

Grievance Redress Mechanism in the Public Sector of Sri Lanka: A Literature Review and Policy Analysis

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Abstract

Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) have emerged as critical instruments for strengthening accountability, transparency, and citizen trust in public administration. This article critically examines the conceptual foundations, institutional frameworks, and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of GRMs in Sri Lanka's local public sector. It synthesizes the global and regional scholarship on GRMs with a policy analysis of national frameworks, drawing on international best practices (World Bank, UNDP) and national guidelines. The study highlights both the promise and the limitations of current mechanisms. Findings reveal that while GRM's provisions have been institutionalized through citizen charters, ombudsperson offices, and project-based grievance systems, implementation remains uneven. Persistent deficits in accessibility, timeliness, documentation, and data-driven learning due to political interference, resource constraints, and limited citizen awareness. Comparative insights suggest that Sri Lanka's GRM landscape lags behind global participatory governance models, particularly in monitoring, evaluation, and feedback integration. The analysis emphasizes the need for institutional strengthening, digital innovations, participatory oversight mechanisms, and the adoption of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure accountability and responsiveness. By bridging literature and policy analysis, this study contributes to ongoing debates on governance reform and offers actionable pathways for enhancing GRM's effectiveness in Sri Lanka's public sector.

Keywords: Grievance Redress Mechanism, Public Sector Governance, Administrative Justice, Citizen Participation, Public Accountability, Local Government

1. Introduction

Governance reform has emerged as a central theme in contemporary public administration, particularly in societies recovering from conflict and striving to rebuild trust between citizens and the state. In such contexts, Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) are increasingly recognized as essential instruments for strengthening accountability, transparency, and participatory governance (Pande & Hossain, 2022). GRMs provide structured channels through which citizens can voice concerns, seek remedies, and hold institutions accountable for service delivery. They are not merely administrative tools but integral components of democratization and institutional legitimacy. Citizens today increasingly demand greater accountability for service delivery, transparency in administrative decisions, and accessible avenues to resolve grievances when public bodies fail to meet expectations (UNDP, 2016). Such grievances may include service delays, discrimination, misallocation of resources, to procedural unfairness and lack of feedback. Institutionalized GRMs enable citizens to articulate these concerns, compel authorities to respond, and help identify underlying service delivery problems to be identified and remedied (World Bank, 2022). Moreover, they function as early warning systems for systemic issues, helping to avert escalation into larger conflicts or litigation (UN REDD, 2021).

Sri Lanka presents a compelling case for examining GRMs within the public sector. The local government sector in Sri Lanka, given its diverse and multi-layered nature (urban, rural, multi-ethnic), presents unique challenges and opportunities for GRM design: accessibility in remote areas, language and ethnicity barriers, resource constraints, and varying levels of institutional capacity. In addition, following decades of civil conflict, the country has embarked on multiple governance reforms aimed at consolidating peace, fostering reconciliation, and improving service delivery. The Northern and Eastern Provinces, which bore the brunt of the conflict, remain particularly sensitive to issues of trust, equity, and citizen engagement. In these regions, the effectiveness of GRMs is not only a matter of administrative efficiency but also of political stability and social cohesion. Yet, despite their importance, GRMs in Sri Lanka's public sector remain under-researched, under-utilized, and inconsistently implemented.

Globally, institutions such as the World Bank (2013) and UNDP (2019) have emphasized the role of GRMs in enhancing development outcomes. They argue that effective grievance systems reduce corruption, improve service delivery, and empower marginalized communities. In South Asia, countries such as India and Bangladesh have experimented with citizen charters, ombudsperson offices, and digital complaint systems, offering valuable lessons for Sri Lanka. However, the Sri Lankan experience has been marked by fragmented initiatives, often tied to donor-funded projects rather than embedded within the institutional fabric of public administration.

The policy landscape in Sri Lanka includes citizen charters, ombudsperson offices, Local Government Public Redress System (LGPRM-PRS), and project-specific grievance systems such as those introduced under the Smallholder Agribusiness and Resilience Project (SARP, 2023). While these initiatives recognize the importance of GRMs, they face several limitations. Political interference, resource constraints, lack of citizen awareness, and weak monitoring mechanisms undermine their effectiveness. Moreover, the absence of a coherent national framework for grievance

redress means that practices vary widely across institutions, leading to inconsistent and inequitable outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, GRMs can be situated within the broader discourse on participatory governance and accountability. Scholars such as Pande and Hossain (2022) argue that grievance systems embody the principles of responsiveness and inclusivity, which are central to modern public administration. They provide a counterbalance to bureaucratic inertia and create opportunities for citizens to influence decision-making. In post-conflict societies, GRMs acquire additional significance as they contribute to reconciliation by offering nonviolent avenues for addressing grievances.

Despite these theoretical and practical imperatives, the Sri Lankan literature on GRMs remains sparse. Existing studies tend to focus on sector-specific initiatives, such as health or education, without offering a comprehensive analysis of the policy framework. Furthermore, there is limited engagement with global best practices, leaving a gap in comparative understanding. This article seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing the available literature and conducting a policy analysis of GRMs in Sri Lanka's public sector.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to provide a systematic literature review of global, regional, and national perspectives on GRMs, highlighting key themes, debates, and gaps. Second, it undertakes a policy analysis of Sri Lanka's public sector frameworks, examining the institutional arrangements, challenges, and opportunities for reform. Third, it seeks to generate policy recommendations that are both contextually grounded and informed by international best practices. By doing so, the article contributes to ongoing debates on governance reform and offers actionable pathways for enhancing GRM effectiveness in Sri Lanka.

The significance of this study lies in its dual focus on literature and policy. While many existing works emphasize either theoretical debates or empirical case studies, this article bridges the two by linking scholarly insights with practical policy analysis. This approach is particularly relevant for Sri Lanka, where

governance reforms must be both theoretically sound and practically feasible. Moreover, by situating the analysis within the post-conflict context of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, the study underscores the political and social dimensions of grievance redress, moving beyond purely administrative concerns.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) in Public Administration

Grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) in public administration are formalized systems that allow individuals or groups to raise concerns, complaints or grievances about public service delivery, administrative decisions or policy implementation, and obtain remedial action or feedback (Pande & Hossain, 2022; World Bank, 2022). The definition emphasizes that a GRM is not merely a suggestion box but an institutional channel embedded in governance processes: it must receive, process, respond and learn from grievances, providing a constructive feedback loop between citizens and public institutions (World Bank, 2022). According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), an effective GRM “provides a continuous, constructive feedback loop between people and institutions or programme administrators” (ADB, n.d.). Similarly, the Stakeholder Participation Guide highlights that GRMs serve as early-warning systems for recurring or systemic problems and ensure rights protection and accountability (UN REDD, 2021).

In the public sector context, GRMs serve multiple functions: they enable responsiveness, enhance legitimacy, contribute to service improvement, and strengthening of social accountability arrangements. They differ from general feedback mechanisms in that a grievance involves an expectation of redress and resolution, not just an input or suggestion (UN REDD, 2021). Within local public services, GRMs may take various forms, public relation counter, complaint desks, complaint box, ombudsman referrals, digital portals, hotline services, citizen charters and appeal boards. Their core features include accessibility, fairness, transparency, responsiveness and the ability to produce learning and system improvements.

2.2 Analytical Dimensions of

GRM Effectiveness (Accessibility, Timeliness, Fairness, Learning)

In assessing the effectiveness of GRMs in the public sector, four analytical dimensions are especially salient: accessibility, timeliness, fairness, and learning.

Accessibility refers to the ability of citizens to access the grievance redress channel easily: low literacy, linguistic barriers, cost of submission, geographical outreach, awareness of the mechanism all affect accessibility (Stakeholder Participation Guide, UN REDD, 2021). If users cannot access the mechanism, the theoretical benefits of GRMs cannot be realized.

Timeliness addresses how swiftly grievances are processed, resolved or responded to. Delays erode credibility and reduce citizen trust. The Stakeholder Participation Guide observes that effective GRMs should be “responsive, and process grievances in an efficient and timely manner”. (UN REDD, 2021).

Fairness involves impartial treatment, transparency of process and outcomes, non-discrimination, and protection from reprisals. A grievance mechanism that appears biased or opaque undermines legitimacy. The literature emphasizes that GRMs must ensure credibility and independence (Hossain, 2023; Pande & Hossain, 2022).

Learning refers to the mechanism’s ability not only to resolve individual complaints but also to feed back into system improvements: to identify recurring issues, generate data, enable amendments in policy or service models and thereby improve institutional responsiveness (World Bank, 2022; Hossain, 2023). Without learning-loops, GRMs risk becoming symbolic rather than functional.

In public sector settings, these four dimensions serve as a useful analytical framework for comparing design and implementation of GRMs. They provide criteria for evaluating how well the mechanisms function and what enablers or constraints may exist.

2.3 Global Perspectives on Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs)

Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) have become central to governance discourse worldwide, particularly in development and

public administration. International organizations such as the World Bank, 2013) and UNDP, 2019) emphasize GRMs as accountability tools that enhance transparency, reduce corruption, and foster citizen trust. They argue that effective grievance systems are not merely complaint-handling procedures but integral to participatory governance. Globally, GRMs are embedded in diverse contexts:

- Development projects: The World Bank requires GRMs in all major projects to ensure community concerns are addressed (World Bank, 2013).
 - Public service delivery: GRMs are used to monitor responsiveness in sectors such as local government, health, education, and infrastructure (Pande & Hossain, 2022).
 - Digital innovations: Countries like Estonia and South Korea have pioneered e-GRM platforms, enabling real-time citizen feedback and reducing bureaucratic delays (UNDP, 2019).
- Scholars highlight several theoretical underpinnings:
- Accountability theory: GRMs operationalize vertical accountability by empowering citizens to hold institutions responsible (Fox, 2015).
 - Participatory governance: GRMs embody inclusivity, ensuring marginalized voices are heard (Cornwall, 2008).
 - Conflict resolution: In fragile states, GRMs provide non-violent avenues for addressing grievances, contributing to peacebuilding (World Bank, 2013).

Despite these advances, global literature identifies persistent challenges: weak institutional capacity, political resistance, and limited citizen awareness. Comparative studies suggest that while GRMs are widely adopted, their effectiveness depends on contextual adaptation and sustained political will (Pande & Hossain, 2022).

International Experience in Local-Level GRMs (Municipal Services)

Globally, grievance redress mechanisms have become integral to public-sector accountability and citizen-centric service delivery. In many countries, **local government** institutions have established systematic approaches to complaint handling as part of broader governance reforms

promoting transparency and performance management (World Bank, 2022).

In OECD countries, municipal GRMs are embedded within e-governance architectures. For instance, the United Kingdom's Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman provides a two-tier complaint review, first by the local authority, then by an independent ombudsman. Annual reports are publicly available and analyzed for systemic improvements (LGO, 2023). Similarly, in Canada, municipalities such as Toronto employ integrated "311" hotlines and digital dashboards that log, route, and track complaints, linking them to service standards and performance indicators (City of Toronto, 2022).

In Scandinavian systems, the focus lies on administrative fairness and learning. Denmark's and Sweden's ombudsman institutions conduct not only case-based redress but also issue thematic recommendations to local agencies (Petersson, 2020). New Zealand's local authorities operate Customer Complaint Resolution Policies guided by the Office of the Ombudsman's Good Administration Principles (Office of the Ombudsman NZ, 2021).

In developing-country contexts, donor-funded programmes have promoted GRMs within decentralization and service-delivery initiatives. For instance, the Philippines' Citizen Feedback Mechanism (Bayanihan GRM) and Indonesia's LAPOR! platform integrate complaints from citizens through SMS, web, and mobile apps, automatically forwarding them to responsible agencies (ADB, 2020). These systems demonstrate how technological enablers improve access and traceability while strengthening performance monitoring.

Evidence suggests that where municipal GRMs are anchored in clear legislation, adequately resourced, and supported by leadership commitment, complaint resolution rates and citizen satisfaction improve substantially (World Bank, 2022; OECD, 2021). Conversely, where redress remains fragmented or politicized, citizen trust declines. Comparative reviews highlight institutional maturity, defined by procedural clarity, feedback culture, and integration with planning, as a decisive factor for success (Petersson, 2020).

For Sri Lanka, these international models underscore the importance of embedding GRMs into both service-delivery systems and governance frameworks rather than treating them as add-on compliance measures.

2.4 Regional Insights: South Asia and Post-Conflict Governance

South Asian countries offer a rich landscape for examining GRMs, given its diverse governance structures and socio-political challenges. Countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal have experimented and offering valuable comparative lessons with citizen charters, ombudsman offices, and project-based grievance systems.

India: The Right to Information Act, Public Service Guarantee Acts and citizen charters institutionalize grievance redress (e.g., Madhya Pradesh 2010; Bihar 2011) make timely delivery of local services a statutory obligation (Paul & Sharma, 2017), with grievance appeal rights and penalties for non-compliance, though implementation varies across states (Singh, 2016). The Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) enables citizens to lodge complaints online, including for local-body issues, with performance data publicly disclosed. Evaluation reports show improvements in resolution timeliness but persistent issues with quality of responses and low citizen feedback loops (Government of India, 2021).

Bangladesh: GRMs are integrated into social protection programs, but political patronage often undermines their credibility (Rahman, 2018). The Access to Information (a2i) programme has digitized grievance processes in union councils through the Integrated Service Delivery model. Citizens can register complaints via mobile apps or service centers, receiving a tracking ID and SMS updates (World Bank, 2020). Nonetheless, socio-cultural hierarchies, low awareness, and limited women's participation constrain utilization (Hossain, 2023).

Pakistan's Citizen Portal, launched in 2018, serves as a smartphone-based interface linking local authorities with federal oversight. Over

three million grievances were reported within two years, with reported resolution rates of > 80 %, yet independent audits found limited verification of outcomes (Government of Pakistan, 2021).

Nepal: Post-conflict governance reforms emphasize community mediation and grievance systems to rebuild trust (Shrestha, 2017). Nepal has introduced GRMs within its newly federalized governance structure, but overlapping jurisdictions between municipalities and provincial ministries have diluted accountability (Ghimire & Subedi, 2021).

Common patterns across South Asia include:

- Over-centralization of digital complaint systems that may bypass local feedback and learning,
- Political interference in redress prioritization,
- Inadequate institutional capacity for data management and root-cause analysis,
- Gender, literacy, and language barriers affecting accessibility (Hossain, 2023; Paul & Sharma, 2017).

However, regional evidence also demonstrates innovations, such as community mediation in Nepal or social-audit forums in India, that integrate grievance redress into participatory governance. These initiatives highlight that cultural adaptation and social legitimacy are as important as technology or procedure. For Sri Lanka, aligning local GRMs with these contextual realities, particularly through decentralized but networked structures, could enhance performance and inclusiveness.

Regional literature underscores further several themes:

- Donor influence: Many GRMs are donor-driven, raising questions about sustainability once external funding ends (Rahman, 2018).
- Institutional fragmentation: Multiple overlapping grievance systems create confusion and dilute accountability (Singh, 2016).
- Citizen participation: Awareness campaigns and civil society engagement are critical for GRM effectiveness (Shrestha, 2017).

South Asia's experience highlights the tension between formal institutional design and informal political realities. While GRMs are formally mandated, their success often hinges on local power dynamics and community trust. This

resonates strongly with Sri Lanka's post-conflict context, where institutional reforms must navigate entrenched political structures and ethnic sensitivities.

2.5 Sri Lankan Context: GRMs in the Public Sector - Legal, Policy, and Institutional Landscape

2.5.1 Statutory and Policy Architecture for GRMs in Local Authorities

Sri Lanka's public administration operates under a unitary yet devolved governance framework established by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which created provincial councils and strengthened the local government tier (Wickramasinghe & Gunatilleke, 2021). Local Authorities, composing municipal councils, urban councils, and pradeshiya sabhas, derive their mandates from the Municipal Councils Ordinance (1947), Urban Councils Ordinance (1939), and Pradeshiya Sabha Act No. 15 of 1987. These statutes empower councils to deliver services and address citizen complaints, petitions, and representations (Ministry of Public Administration [MOPA], 2019).

At the national level, Public Administration Circular No. 15/2009 formalized complaint-handling procedures, requiring designated officers and grievance registers. The National Policy on Citizen Charters (2012) further mandated service standards, disclosure obligations, and feedback channels, explicitly recognizing grievance redress as a core element of performance management (MOPA, 2019).

The Right to Information (RTI) Act No. 12 of 2016 reinforced transparency by granting citizens the right to request information and appeal refusals through the RTI Commission, indirectly strengthening GRMs by requiring disclosure of complaint outcomes (Jayasinghe & Perera, 2019). The Administrative Appeals Act No. 4 of 2002, though rarely invoked locally, provides an overarching statutory route for challenging administrative determinations.

Collectively, these laws and policies demonstrate a multi-layered and hybrid GRM architecture. Yet implementation remains inconsistent: weak monitoring, limited citizen awareness, and resource constraints hinder institutionalization (Wickramasinghe et al., 2022).

2.5.2 Institutional Actors and Interfaces

Sri Lanka's grievance-handling ecosystem involves multiple actors across national, provincial, and local levels. Local Authorities serve as frontline institutions, receiving complaints on waste collection, taxation, and infrastructure. Compliance with grievance registers and reporting varies, often depending on institutional capacity, leadership and commitment (MOPCLG, 2020).

At the national level, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), established under Article 156 of the Constitution, provides an independent avenue for redress. Though decisions are recommendatory, they exert moral and administrative pressure (Fernando, 2021). The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), empowered under Act No. 21 of 1996, investigates rights violations and overlaps with GRMs functions, particularly in cases of administrative discrimination (Gunatilleke, 2020).

Oversight bodies such as the National Audit Office highlight unresolved grievances and irregularities in audit reports (Auditor General's Department, 2022). The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) provides escalation for misconduct-related grievances. RTI mechanisms further interconnect citizen information requests with complaint resolution (Jayasinghe & Perera, 2019).

Despite this multiplicity, the system remains fragmented, with overlaps and jurisdictional ambiguities between Ombudsman, HRCSL, and ministerial complaint desks (Fernando, 2021). Strengthening coordination, standardizing procedures, and sharing data across institutions would improve efficiency and citizen trust.

2.5.3 Administrative Processes and Digital/ Hotline Channels in Local Service Delivery

Operationally, local authorities have adopted administrative processes to institutionalize grievance redress. The Citizen Charter initiative, piloted in 1999 and formalized in 2012, requires each local authority to display service standards, designated officers, and complaint channels to be publicly displayed (MOPA, 2019). Yet audits reveal the charters set performance timelines for

services such as issuance of permits, waste disposal and assessment taxes, thereby creating measurable expectations. Many urban councils maintain on-site complaint desks or public-relations units, while smaller pradeshiya sabhas often rely on manual registers and suggestion boxes (Auditor General's Department, 2022).

Digital transformation has added new channels for grievance submission. The Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), under the Digital Government Policy (2018), launched portals such as Lanka Gate and gov.lk contact forms, linking citizens directly with ministries and local offices (ICTA, 2021). Some local authorities use dedicated e-mail addresses or WhatsApp numbers for complaints, though adoption is uneven due to infrastructure gaps and limited digital literacy (Perera & Herath, 2022). The "Tell the President" Hotline (1919) and the Public Administration Complaint Hotline (1955) provide centralized intake channels for citizen grievances nationwide.

Critically, Sri Lanka's GRM processes remain compliance-oriented rather than outcome-driven. The absence of performance metrics, feedback loops, and integrated databases limits systemic learning. As Pande and Hossain (2022) argue, effective GRMs require not only procedural access but measurable responsiveness and citizen satisfaction.

Sri Lanka's governance reforms have increasingly recognized the importance of GRMs, particularly in the aftermath of civil conflict. The Northern and Eastern Provinces, which experienced prolonged violence, present unique challenges for grievance redress. GRM landscape demonstrates a strong statutory base but weak operationalization. The literature highlights a gap between policy design and practice, echoing regional experiences where donor-driven or fragmented systems falter without institutional coordination (Rahman, 2018; Shrestha, 2017). Future reforms must shift emphasis from procedural compliance to measurable responsiveness, citizen satisfaction, and integrated monitoring.

2.5.4 Summary of Institutional Landscape of Sri Lanka

Key GRM initiatives:

- **Citizen charters:** Mandated in public institutions to provide service standards and complaint mechanisms (Ministry of Public Administration, 2015).
- **Ombudsman office:** Established to address administrative grievances, though limited in reach and resources (Fernando, 2019).
- **Project-based GRMs:** Initiatives such as the LGPRM, PRS in Local Government, and the Smallholder Agribusiness and Resilience Project (SARP, 2023) include grievance systems to handle community concerns.

Challenges

- **Political interference:** Local elites often manipulate grievance systems for patronage (Fernando, 2019).
- **Resource constraints:** Many institutions lack trained staff and adequate funding (Ministry of Health, 2023).
- **Citizen awareness:** Limited knowledge of grievance procedures reduces utilization (SARP, 2023).
- **Monitoring gaps:** Absence of systematic evaluation undermines accountability (Pande & Hossain, 2022).

Theoretical Fit

Sri Lanka's GRM experience can be analyzed through accountability and participatory governance frameworks. While citizen charters embody responsiveness, their weak enforcement reflects the gap between theory and practice. In post-conflict regions, GRMs acquire added significance as tools for reconciliation, yet their potential remains underutilized.

Literature Gap

Existing Sri Lankan studies are fragmented, focusing on sector-specific initiatives rather than offering a comprehensive policy analysis. There is limited engagement with global best practices, leaving a gap in comparative understanding. This article seeks to fill that gap by synthesizing literature and analyzing policy frameworks.

Synthesis and Conceptual Gaps

Across global, regional, and Sri Lankan contexts, several themes emerge:

- GRMs are widely recognized as accountability tools but suffer from weak institutionalization.

- Donor-driven initiatives risk sustainability challenges.
- Citizen participation and awareness are critical yet often neglected.
- Post-conflict contexts require GRMs to serve both administrative and reconciliation functions. The literature reveals a clear gap: while GRMs are conceptually robust, their practical implementation in Sri Lanka remains inconsistent. This underscores the need for policy analysis that bridges theory and practice, situating Sri Lanka's experience within global and regional debates.

3. Policy Analysis Framework

3.1 Introduction to Policy Analysis

Policy analysis provides a structured lens for evaluating the design, implementation, and effectiveness of grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs). In the Sri Lankan public sector, GRMs are embedded within citizen charters, ombudsman offices, and project-based initiatives. However, their institutionalization remains fragmented. By applying comparative insights from global best practices, particularly those promoted by the World Bank (2013), UNDP (2019), and regional experiences, this section evaluates Sri Lanka's policy landscape and identifies pathways for reform.

3.2 Policy Landscape in Sri Lanka

Citizen Charters

Introduced in the mid-2000s, citizen charters were designed to enhance service delivery by specifying standards and providing grievance channels (Ministry of Public Administration, 2015). While conceptually aligned with accountability frameworks, their enforcement has been weak. Many institutions display charters but fail to operationalize complaint-handling procedures.

Ombudsman Office

Sri Lanka's ombudsman office, established under constitutional provisions, serves as a formal grievance redress institution. However, its centralized, limited jurisdiction, bureaucratic delays, and lack of resources constrain effectiveness (Fernando, 2019).

Project-Based GRMs

Donor-funded projects such as the LGPRM and PRS in local government sector introduced to address service delivery issues, including mechanism front-desk, hotlines, SMS services and complaint boxes. The Smallholder Agribusiness and Resilience Project (SARP, 2023) further tailored GRMs to community concerns through grievance committees, hotlines and complaint boxes. While effective in project contexts, these remain isolated from broader institutional frameworks, and sectoral coverage is uneven.

Sectoral Guidelines

The Ministry of Health (2023) has issued guidelines for community engagement and grievance redress in health services. Comparable policies are absent in other critical sectors such as education and local government.

3.3 Implementation Challenges

- **Political Interference:** Local elites often manipulate grievance systems for patronage, undermining impartiality (Fernando, 2019).
- **Resource Constraints:** Many institutions lack trained staff, adequate funding, and digital infrastructure to manage grievances effectively (Ministry of Health, 2023).
- **Citizen Awareness:** Limited knowledge of grievance procedures reduces utilization. Surveys show many citizens remains unaware of their rights under citizen charters (Pande & Hossain, 2022).
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Absence of systematic monitoring mechanisms prevents accountability. Unlike global best practices, Sri Lanka lacks standardized indicators for GRM performance.

3.4 Comparative Lens: Global Best Practices World Bank Standards

The World Bank mandates GRMs in all major development projects, emphasizing accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness (World Bank, 2013). Key features include multiple entry points (hotlines, online portals, in-person offices), time-bound resolution procedures and independent monitoring and reporting.

UNDP Frameworks

UNDP promotes GRMs as part of participatory governance reforms. Their model emphasizes inclusivity, ensuring marginalized groups can access grievance systems (UNDP, 2019).

Digital Innovations

Countries such as South Korea and Estonia have pioneered e-GRM platforms, enabling real-time complaint tracking and reducing bureaucratic delays (UNDP, 2019).

Regional Comparisons

- **India:** Citizen charters and Right to Information Act institutionalize grievance redress, though unevenly implemented (Singh, 2016).
- **Bangladesh:** GRMs in social protection programs highlight donor influence but face sustainability challenges (Rahman, 2018).
- **Nepal:** Community mediation mechanisms integrate grievance redress into peacebuilding (Shrestha, 2017).

3.5 Comparative Analysis - Sri Lanka vs. Global Best Practices

Table 1: Comparative Analysis

Dimension	Sri Lanka	Global Best Practices	Gap/Opportunity
Accessibility	Citizen ombudsman, project GRMs	Multiple entry points, digital platforms	Expand digital and multi-channel access
Responsiveness	Delays, weak enforcement mechanisms	Time-bound resolution standards	Introduce clear timelines
Inclusivity	Limited awareness, urban bias	Targeted outreach to marginalized groups	Awareness campaigns
Monitoring	Weak evaluation mechanisms	Independent monitoring, public reporting	Develop standardized indicators
Sustainability	Donor-driven, fragmented initiatives	Institutionalized and nationally embedded frameworks	National GRM policy

3.6 Policy Implications

- **Institutional Strengthening:** Sri Lanka must move beyond fragmented initiatives toward a coherent national GRM policy. This requires empowering the ombudsman office, standardizing citizen charters, and integrating project-based GRMs into institutional frameworks.
- **Digital Transformation:** Adopting e-GRM platforms can enhance accessibility and transparency. Lessons from South Korea and Estonia demonstrate the potential of digital systems to reduce delays and improve citizen trust.
- **Citizen Awareness and Participation:** Launch awareness campaigns, civil society engagement, and participatory monitoring are essential.

Without citizen buy-in, GRMs risk becoming symbolic rather than functional.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Developing standardized indicators and independent monitoring mechanisms can enhance accountability. Public reporting of grievance outcomes would strengthen transparency.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's GRM policy landscape reflects both progress and limitations. While citizen charters, ombudsman offices, and project-based initiatives demonstrate recognition of grievance redress, their fragmented implementation undermines effectiveness. Comparative insights from global best practices highlight the need for institutional strengthening, digital transformation, citizen

awareness, and robust monitoring. By aligning with international standards while addressing local realities, Sri Lanka can enhance GRM effectiveness and contribute to governance reform in its post-conflict context.

4. Sri Lankan Studies: Coverage, Methods, and Findings on Resolution, Satisfaction, Equity Empirical scholarship on grievance redress within Sri Lanka's local public sector remains limited but growing. Most studies analyze GRMs as part of broader governance or public-service-delivery reforms.

Gunatilleke (2020) examined accountability institutions and found that local-authority complaint desks often lacked formal protocols, leading to inconsistent documentation and follow-up. Only 37 % of surveyed councils maintained active complaint registers. Wickramasinghe et al. (2022) investigated performance management under the Citizen Charter Policy and observed that, while awareness among staff had improved, citizens remained largely unaware of complaint rights or timelines.

A mixed-methods study by Perera and Herath (2022) on e-governance adoption revealed that digital complaint portals at municipal levels increased convenience but suffered from weak integration with back-office processes, resulting in delayed responses. Quantitative data from 12 local authorities showed that 68 % of complaints were acknowledged within 48 hours, but only 45 % were resolved within official time limits.

Jayasinghe and Perera (2019) analyzed the RTI Act's contribution to grievance redress and found it had an indirect but significant impact on transparency: citizens who sought information about their complaints often triggered faster administrative action.

At a micro level, case studies in Municipal Council and Pradeshiya Sabha indicate that grievance categories are dominated by waste management, building-approval, and property-tax issues. Satisfaction surveys report moderate trust in complaint handling (mean = 3.2 / 5), but citizens express concerns about bureaucratic delays and lack of feedback (MOPCLG, 2020).

Gender and social-equity aspects are under researched. Preliminary assessments suggest that women and low-income groups face

disproportionate barriers in lodging complaints due to social norms and cost of travel (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2021). Moreover, the absence of standardized indicators, such as average time to resolution or appeal success rate, makes comparison across councils difficult.

In terms of methodology, local studies employ descriptive surveys, interviews with administrators, and content analysis of complaint records rather than experimental or longitudinal designs. This reflects both data limitations and the nascent research culture around administrative justice.

Overall, Sri Lankan evidence portrays a functioning but underperforming GRM landscape: legal and institutional frameworks exist, but effectiveness is constrained by limited capacity, citizen awareness, and feedback mechanisms. Yet, incremental progress - digitalization, RTI linkages, and Charter compliance—shows potential for transformation if systematized.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction to Findings

The synthesis of literature and policy analysis reveals that grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) in Sri Lanka's public sector are simultaneously promising and problematic. On one hand, institutional frameworks such as citizen charters, ombudsman offices, and project-based GRMs demonstrate recognition of the importance of grievance redress. On the other hand, weak enforcement, political interference, and limited citizen awareness undermine their effectiveness. This section integrates global, regional, and Sri Lankan perspectives to provide a nuanced understanding of GRM effectiveness, highlighting key findings and their implications for governance reform.

4.2 Key Findings

4.2.1 Institutional Recognition but Weak Implementation

Sri Lanka has formally recognized GRMs through citizen charters and ombudsman offices. However, implementation remains inconsistent. Many institutions display charters without operationalizing complaint-handling procedures, and the ombudsman office suffers from

bureaucratic delays and limited jurisdiction (Fernando, 2019).

4.2.2 Donor-Driven Initiatives and Sustainability Concerns

Project-based GRMs, such as those under the Smallholder Agribusiness and Resilience Project (SARP, 2023), demonstrate effectiveness in localized contexts. Yet, their sustainability is questionable once donor funding ends. This mirrors regional experiences in Bangladesh and Nepal, where donor-driven grievance systems struggled to survive beyond project cycles (Rahman, 2018; Shrestha, 2017).

4.2.3 Citizen Awareness and Participation Gaps

Limited citizen knowledge of grievance procedures reduces utilization. Surveys indicate that many citizens are unaware of their rights under citizen charters (Pande & Hossain, 2022). This gap highlights the need for awareness campaigns and participatory monitoring.

4.2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation Deficits

Sri Lanka lacks standardized indicators for GRM performance. Unlike global best practices, grievance outcomes are rarely reported publicly, undermining transparency and accountability (World Bank, 2013).

4.3 Comparative Insights

4.3.1 Global Best Practices

Global models emphasize accessibility, responsiveness, inclusivity, and monitoring. For example, the World Bank mandates multiple entry points, time-bound resolution, and independent monitoring (World Bank, 2013). UNDP frameworks stress inclusivity, ensuring marginalized groups can access grievance systems (UNDP, 2019).

4.3.2 Regional Lessons

South Asian experiences highlight donor influence, institutional fragmentation, and the importance of citizen participation. India's Right to Information Act demonstrates the potential of legal frameworks, while Bangladesh's social protection GRMs reveal sustainability challenges (Singh, 2016; Rahman, 2018).

4.3.3 Sri Lanka's Position

Sri Lanka's GRM landscape lags behind global standards. While institutional recognition exists, weak implementation, limited awareness, and monitoring deficits create significant gaps.

4.4 Cross-Cutting Themes: Inclusion (Gender, Vulnerable Groups), Transparency, and Feedback Loops

Three cross-cutting themes emerge from international and Sri Lankan evidence: inclusion, transparency, and feedback loops.

Inclusion refers to equitable access for women, persons with disabilities, minorities, and economically marginalized groups. Studies show women are less likely to file complaints in formal forums due to fear of reprisal or social stigma (Hossain, 2023; UNDP Sri Lanka, 2021). Best-practice models, such as India's Mahila Grievance Cells and Bangladesh's Union Digital Centers, demonstrate that gender-responsive design, female staff, safe spaces, outreach through community networks, can increase utilization.

Transparency ensures that complaint processes, timeframes, and outcomes are publicly disclosed. The RTI framework in Sri Lanka has improved transparency by mandating disclosure of administrative decisions (Jayasinghe & Perera, 2019). Globally, dashboards such as Indonesia's LAPOR! or Pakistan's Citizen Portal illustrate how open data enhances credibility. However, transparency must be balanced with confidentiality and privacy, particularly for sensitive cases.

Feedback loops convert complaint data into learning. Effective GRMs not only resolve individual grievances but also analyze trends to inform service improvements (World Bank, 2022). In Sri Lanka, feedback mechanisms remain under-developed: only a few councils produce periodic summaries of complaints, and lessons rarely feed into planning cycles (Wickramasinghe et al., 2022). Institutionalizing quarterly complaint reviews and publishing aggregated statistics could close this gap.

In sum, inclusiveness, transparency, and learning are interdependent. Without them, grievance

systems risk becoming tokenistic; with them, they evolve into robust governance tools reinforcing citizen trust and administrative responsiveness.

4.5 Standards and Good Practice Benchmarks

4.5.1 Development-Partner Frameworks for GRMs (design, monitoring, disclosure)

International development partners have established a range of normative frameworks for grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) that guide design, implementation, and monitoring across public institutions and donor-supported projects. The World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) (2018) requires all investment projects to establish functioning GRMs proportionate to risk, with clear procedures for receipt, acknowledgment, assessment, and resolution of complaints. The Bank's guidance emphasizes accessibility, predictability, transparency, and learning as the four pillars of effective redress (World Bank, 2022). Similarly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) mandates its borrowers to maintain project-level GRMs, highlighting disclosure of procedures, timebound responses, and record-keeping for audit (ADB, 2020).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN REDD

frameworks integrate grievance mechanisms within broader social-accountability systems, encouraging participatory design and third-party monitoring (UNDP, 2021). The International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standard 1 further sets out that GRMs must be "culturally appropriate, readily accessible, and free of retribution," requiring periodic disclosure of complaint statistics (IFC, 2019).

Good-practice guidelines emerging from these frameworks converge on several dimensions:

- **Clarity of process** – public disclosure of complaint channels and procedures in accessible language.
- **Responsiveness** – time-bound acknowledgment and feedback mechanisms.
- **Transparency and disclosure** – publication of aggregated data on complaints, resolutions, and lessons learned.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – regular reporting using key performance indicators (KPIs).

- **Integration** – linking grievance data to institutional learning and policy reform.

These development-partner models influence domestic policy in countries such as Sri Lanka through technical assistance and donor conditionalities. For instance, the World Bank-funded Local Government Enhancement Sector Project required each participating council to maintain a GRM with monthly reporting, establishing precedents later incorporated into Sri Lanka's Citizen Charter Policy (MOPA, 2019). The alignment of local administrative systems with these standards thus provides a pathway for institutional strengthening and international benchmarking.

4.5.2 Complaint Handling Guidance (e.g., service standards, SOPs, appeals/escalation)

Across jurisdictions, standard operating procedure (SOP) frameworks codify complaint-handling practices into structured stages: intake, acknowledgment, assessment, investigation, resolution, and appeal. The OECD Good Practice Principles for Public Service Delivery (2021) advocate written procedures specifying responsibilities, timelines, and escalation routes. In the United Kingdom, the Cabinet Office Complaint Standards Framework requires public bodies to acknowledge grievances within 5 working days, provide full responses within 20 days, and offer escalation to the ombudsman (LGO, 2023).

In South Asia, similar models are emerging. India's Public Service Guarantee Acts specify statutory timelines and penalties for delayed service delivery, functioning as enforceable GRMs (Paul & Sharma, 2017). Bangladesh's a2i programme has introduced step-wise complaint workflows integrated with service-quality audits (World Bank, 2020).

For Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Public Administration Circular No. 15/2009 and Citizen Charter Policy (2012) outline comparable standards, acknowledging complaints within 3 days, resolving within 14, and maintaining written records. Escalation paths include the head of the institution, the Ministry Secretary, and finally the Ombudsman.

However, compliance assessments reveal inconsistent documentation and weak appeal handling (Wickramasinghe et al., 2022).

Effective complaint-handling guidance therefore depends on institutional clarity, documentation discipline, and a culture of learning. Codifying SOPs without accountability monitoring risks procedural formality without substantive responsiveness. Integration of digital dashboards and automated escalation reminders, as recommended by the ICTA Digital Government Policy (2018), can reinforce both transparency and timeliness.

4.6 Synthesis and Critical Gaps

4.6.1 Design–Implementation

Gaps: Accessibility, Timeliness, Documentation While Sri Lanka’s policy and legal frameworks for grievance redress are extensive, implementation gaps persist between formal design and practical outcomes. **Accessibility** remains constrained by geographical, linguistic, and digital divides. Many rural citizens are unaware of available mechanisms or face social barriers in approaching officials (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2021). Physical complaint desks exist mainly in municipal and urban councils, and digital options often require internet access beyond the reach of poorer households (Perera & Herath, 2022).

Timeliness of response constitutes a second weakness. Audit reports show that less than half of recorded grievances are resolved within prescribed periods, reflecting bureaucratic inertia, overlapping authority, and lack of dedicated staff (Auditor General’s Department, 2022).

A third issue concerns **documentation and record-keeping**. Despite requirements for registers and periodic reporting, many local authorities maintain ad hoc logs with incomplete fields or no categorization. The absence of digitized systems undermines data reliability and longitudinal analysis. These design–implementation gaps suggest that the existing framework has achieved procedural codification but not behavioral institutionalization. Embedding grievance response performance into annual appraisals and budget incentives could help bridge this divide.

4.6.2 Data, Measurement, and Learning Deficits (KPIs, dashboards, public reporting)

Robust measurement frameworks are essential to transform GRMs from reactive to learning systems. International models employ dashboards that track key indicators such as average resolution time, user satisfaction, appeal rates, and proportion of systemic reforms initiated (World Bank, 2022). In contrast, Sri Lanka’s local authorities rarely compile or publish grievance statistics. Without consistent data, benchmarking across councils and trend analysis remains impossible (Wickramasinghe et al., 2022).

Learning deficits are equally evident. Feedback from complaint analysis seldom informs service-delivery redesign or training curricula. Quarterly grievance reviews are not institutionalized, and there is no central repository aggregating local data. Establishing **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**, for example, percentage of grievances resolved within 14 days, and linking them to performance assessments could incentivize improvement.

Digitized dashboards could further enable transparency through real-time visualization. Drawing from models such as Indonesia’s LAPOR! and Pakistan’s Citizen Portal, Sri Lanka could adopt a unified “Local Grievance Data Hub” to standardize reporting and facilitate public disclosure.

4.6.3 Capacity, Incentives, and Governance Challenges

Human and institutional capacity deficits remain the most significant constraint. Complaint officers are often assigned as additional duties without specialized training in mediation or administrative justice (Gunatilleke, 2020). Limited budget allocations restrict staffing and ICT infrastructure. Incentive structures favor compliance reporting rather than citizen satisfaction, discouraging proactive engagement. Governance challenges include politicization of complaint handling, inconsistent supervision by districts and provincial councils, and lack of independent oversight. Strengthening autonomy, embedding GRM performance into audit frameworks, and mainstreaming training through the Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance (SLILG) would address these gaps. Ultimately,

sustainable improvement requires a shift from procedural obligation to accountability culture, where citizen feedback becomes integral to decision-making.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of GRMs

Dimension	Sri Lanka	Global Practices	Best	Regional Insights	Gap/Opportunity
Accessibility	Citizen charters, ombudsman offices, project-specific GRMs	Multiple entry points, including digital platforms		Mixed approaches; often donor-driven initiatives	Expand digital and multi-channel access
Responsiveness	Delays and weak enforcement mechanisms	Time-bound resolution standards		Variable performance across countries	Introduce clear timelines for grievance resolution
Inclusivity	Limited awareness, urban bias	Targeted outreach to marginalized groups		Civil society engagement plays a critical role	Strengthen awareness and outreach campaigns
Monitoring	Weak evaluation and oversight mechanisms	Independent monitoring with public reporting		Fragmented monitoring systems	Develop standardized indicators and reporting
Sustainability	Donor-driven and fragmented initiatives	Institutionalized and nationally embedded frameworks		Donor dependency common	Establish a coherent national GRM policy

5. Discussion

5.1 Bridging Theory and Practice

The literature emphasizes GRMs as accountability tools, participatory governance instruments, and reconciliation mechanisms (Fox, 2015; Cornwall, 2008). Sri Lanka's policy landscape reflects these theoretical imperatives but struggles with practical implementation. The gap between theory and practice underscores the need for well-coordinated policy, institutional strengthening and citizen engagement.

5.2 Post-Conflict Significance

In the Northern and Eastern Provinces, GRMs acquire added significance as tools for reconciliation. By providing non-violent avenues for addressing grievances, they contribute to rebuilding trust between citizens and the state. However, weak implementation risks exacerbating mistrust and undermining peacebuilding efforts.

5.3 Policy Reform Pathways

Comparative insights suggest several reform pathways:

- Institutional strengthening: Empower the ombudsman office and standardize citizen charters.
- Digital transformation: Adopt e-GRM platforms to enhance accessibility and transparency.
- Citizen awareness: Launch campaigns to educate citizens about grievance procedures.
- Monitoring and evaluation: Develop standardized indicators and independent monitoring mechanisms.

5.4 A Context-Sensitive GRM Effectiveness Model for Sri Lankan Local Authorities

5.4.1 Proposed Logic Model (Inputs–Processes–Outputs–Outcomes)

A context-sensitive model for grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) in Sri Lanka's local authorities must balance the structural realities of decentralized administration with the expectations of citizen-centric governance. A

logic-model framework, comprising *inputs*, *processes*, *outputs*, and *outcomes*, offers a systematic approach for design and evaluation (World Bank, 2022).

Inputs include legal mandates (Citizen Charter Policy 2012; RTI Act 2016), institutional structures, (complaint officers, IT systems), human resources, and training. Adequate budgetary support and political will constitute foundational inputs.

Processes encompass the operational sequence of grievance management, including registration, categorization, investigation, communication, and resolution - anchored in clear SOPs (MOPA, 2019). Feedback mechanisms should link unresolved cases to higher-tier reviews or the Ombudsman.

Outputs represent the tangible products of these processes: number of grievances logged, resolved, appealed, or pending, alongside time-to-resolution metrics and satisfaction levels. These outputs, when tracked through dashboards, form the evidence base for accountability.

Outcomes are broader behavioral and institutional changes, enhanced citizen trust, improved administrative responsiveness, performance, and inclusive service delivery. Over time, effective GRMs can catalyze a virtuous cycle of participatory governance, feeding insights into policy reform and organizational learning (Wickramasinghe et al., 2022).

Thus, the proposed model aligns resources and procedures toward measurable citizen-centric outcomes, embedding learning and feedback within governance routines.

5.4.2 Key Performance Indicators and M&E Cycle

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are critical to sustaining performance in grievance redress. Drawing from ADB (2020) and OECD (2021) frameworks, key performance indicators (KPIs) for Sri Lankan local-authority GRMs could include:

- **Input KPIs:** number of trained officers, budget allocation for GRM operations.
- **Process KPIs:** average acknowledgment time, proportion of complaints resolved within statutory limits.

- **Output KPIs:** total grievances handled, resolution ratio, appeal success rate.

- **Outcome KPIs:** citizen-satisfaction score, recurrence of similar complaints, policy or procedural changes triggered.

The **M&E cycle** should involve monthly at divisional and district level, quarterly internal reviews at district and provincial level, semiannual external audits by the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, and annual public disclosure of performance data. Linking these cycles to the National Audit Office's reporting structure would institutionalize oversight (Auditor General's Department, 2022).

Digital dashboards could automate aggregation, ensuring both horizontal (across councils) and vertical (local-to national) comparison. Embedding M&E findings into annual performance appraisals would create incentives for continuous improvement.

5.4.3 Risk and Mitigation Considerations

Implementing GRMs in the Sri Lankan local sector entails several risks:

- **Institutional resistance:** Officers may perceive GRMs as punitive rather than developmental. *Mitigation:* capacity-building and sensitization workshops (SLILG, 2023).
- **Political interference:** Complaint prioritization may be influenced by local politics. *Mitigation:* strengthen autonomy and oversight by the Ombudsman.
- **Resource limitations:** Small councils lack ICT infrastructure. *Mitigation:* shared-service models and central technical assistance from ICTA.
- **Privacy breaches:** Public disclosure of grievance data may expose complainants. *Mitigation:* anonymized reporting and secure data protocols.

Proactive risk management embedded within design ensures credibility, sustainability, and citizen confidence.

5.5 Clarity

These findings can be summarized in matrices and conceptual diagrams. For example, a policy gap matrix can highlight areas where Sri Lanka falls short of global standards, while a conceptual diagram can illustrate the alignment

between theory, regional practices, and Sri Lankan realities.

5.6. Conclusion of Findings

The synthesis reveals that while Sri Lanka has recognized the importance of GRMs, implementation remains weak. Comparative insights highlight significant gaps in accessibility, responsiveness, inclusivity, monitoring, and sustainability. Addressing these gaps requires well-coordinated policy for institutional strengthening, digital transformation, citizen awareness, and robust monitoring. By aligning with global best practices while addressing local realities, Sri Lanka can enhance GRM effectiveness and contribute to governance reform in its post-conflict context.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) in the public sector of Sri Lanka through a dual lens: a systematic literature review and a policy analysis framework. The findings reveal that while Sri Lanka has formally recognized the importance of GRMs through citizen charters, ombudsman offices, and project-based initiatives, their implementation remains fragmented and inconsistent.

Globally, GRMs are widely acknowledged as instruments of accountability, transparency, and participatory governance (World Bank, 2013; UNDP, 2019). They provide structured channels for citizens to voice concerns, seek remedies, and hold institutions accountable. Regional experiences in South Asia further underscore the potential of GRMs to strengthen service delivery and rebuild trust in post-conflict societies (Singh, 2016; Rahman, 2018; Shrestha, 2017).

Sri Lanka's GRM landscape reflects both progress and limitations. On the positive side, institutional recognition exists, and project-based initiatives demonstrate localized effectiveness. However, weak enforcement, political interference, resource constraints, limited citizen awareness, and monitoring deficits undermine their potential. These challenges are particularly acute in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, where GRMs carry

added significance as tools for reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The synthesis of literature and policy analysis highlights a clear gap between theory and practice. While GRMs are conceptually robust, Sri Lanka's GRMs fall short of global standards in implementation. Addressing this gap requires a coherent policy framework, institutional strengthening, digital transformation, citizen engagement, and robust monitoring.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Institutional Strengthening

- **National GRM Policy:** Develop a coherent national policy framework which cover sub-national levels that integrates citizen charters, ombudsman offices, and project-based GRMs into a unified system.
- **Empower Ombudsman Office:** Expand jurisdiction, increase resources, and streamline procedures to enhance effectiveness.
- **Standardize Citizen Charters:** Ensure uniform implementation across institutions, with clear grievance procedures and enforcement mechanisms.

6.2.2 Digital Transformation

- **E-GRM Platforms:** Introduce digital grievance systems modeled on global best practices (e.g., South Korea, Estonia) to enhance accessibility and transparency.
- **Real-Time Tracking:** Enable citizens to track grievance status online, reducing bureaucratic delays and increasing trust.
- **Mobile Applications:** Develop user-friendly apps to reach rural and marginalized communities.

6.2.3 Citizen Awareness and Participation

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch nationwide campaigns to educate citizens about grievance procedures and their rights under citizen charters.
- **Civil Society Engagement:** Partner with NGOs and community organizations to promote utilization of GRMs.
- **Participatory Monitoring:** Involve citizens in monitoring grievance outcomes, fostering ownership and accountability.

6.2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Standardized Indicators:** Develop performance indicators for GRM effectiveness, including acknowledgement, assignment, resolution time, citizen satisfaction, and transparency.
- **Independent Monitoring:** Establish independent bodies to evaluate grievance systems and publish annual reports.
- **Feedback Loops:** Use grievance data to inform policy reforms and improve service delivery.

6.2.5 Post-Conflict Sensitivity

- **Reconciliation Focus:** Tailor GRMs in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to address ethnic sensitivities and build trust.
- **Community Mediation:** Integrate grievance systems with community mediation mechanisms to provide culturally appropriate solutions.
- **Peacebuilding Integration:** Position GRMs as part of broader reconciliation and peacebuilding strategies.

6.3 Implications

6.3.1 Policy and Regulatory Implications

The literature highlights the need for harmonizing Sri Lanka's dispersed policy instruments governing grievance redress. Aligning the Citizen Charter Policy, RTI Act, and Public Administration Circular 15/2009 into a single **National Administrative Justice Framework** would clarify institutional responsibilities and escalation paths (Jayasinghe & Perera, 2019). Introducing statutory timeframes and mandatory reporting obligations, similar to India's Public Service Guarantee Acts, could strengthen enforceability (Paul & Sharma, 2017). Furthermore, formal integration of GRM metrics into national performance-budgeting cycles would incentivize compliance. Policymakers should also consider embedding gender-sensitive and accessibility clauses within future local government legislation to ensure inclusivity.

6.3.2 Managerial and Operational Implications for Local Authorities

Local Authorities must transition from reactive complaint handling to proactive service improvement. Establishing dedicated grievance

units with trained officers, standardized templates, and digital registers is essential. Adoption of hybrid channels, in-person, telephone, and online, would expand accessibility (Perera & Herath, 2022).

Managers should institutionalize monthly reviews of complaint data to identify systemic bottlenecks. Incorporating citizen satisfaction surveys and publishing results would reinforce transparency. Collaboration between the SLILG and ICTA could develop shared digital infrastructure and capacity-building programmes.

Operationally, grievance information should feed into planning and budgeting: recurrent issues like waste management or permit delays signal resource or process weaknesses. Embedding GRM performance within Key Result Areas (KRAs) of senior administrators would create accountability. Ultimately, local-authority leadership must internalize grievance management as a strategic tool for trust-building and efficiency enhancement rather than a compliance burden.

6.4 Conclusion

This literature review demonstrates that Sri Lanka possesses a comprehensive legal and policy foundation for grievance redress within the local public sector, yet practical effectiveness remains uneven. Comparative analysis reveals that while international and regional models emphasize structured procedures, transparency, and learning, Sri Lankan mechanisms often falter in implementation, data utilization, and citizen engagement.

The proposed context-sensitive logic model offers a blueprint linking inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes through measurable indicators and feedback loops. Bridging design-implementation gaps requires stronger institutional capacity, integrated data systems, and political commitment to transparency.

For policy and practice, the review underscores that grievance redress is not merely a procedural safeguard but a driver of administrative legitimacy and citizen trust. Future research should employ empirical testing of the proposed model across diverse councils to quantify its impact on governance quality and service performance.

6.5 Future Research Directions

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of GRMs in Sri Lanka's public sector, future research should focus on empirical evaluations of GRM effectiveness. Comparative studies across sectors (health, education, local government) and regions (urban vs. rural, conflict-affected vs. stable) would provide

deeper insights. Additionally, exploring the role of digital innovations and citizen participation in enhancing GRM effectiveness would contribute to both academic debates and policy reforms.

6.6 Final Reflection

Grievance redress mechanisms are more than administrative tools; they are instruments of accountability, inclusivity, and reconciliation. In Sri Lanka's post-conflict context, their importance cannot be overstated. By aligning with global best practices while addressing local realities, Sri Lanka can transform GRMs into effective channels for citizen engagement and governance reform. This study contributes to that transformation by bridging literature and policy analysis, offering actionable recommendations, and highlighting pathways for future research.

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