com/asanxidmat>, <https://www.instagram.com/asanxidmat/>

³³ *The Bank of Ideas*, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.ideyabanki.com/>

ASAN Radio 100 FM

Launched in December 2015, ASAN Radio 100 FM is the first-ever and the only radio station specialized in the area of public service delivery. Its purpose is to deliver true, useful and immediate information to people and secure access to a wider audience. The Radio's mission is to form an objective media entity, deliver first-hand information, participate actively in raising the public awareness and sensitize the society on ASAN services, novelties and projects.³⁴

2.9. ICT and innovations

Application of innovations and advanced technologies increases the quality of public services and the efficiency of service delivery processes. According to the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration, "a strategic and pragmatic approach to promoting innovation in the public sector is needed. It is important to allow flexibility, build the collaborative capacities ... and consider ways to sustain innovative practices"³⁵.

Innovation in the public service delivery is an absolute pre-requisite for preventing its stagnation, meeting the citizens' interest and remaining ahead of their expectations. Innovations are not limited to information and communication technology only. They can be found in institutional configurations, service delivery mechanisms and social innovations.³⁶

³⁴ Homepage of ASAN Radio 100 FM, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.asanradio.az/>

³⁵ Report on the 15th Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 18-22 April 2016, New York, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN96272.pdf>

³⁶ World Public Sector Report 2015: Responsive and Accountable Public Governance, United Nations Economic and Social Council, accessed August 14, 2016, <https://publicadministration.un.org/publications/content/PDFs/World%20Public%20Sector%20Report2015.pdf>

Furthermore, ASAN Radio broadcasts programmes dedicated to various social problems of concern for the public with the participation of heads and senior officials of government agencies and private companies, local experts and academicians. While hosting senior officials from selected ministries, it invites the audience to send their questions and complaints. After the programme, the officials undertake internal inquiry on issues raised by the listeners and contact them with replies. On its part, ASAN Radio also calls its listeners and relevant ministries to make sure that the raised problems have been taken care of.³⁷

Along with its statutory mandate to oversee the process of digitalization of public services in Azerbaijan, SAPSSI also harnesses the power of advanced technologies and social innovations to raise the efficiency of public services in ASAN Service.

All centres are equipped with advanced technology, such as electronic queue machines, queue tracking system, biometric data system, electronic complaint booths, electronic information terminals, exit-poll monitors, "ASAN Pay" terminals, etc. Software part of this technology has been developed by ASAN specialists.

"ASAN Pay" system

"ASAN Pay" is a multifunctional payment system developed by SAPSSI. It enables the electronic delivery of administrative penalty decisions to citizens and the electronic payment of administrative fines and those required by the enforcement of court decisions.

³⁷ "Interview with. Emin Musavi, Director of ASAN Radio 100 FM", *ASAN Journal*, No.6, July 2016, ISSN 2518-1637

“ASAN Pay” system has the capabilities of electronic delivery of administrative penalty decisions and foto- and video-footage of traffic rule violations to the citizens’ emails and mobile phones; monitoring the validity of administrative penalty decisions and sending notification on their expiration; making online payments of administrative fines through a mobile phone application.

The system can also be used for payments of utility, landline and mobile phone services, mortgage and municipal taxes (profit, land, property, mining and local), as well as fees for certain ASAN services.

2.10. Human resources management

Effective human resources management and development is critical to maintaining the highest level of the citizens’ satisfaction with public services. Introducing a merit-based recruitment system, inculcating the values of professionalism and integrity, developing skills and leadership qualities, and applying performance-based appraisal system are pivotal in terms of fostering a new image of the public service delivery.

The Statute of SAPSSI defines the number of its personnel as 522 persons. Those are employees working in the SAPSSI headquarters and as the core staff in ASAN Service centres.

Overall, SAPSSI coordinates and manages the work of more than two thousand persons, which apart from the core ASAN Service staff also include representatives of service providing state entities and private companies, volunteers, technical and security staff. Obviously, this indicator changes with the launch of new centres.

Each centre has around 200 employees, of which 90 belong to the service providing state entities. Such a high number is substantiated by the fact

Payments can be made on the “ASAN Pay” portal³⁸ using a bank card or through special “ASAN Pay” terminals installed in public places and shopping malls by cash or using a bank card.

The “ASAN Pay” system can be accessed through the “ASAN Pay” internet portal, mobile devices with internet access and special “ASAN Pay” terminals installed in public places and shopping malls.

that the centres are open seven days a week without a lunch break, which requires a shift system among the employees in order to fully observe the existing labour law.

The first year of the inception of ASAN Service was characterized by a very intense staff turnover in the centres. The reason was that the level of professionalism of representatives of the service providing state and some cases those of private entities were far from being ideal. Many did not fully comprehend the whole gravity of the demanding environment that they were going to work in. Having accustomed to an “old style” of interaction with citizens, they were not ready to adapt to the new system that aimed to deter any condition conducive to corruption and mistreatment of the citizens. On the other hand, the fledgling organisation had yet to embed a sound human resources management and development system that would inculcate a new mindset in its employees.

To overcome this, SAPSSI introduced an effective merit-based recruitment, performance appraisal, financial motivation and training system.

³⁸ Homepage of “ASAN Pay” Portal, accessed October 19, 2016, www.asanpay.az

The core staff of ASAN Service is hired through the centralized civil service recruitment process, which includes written tests and interviews.

In their turn, the service providing public entities second their personnel to work in ASAN Service centres upon the approval of SAPSSI. Before that, their candidates are thoroughly examined by the latter. Their work performance is also closely monitored and regularly evaluated, and those who continuously commit serious faults in their work are sent back to their respective entities and substituted with new ones.

Performance appraisal of SAPSSI and the centres' personnel is conducted against various criteria on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

SAPSSI also applies a performance-based motivation scheme to remunerate public servants in ASAN Service centres.

Trainings constitute an important element of human resources development for ASAN Service centres. SAPSSI has a statutory mandate

to organise various courses and trainings for employees of the state entities represented in ASAN Service centres. New and existing personnel of the centres, including the main staff and representatives of public and private entities have to attend trainings in the ASAN Training Centre located in Baku on a regular basis. The topics include codes of ethics, business practices, stress management, time management, conflict resolution, principles and rules of citizens' satisfaction, the role of communication, mass psychology, and social awareness in public service. Also tailor-made trainings are provided varying from one person to another and accommodating special needs.⁴⁰

ASAN Service actively promotes gender equality. Females constitute almost 50 percent of all ASAN staff. The average age of employees is 28.

ASAN Service also creates employment opportunities for vulnerable groups. The centres recruit persons with disabilities.

2.11. ASAN Volunteers

Volunteerism is an important and popular mechanism for young people to bring about positive changes in the society. It is a powerful means to engage youth in tackling development challenges. Volunteerism benefits both the society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.³⁹

Nowadays, ASAN Service is the most popular destination for the Azerbaijani youth to gain initial professional skills and to contribute to the development of the society they are part of. As part of its corporate social responsibility, it has developed an institutional approach to this concept.

Every young person aged 17-25, who aspires for self-development and enhancement of his/her knowledge and skills, can apply for volunteerism in ASAN centres. By performing various activities during their service, such as welcoming and informing citizens, issuing queue numbers, assisting in filling in application forms, working with electronic boards, conducting surveys on the quality of services the ASAN volunteers not only gain experience, but also assist public service officers. Their work is evaluated and they are awarded with certificates.

So far more than 8000 young people have successfully undergone the volunteer activity in ASAN Service centres. Also, nearly 530

³⁹ *Homepage of the United Nations Volunteers*, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.unv.org/about-us.html>

⁴⁰ "Moving towards citizens: The "ASAN Service" Model", *Report by Vision – the Think Tank*, London, 10 March 2015, accessed September 5, 2016, http://www.visionwebsite.eu/UserFiles/Vision_ASAN_Report.pdf

professionally distinguished young people have been employed by SAPSSI, ASAN Service centres and other state entities, private companies and enterprises.

In order to enhance employment opportunities for its volunteers and supply the labour market with qualified and experienced young professionals, SAPSSI launched a web portal called ASAN Cadre Career Centre, where CVs of volunteers are uploaded. Partners of ASAN Service in the public and private sectors can freely access this database and find proper candidates to fill their vacancies.

2.12. Forthcoming projects

Several decisions have been taken lately on the application of ASAN working methods and principles in other areas where deficiencies remain.

“ASAN Kommunal” centres

In order to deliver utility services in a more qualitative, comfortable and innovative manner, and ensure citizens' satisfaction in this sphere, SAPSSI has been tasked with the establishment and unified management of “ASAN Kommunal” (ASAN Utilities) centres that will ensure the delivery of utility and other customer services to individuals and legal entities from a single location based on the principles and standards of ASAN Service. At those centres electricity, gas and water supplying companies will render utility and other customer services via advanced information and communication technologies. Also, innovations will be applied with the aim of constant improvement of services, and the citizens' inquiries will be received and responded to via 108 Call Centre. In order to maintain a high-quality service delivery process SAPSSI will carry out monitoring and assessment measures, conduct surveys, organise trainings and specialized courses.⁴¹

⁴¹ “Measures on the establishment of “ASAN Kommunal” centres”, Presidential Decree 890, 4 May 2016, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/32736>

Meanwhile, they can also post vacancy notices on the portal. This mechanism creates a bridge between youth with distinctive work experience seeking to start a successful career and their potential employers.

Around 2600 CV's have been uploaded to the portal, and 582 public and private entities have registered therewith.⁴²

In 2013 the volunteers instituted an NGO named “The ASAN Volunteers Organisation”.⁴³ It has implemented hundreds of projects and initiatives in the social, environmental and cultural spheres.

“ASAN Visa”

Another task recently assigned to SAPSSI is to design and manage the “ASAN Visa” system in order to launch an electronic visa system that will simplify visa application procedures for foreign nationals and stateless persons visiting Azerbaijan, and enhance efficiency and transparency in this sphere. The new system will allow foreign nationals or stateless persons to apply online for an electronic visa, submit necessary information online, pay visa fees online and receive an electronic visa within three working days to their email addresses.⁴⁴

ASAN Service Index

SAPSSI is also tasked with developing ASAN Service Index, based on which it will conduct assessment of the services contained in the

⁴² Homepage of ASAN Cadre Career Centre, accessed September 5, 2016, www.asankadr.az

⁴³ Homepage of ASAN Volunteers Organisation, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.asanyouth.az/>

⁴⁴ “Simplification of the procedures of issuance of electronic visas and establishment “ASAN Visa” system”, Presidential Decree 923, 1 June 2016, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/32942>

Electronic Registry of Public Services⁴⁵ in accordance with a number of parameters, such as availability of information about services and means of applying for them, duration of service provision, electronization of database used in the delivery of services and their integration with other entities' information systems, organisation of trainings on service management, existence of feedback and monitoring mechanisms and tools for measuring public satisfaction. Along with those of state entities, services rendered by state-owned enterprises and state-funded organisations should be incorporated into the Electronic Registry and assessed against ASAN Service Index.⁴⁶

2.13. International recognition and experience sharing

ASAN Service is the holder of the United Nations Public Service Award (UNPSA)⁴⁷. In the competition that lasted from November 2014 to May 2015 and applied by several hundreds of initiatives from around the world, the United Nations, through the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, selected ASAN Service for its outstanding achievements as the first-place winner of the UNPSA in the category of "Improving the delivery of public services".

It must be emphasized the Azerbaijan is the first country in the post-Soviet area to have won the first place in this category.

The UNPSA is the most prestigious international recognition of excellence in public service. Its purpose is to reward the creative achievements

ASAN Service Index will allow the decision-makers in Azerbaijan to detect shortcomings in public service delivery and compel responsible ministries and enterprises to take necessary measures to improve the efficiency in this field. It will be the first evaluation index based on objective criteria, which will significantly improve public services and positively affect people's lives and business environment.⁴⁸

and contributions of public service institutions towards a more effective and responsive public administration in countries worldwide. It aims to discover new innovations in governance, motivate public servants to further promote innovations, raise the image of public service, enhance trust in government, and collect and share successful practices for possible replication between and within countries.⁴⁹

The success of ASAN Service in transforming the public service delivery in Azerbaijan resonated at the international level. In their reports international institutions such as the World Bank⁵⁰,

45 The Electronic Registry of Public Services (www.dxr.az) is a unified information portal on all public services (electronic and non-electronic) rendered by all state entities in Azerbaijan. It was developed by SAPSSI in 2015.

46 "Amendments to Presidential Decree 262 of 11 September 2014 on concerning measures on the establishment of the Electronic Registry of services rendered by state entities", *Presidential Decree 934*, 9 June 2016, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://e-qanun.az/framework/33025>

47 "2015 United Nations Public Service Awards Winners Fact Sheet", *United Nations Public Administration Network*, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN94633.pdf>

48 "ASAN Service Index will measure quality of public service delivery", *New York Business Journal*, 28 June 2016, accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.bizjournals.com/newyork/prnewswire/press_releases/Georgia/2016/06/28/NY35211?ana=prnews

49 "About the UNPSA", *United Nations Public Administration Network*, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN93340.pdf>

50 *World Bank Country Partnership Framework for Azerbaijan 2016-2020*, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/748271467998502035/pdf/95860-REVISED-Box385353B-OUO-9-R2015-0122-2.pdf>

UNDP⁵¹, EU⁵² and OECD⁵³ have positively assessed the process of public service modernization in the country and the progressive changes brought by the establishment of ASAN Service.

The benchmarking study entitled “Comparative analysis of centres rendering public and municipal services” conducted by PwC in August 2015 ranked Baku among the top three out of 18 largest cities of the world with the easiest and most comfortable access to public services.⁵⁴

Speaking at the IV Baku International Humanitarian Forum on 2 October 2014, UNDP Administrator Ms. Helen Clark stressed that services provided by ASAN increased the efficiency of public services and reduced opportunities for corruption. She considered this approach as a great success for Azerbaijan, which would be of interest to other countries seeking to modernize their public services.⁵⁵

ASAN Service and its projects “ASAN Pay” and “ASAN Cadre” have been inscribed as best

practices in the United Nations South-South Cooperation Mechanisms and Solution Portal.⁵⁶ The portal provides a single access to practical, easy-to-use development solutions originated in selected regions of the world for transfer and replication worldwide.

The Foreign Affairs magazine described ASAN Service as “a byword in efficiency and transparency”⁵⁷ that has significantly increased public confidence in state bodies and triggered a radical change in the public perception of state administration.

Another foreign media outlet portrayed ASAN Service as “the Government’s reform agenda aimed at simplifying processes, improving the ease of doing business, enhancing transparency while combating corruption in order to service its citizens better”.⁵⁸

Pointing to the wide interest of other countries seeking to modernize their public service delivery systems toward ASAN Service – “Azerbaijan’s brand”⁵⁹ as he put it in one of his public speeches – President Ilham Aliyev expressed readiness to share his country’s experience globally.

51 UNDP Country Programme Document for the Republic of Azerbaijan 2016-2020, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.az.undp.org/content/azerbaijan/en/home/library/undp/CPD.html>

52 Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Azerbaijan. Progress in 2014 and recommendations for actions, accessed October 19, 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/2015/azerbaijan-enp-report-2015_en.pdf

53 Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan. Azerbaijan Progress Update. 12th Monitoring Meeting, 16-18 April 2014, accessed October 19, 2016, <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/AzerbaijanProgressUpdateApril2014ENG.pdf>

54 “Сравнительный анализ центров предоставления государственных и муниципальных услуг”, Benchmarking study by PricewaterhouseCoopers, August 2015, accessed August 14, 2016, <https://www.pwc.ru/ru/governance-risk-compliance/assets/service-survey-report.pdf>

55 Helen Clark: Speech at the IV Baku International Humanitarian Forum”, United Nations Development Programme, 2 October 2014, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/speeches/2014/10/02/helen-clark-speech-at-the-iv-baku-international-humanitarian-forum.html>

56 South-South Cooperation Mechanisms and Solutions, ASAN Service, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://southsouthworld.org/solution/view?id=273>

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57 “A Quantum Leap in Public Service Provision”, Foreign Affairs Magazine, Special Issue, January-February 2015, accessed October 19, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/country-focus/Azerbaijan-2020-turning-strength-into-sustainability>

58 “Azerbaijan cracks down on corruption, cuts bureaucracy and improves government services with wide-ranging initiative”, PRNewswire, 22 April 2013, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/azerbaijan-cracks-down-on-corruption-cuts-bureaucracy-and-improves-government-services-with-wide-ranging-initiative-204065551.html>

59 “Closing speech by Ilham Aliyev at the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers dedicated to the results of socio-economic development in 2015 and objectives for the future”, Official website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 10 January 2016, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://en.president.az/articles/17442>

Turning this statement into action, SAPSSI actively cooperates with similar government agencies of other countries.

Such interaction has already yielded concrete results. Thus, SAPSSI and the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in establishing advanced public service delivery

mechanism on 12 July 2016 in Kabul. The document creates a legal framework for transferring Azerbaijan's relevant expertise and knowledge to Afghanistan and envisages concrete measures to that end⁶⁰. It should be noted that a homonymous entity – "Asan Khedmat" – has been instituted lately in Afghanistan.⁶¹

⁶⁰"Azerbaijan's "ASAN Xidmet" model to be applied in Afghanistan", *Azerbaijan State News Agency – AzerTac*, accessed October 19, 2016, http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijans__quotASAN_Xidmet_quot_model_to_be_applied_in_Afghanistan-971014

⁶¹ *Homepage of Afghanistan's "Asan Khedmat"*, accessed October 19, 2016, www.asan.gov.af

CHAPTER III: LESSONS LEARNED

The achievements of ASAN Service in reshaping the public service delivery and cultivating a new culture of “civil servant - citizen” relations in Azerbaijan did not happen overnight. There have been a number of challenges to be addressed in order to lay a solid ground for a viable OSS. The most outstanding ones can be summarized as follows:

- *Although applying an OSS mechanism in the public service delivery was not new in the international practice at the time of the establishment of ASAN Service, elaborating a country-tailored concept for Azerbaijan was a serious task. The issues that needed to be addressed by the masterminds of ASAN Service included forming a citizen-centric system in conformity with national governance specificities, retaining services of public entities and thus preventing unemployment, avoiding overlaps in public services among them, bringing public and private institutions under a single structural framework, etc.*
- *Rather than overhauling the then existing system overnight, the leadership of Azerbaijan took an evolutionary approach to modernizing the public service delivery in the country. ASAN Service started as a pilot project with a limited number of services and service providers by gradually expanding centres and services in the subsequent years. This led to incremental development by preserving flexibility and agility and reducing a risk of system failure. Furthermore, it allowed to better analyse and rectify certain drawbacks while planning future steps.*
- *Developing adequate human capacities in order to sustain the system was another challenge. The then new staff, in particular those seconded by service providing entities where serious deficiencies with efficient delivery of public services remained, were not professionally mature enough to work under new conditions. It took perseverance to establish an effective human resources management system and raise a new generation of civil servants devoid of corrupt mentality.*

- *The crucial role of applying innovations and advanced technologies with the aim of improving the efficiency of public services is an undeniable fact. As a constellation of alternative public services, which are also rendered independently by service providing entities, ASAN Service constantly strives to perfect its procedures and working methods in order to keep on being of interest to the public and stay ahead of its expectations.*

The process of modernizing public service delivery is pre-conditioned by problems that are mostly common for all states. Azerbaijan was no exception too. Looking at the path covered by the country in the last four years, one can definitely observe cardinal conceptual and practical changes in public services. The pace and scale of this transformation in the public service delivery, which started with the introduction of the ASAN Service model in mid-2012 – another incarnation of the OSS principle – is formidable.

From the perspective of this case study, which by no means intends to advocate the “one-size-fits-all” approach, there are a number of factors that underpin a successful public service delivery mechanism based on the OSS principle.

The following actions are considered to be the cornerstone of an efficient OSS public service delivery mechanism:

- *Identifying a proper **conceptual foundation** to ensure a citizen-centric mechanism based on good governance;*
- *Elaborating a **sound strategy and tailor-made resilient implementation programmes** based on states’ specificities that include several elements, such as geography, population, economy, etc.*
- *Galvanizing **vigorous political will** at the highest level to ensure the continuity and inclusiveness of the transformation process.*

- Forging **collaborative partnerships**, such as Public-Private Partnership, youth engagement, volunteerism.
- **Being innovative** to raise the efficiency of public services and their delivery processes by applying social innovations and advanced ICT, while keeping in mind that ICT is an innovation driver rather than an innovation itself.
- Ensuring **public participation** to learn strengths and weaknesses, to identify and

respond to the public's needs and expectations and to gauge the effectiveness of work.

- Developing **tangible capacities**, such as institutional, human and operational.
- Applying effective **measurement and assessment tools** to guarantee the efficiency of public services.

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The ACSH is a multilateral institutional platform for the continuous exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of civil service development, aiming at supporting governments in the region through fostering partnerships, capacity building and peer-to-peer learning development activities; and evidence-based solutions, informed by a comprehensive research agenda. The geographical range of participants stretches from the North America and Europe, through the CIS, the Caucasus and Central Asia to ASEAN countries, demonstrating that partnership for civil service excellence is a constant and universal need for all nations.

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