



IAS 100

A Civil Services Chronicle Initiative

CITIZEN CHARTER



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Citizens all over the world have become conscious of their rights as customers and clientele services provided by the public organizations. They have become assertive in receiving quality and timely services from the government and at the same time they detest delay. They expect the government agencies to deliver goods and services to them at their hour of need rather than at the convenience of the government agencies. They pay for the services as demanded by public organizations and in the process rightly demand for those services and it was not the case in the past. Such change was the direct result of "customer-focus" of private organizations, which influenced public organizations in changing the work environment, structures and processes for serving the citizens better. Such was the impact of citizen-focussed activities of the government, that the public officials have to some extent changed their attitudes towards citizens as buyers or customers of government services received at some cost. In the past, citizen was expected to pay fee to the government agencies and receive services at the will of the government agencies. Citizen has no option but to bear the lackadaisical attitude of the bureaucrats, irrespective of citizen's needs. At the same time, the services provided by the government were of poor quality. Thus, the whims and fancies of the public officials determined the delivery of services to the people in India. To offset such inconvenience to people, citizen's charter came into existence, which are expected to change such whimsical functioning of public agencies.

A citizen's charter is a micro-concept in the sense that it is invoked by an organization and symbolizes the sincerity of government endeavors all over the world to initiate changes in the administrative systems to make them more citizen-friendly. Such efforts were the result of the changing political, social and economic conditions witnessed in the form of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG). The onset of LPG and the entry of private entrepreneurs in those activities hitherto reserved for the government agencies necessitated changes in the structures and processes of government agencies, particularly those

which come into contact with the citizens. Added to it, the intellectual revelations, emphasizing modifications in the processes of the government in specific and its organization in general, brought citizen services into limelight. The 'New Public Management', which emphasized decentralization, changed management style, rationalization or streamlining of administrative structures, concern for citizen, application of management principles (where the customer occupies primary position) etc., acted as catalyst to the administrative reforms in the sphere of citizen-friendly administration. Besides, in *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler emphasized that the government should improve their operational efficiency towards citizens. All such intellectual stirring and practicalities necessitated reforms in the administrative systems, one of which is citizen's charters, a move towards providing better services to citizens.

Citizen's charter is a document that represents an effort by public agencies to focus on citizen needs. The idea behind citizen's charters is transparency in all their activities particularly the activities that lead to provide certain services to citizens. The commitment is in respect of 'standards and quality' of services to be provided to citizens. The standards are fixed from the perspective of implying that the citizens should be aware within what time frame the citizens receive services. Besides, the citizen's charters exhort public officials to exhibit courteous attitude towards citizens who come in the capacity of customers to public officers as they pay for the services they intend to receive. The charters are nothing but a code of conduct on the part of public officials imposed by themselves to provide services on a better note to citizens. They assume moral dimension of civil service accountability and hence do not have any legal binding on public officials but act as guide in discharging their duties in the capacity of public servants. They are voluntary in nature and do not impose any legal obligations on public officials. Through these charters, public officials make a commitment to citizens for providing better services.

The sanction behind the citizen's charter is moral and nothing else.

The commitments imposed by citizen's charters are not limited to public officials as the charters impose certain obligations on citizens as well, who approach public offices as recipients of certain services. The charters are a commitment on the part of public officials and citizens as well. Citizen's charters not only provide the details of commitment of public organization towards citizens, but vice versa. The commitment on the part of citizens and also public organizations towards each other necessitates certain changes in the attitude of public servants and citizens as well. It also necessitates certain changes in the administrative processes towards increasing efficiency of public delivery system. Such altitudinal change among civil servants and changes in administrative practices are a necessity, particularly in the era of privatization, where customer is considered as the king.

NEED FOR CITIZEN'S CHARTERS

A citizen's charter is a manifestation of public agencies' desire to provide quality services to its clients. It is an informal understanding between citizens and government agencies to exchange services in lieu of money paid by the former to the latter. It symbolizes a sense of responsibility of citizens towards public organizations and organizations' obligations towards citizens. In the process of such exchange of services and money between citizens and public organizations, citizen's charters play a positive role. At the same time, the rising expectations of citizens have compelled the government agencies to alter their processes and practices to render qualitative services. Citizen's charters lay down the duties of citizens and public servants in clear terms leaving no ambiguity. Undoubtedly, citizen's charters are expected to play a positive role in the interaction between citizens and public organizations, as they are not simply entities in the process of administrative reform in India. Citizen's charters have raised high expectations among the right-minded civil servants and they are optimistic that they would improve the efficiency of delivery system of public goods and services. Therefore, citizen's charters are required for every public agency, coming into contact with citizens and provide certain services to them. According to Dolly Arora, the charter is exported to provide the details of the public service,

standards to performance, quality of services, simplification of procedures, redressal of grievances, etc. Besides, the charters are necessary for the following reasons:

- ❖ The efficacy of any democratic country lies in the efficient functioning of its political and administrative apparatus. If both work in tandem in delivering goods and services to citizens, it can be considered as a successful polity. It is the responsibility of the political representatives to mould the administrative machinery to the needs of citizens. If the political representatives fail in controlling the civil servants and making them to work towards the delivery of goods and services to citizens according to the wishes of the citizens, the government under such circumstances loses its credibility. People loose faith in the functioning of democratic institutions and the concept of people's power in democracy becomes meaningless. Hence, it is the responsibility of political leaders as the representative of citizens to ensure delivery of services to citizens from the administrative system. Citizen's charters are a step towards ensuring delivery of services to citizens efficiently.
- ❖ The citizens occupy a pivotal place in the entire politico-administrative set up. It is the citizens who accept or reject the government by their electoral power. The administrative apparatus implements the policies and programmes pertaining to the requirements of the citizens. Since, every democratic government is citizen-centred, it is the responsibility of public administration to provide qualitative and timely services. Citizen's charters provide a focus on citizen's services by upgrading their status from a common man to a customer.
- ❖ Every government provides certain services to people irrespective of its form and nature. Among the services provided by the government, certain services are charged and certain other services are provided free of cost. For instance, fire services are provided to citizens free of cost and certain services like supply of drinking water, provided at certain cost. Whatever be the service, the government provides it from the revenue it collects in the form of taxes from the people. If one were to go by such

definition, then every government service comes at a cost, which is collected from citizens. Therefore, citizens have a right to seek qualitative and timely services from the government, either free of cost or on payment. In the process of providing qualitative and timely services, citizen's charters provide a good base on which a responsive edifice of public administration can be built.

- ❖ Citizen's charters offer solutions to certain administrative maladies. They are delay in services, rigid rules, secrecy, bribes, etc. These maladies can be minimized and checked to a large extent by installing citizen's charters in public organizations. Since citizen's charters provide details pertaining to the services to the organization, the time schedule of then services, etc., certain maladies can be context of globalization and liberalization, where the focus of all organizations is on the customer's needs and aspirations. It is the responsibility of the government to cater to the needs of its customers (citizens) who receive paid services from the public agencies. By doing so, the maladies of public agencies could be exterminated to a large extent.

ESSENTIALS OF CITIZEN'S CHARTER

- ❖ **Standards of service delivery:** Every citizen's charter should provide details about all the services and their standards of the respective public organization which devised it. This enables citizens to know the services expected from the organization. The services should be standardized by defining the time-limit for each service provided by the agency, by providing qualitative service and by providing required service to the citizen. Standards are useful and relevant to the user and public organizations from which citizens receive services. The general tendency is that the organizations develop standards based on their own convictions rather than considering the views of citizens, which is not good for the development of cordial relationship between the organization and citizen.

The standards should be monitored from time to time considering changes in citizen's needs and

changes in environmental conditions. Accomplishment of the organization should be compared with the standards prescribed through the help of an independent agency. At the same time standards should be specific and measurable and charters should avoid all such phrases which lead to ambivalence in the minds of citizens. For example, phrases like, "We try to deliver services as soon as possible", should be avoided, as they cannot be measured. Instead, "the service will be provided within ten minutes of the acceptance of application," may be used.

- ❖ **Information:** Every citizen's charter should provide all the details pertaining to the dissemination of information of the public agencies. Citizens should be provided all the details about the availability of information. The availability on time and appropriate information to the citizens add to their satisfaction and enhances the prestige of civil service in their eyes. The standards and quality of services provided in simple and plain language in citizen's charters. Charters should also provide the details pertaining to official hierarchy, where citizen can get information and in case of non-availability of the officer concerned, the alternative should be provided in the charter. The citizens should be provided information in the form of guides, user books, handbooks, posters, etc., for disseminating information.

- ❖ **Choice for citizen:** The citizen's charters should provide choice to users wherever possible. Charters should enable citizens in giving feedback to public officers, on the basis of which public offices can improve their delivery system further. Charters should provide details regarding interaction between citizens and public offices so that citizens have a right to say something about the quality of services received by them. Such interaction not only increases opportunities for citizens in choosing quality and standards of services, but also increases cordial relationship between citizens and the public offices.

At the same time, the charters should explicitly state that services would be provided to citizens if they cooperate with public officer. It is the responsibility of the citizens to provide all the necessary information to public officials while

receiving services from them. If citizens provide correct information, they will be able to receive timely services from public offices or else, they will experience delays. For example, citizens should provide correct information and its proof regarding name, age, address, etc., to receive services promptly within the prescribed time-limit mentioned in citizen's charters.

- ❖ **Courtesy towards citizen:** The citizen's charters should ensure that citizens receive courteous response from public officials to all citizens who come to public offices. The public officials should wear name badge so that citizens can identify public personnel easily in case of any misbehaviour or arrogant answers by the officials. Public offices should treat all citizens with equality so that no citizen feels discriminated. In certain public offices, it is found that "May I Help You" desks are provided to guide citizens in receiving services from public offices. Such desks also assist citizens in filling necessary form for obtaining services from public organizations.
- ❖ **Grievance redressed:** Every public organization should welcome complaints from citizens as they provide feedback on the lapses of quality of services. Such feedback from citizens facilitates public offices to evaluate standards and quality of services they provide to citizens. Constant evaluation leads to improvements of public delivery system. If something goes wrong either in the quality or standard of services, immediate apologies should be offered to citizens and at the same time, citizens should be quick enough to attend to citizens' complaints. Besides, the system should be simple and flexible to solve citizen's problems. By analyzing problems in delivery system and quality of services provided, the public organizations will be able to go to the root of the problem to ensure that it is not repeated. Besides, by analyzing recurring problems, public organizations will be able to identify changes that can be effected accordingly.

The public organizations, as states earlier, should welcome complaints, as they should be considered as an opportunity to improve standards and quality of services. Hence, they should treat complaints with courteous attitude. Such organizations should

provide user-friendly and accessible systems which are flexible. The system should be publicized so that people can complain to the officers concerned and get their grievances redressed. After receiving complaint from citizens, it is the reasonability of the organization to look into them and redress them. The complainant should be kept informed about the status of his or her complaint and the necessary action that follows. The officers dealing with grievances should be trained to solve citizen's problems at the first contact itself. Besides, every public personnel should be prepared to dedicate himself to solve citizens' grievances. If such state of affairs comes into existence in every public organization, it is bound to enjoy citizens' confidence.

Any redressal system can be considered successful if it provides solution in citizens' grievances. No redressal machinery can justify its presence unless citizens' problems are solved. If complaints received by the public organization are thrown into dustbins, then expenses on redressal machinery are wasteful. Depending on the nature of complaints received from citizens, corrective steps should be taken. If simple mistakes occur, apologies should be rendered and in case of serious mistakes, necessary corrections should be rendered and in case of serious mistakes, necessary corrections should be made. On certain occasions, even compensation can be paid if the failure of service leads to financial losses to citizens.

Citizen's charters abroad

Efforts to make the government responsive to citizen's needs have been a continuous process all over the world. Particularly, the democratic governments were eager to provide better and qualitative services to citizens. It was a necessity for a political party as its survival depends on citizens' satisfaction and therefore, the democratic governments proceeded in this direction. To realize this objective, the citizen was placed on a high pedestal and to this end liberalization and globalization added as catalysts. The needs of customer were given priority and the public organizations took cue from it. The governments needed a handy tool through which citizen could be elevated to customer status vis-à-vis the public agencies, which provide services by taking some money from citizen. The countries chosen to describe the status of citizen's charters are as follows:

1. United Kingdom
2. Australia
3. Malaysia
4. South Africa
5. India

The Government of Britain took initial steps in providing such mechanism popularly called citizen's charters.

Reforms in India

The successive dynasties which ruled India for hundreds of years, changed administrative systems to suit their local conditions and administrative the necessities. With the advent of the Mauryan dynasty, administration in India became systematic and elaborate, whose details are found in Kautilya's Arthashastra. In Arthashastra, Kautilya detailed administrative system and the personnel manning it. With changes in political conditions, administrative system, both in structure and designations of administrators, underwent change. In the medieval period, rulers of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals effected certain changes in administrative processes and structures. Such measures were oriented towards strengthening the personal rule of ruler rather than for the welfare of people.

With the advent of the British and the establishment of administrative structure, a replica of British administration made an impact on Indian administration. The administrative system was suited to the needs of colonial power rather than people's welfare. Nevertheless, certain reforms were people-oriented, like Ripon's policy of local self-government. Certain other measures aimed at reforming Indian administration were Lee Commission's report on Indianization of civil services, Government of India Secretariat Committee (Wheeler Committee, 1936), Committee on Organization and Procedure (Maxwell Committee, 1937) and Tottenham Committee (1945-46).

The administrative reforms aimed at making public administrative system more flexible and citizen-friendly continued in independent India. In 1947, the Secretariat Reorganization Committee was set up to look into the matters of shortage of higher-level officers. In 1949, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Gopalaswami Aiyangar to suggest changes in secretariat process. A.D. Gorwala, a retired civil servant, submitted his

report on efficient management of public enterprises. But the major milestone in Indian administration was the report submitted by Paul H. Appleby in 1953 and 1956. Paul H. Appleby was an expert on public administration and suggested the establishment of O&M divisions in every department, and the Institute of Public Administration. His recommendations were immediately accepted. In the history of administrative reforms in India, the place of Administrative Reforms Commission occupies a significant place. It studies the administrative system in India and submitted 20 reports. Though several recommendations of the ARC and other committees were not implemented, yet those which were implemented proved to be effective in improving service delivery of public administration in India.

The Administrative Reforms Commission was set up in the year 1966 and it touched almost all the aspects of Indian administration. It touched the aspect of citizen's grievances and the existing machinery for redressing citizen's grievances. According to the commission, the administration made inroads into the lives of citizens substantially and resultantly, citizens are influenced by the government more now than before. It became an urgent need to take stock of the situation from the perspective of citizens and suggest such mechanisms which increase citizens' satisfaction. The commission found that the existing machinery of redressing citizens' grievances was inadequate and new measures were needed. Based on its study of the Scandinavian mechanism of 'ombudsman', it recommended the creation of Lokpal and Lokayuktas. Lokpal and Lokayuktas were to be impartial and independent institutions with flexibility in their proceedings. But the recommendations of the Administrative Reforms Commission were of no avail as the Lokpal Bill although introduced many times, failed to overcome the legislative hurdles. As far as Lokayuktas are concerned, they have become another public agency of State Governments, as they are powerless to deal with cases of corruption.

The changed economic scenario, after the initiation of economic reforms, led to structural and procedural changes in Indian administration. Since the early nineties, responsive administration was being talked about by political leadership in India. To smoothen the process of economic reforms, the administrative reforms were considered as a necessity. Several administrative reforms were triggered by technological developments paving the

way for e-governance. The governments at both the union and state levels made endeavors to make public administration more citizens friendly and the Government of India took initiative with regard to citizen's charters.

Efforts towards citizen's charters

The Government of India, as stated earlier, intended to refurbish its image by improving its delivery system. Indian administration had all the requisites of a good administrative system, yet it is perhaps lacking the desire to deliver goods to citizens as it should. The citizens had plethora of grievances against the government agencies and as public grievances come under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (AR & PG), it was assigned the role of a nodal agency for coordinating various activities pertaining to citizen's charters concerned with promoting citizen-friendly administrative. The Secretary, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions headed a core group of which other senior officials were also members. In the meetings of the core group held in February 2002, various drafts of citizen's charters were formulated and considered. In November 2003, eight charters formulated by various ministries were considered. Till January 2004, various State Governments' and Union Territories administrations came out with 616 citizen's charters.

Besides formulating citizen's charters, numerous seminars were conducted aiming at synchronizing the activities of various ministries, NGOs, intellectuals, media, citizen forums, etc., regarding charters. The synchronization was aimed at bringing all those sections of the society on a single platform for better exchange of ideas and views in the implementation of citizen's charters. In the seminars, numerous public organizations actively participated and based on the feedback of the seminars, it was decided that focus should be on formulation and implementation of citizen's charters.

In order to spread awareness of citizen's charters among various ministries/departments and also among citizens, the AR & PG shouldered the responsibility of spreading awareness by conducting workshops for State Governments. During the financial years 2002-2003, the AR & PG conducted such workshops for the states of Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. In continuance of its efforts towards

increasing the awareness of citizen's charters, the AR & PG aimed at conducting thirty workshops for different states. The emphasis was on the North Eastern states. Besides, the department released a list of nodal officers of various ministries/departments in charge of citizen's charters. The Department of AR & PG itself brought out its charter and the copies of it were distributed to all the employees in the department and to all the departments of Central and State Governments. The department also posted its citizen's charter on the website to make its activities more transparent. "Introduction of citizen's charters as instruments of administrative reforms is likely to satisfy people who expect something substantial to change the state of affairs and redress their grievances."

Efficacy of citizen's charters in India

The following factors go long way in achieving efficiency of citizen's charters in India.

1. The success or failure of any administrative institution in a country depends on the collaboration of political executive, civil servants and people. The synchronization of efforts of all the three leads to successful functioning of an administrative reform. In the initial stages, it is the political will that should support the reform process followed by wholehearted cooperation of civil servants. Finally, it is the responsibility of citizens to avail of its benefits by their vigilant attitude. The right production of support from all the players facilitates success of an administrative reform.
2. The political leaders are the most important elements in improving efficiency of administrative services. With popular mandate behind them, they are empowered to make all those policies aimed at improving administrative efficiency. It is the political leadership, which provides leadership to the people. In India, Jawaharlal Nehru was successful in providing leadership to Indians during his tenure as the Prime Minister of India. One should strive to emulate Jawaharlal Nehru in this regard. Affection, commitment and hard work invite love in turn by masses. But only a few leaders of the next generation could influence people as Nehru did. As stated earlier, citizen's charters can succeed if political leaders support the cause of citizen and strive towards bettering citizen services.

3. The civil servants should feel that citizen's charters are not a hindrance in public administration, but a tool for enhancing administrative efficiency and productivity. Citizen's charters pave the way for streamlining administrative activities for ensuring delivery of services in a better manner. In the process of streamlining administrative activities, obsolete processes are replaced by new ones, thus reducing the burden of work on administrators. This is particularly true regarding the installation of information and communicational technologies in the delivery of services to citizens. This not only reduced the burden of work on public personnel but also increased the pace of work.
4. Finally, it is the citizen who should benefit from changing administrative process, particularly from citizen's charter. In charters, the activities of public organization are detailed. The services to be delivered to citizens are listed out with time and standards to which organizations usually adhere. It is citizens' responsibility to spread awareness about the benefits of citizen's charters. It cannot be used as a tool to improve public delivery system.

In a country like India, it is not correct to come to conclusion that citizen's charters facilitate user-friendly administrative practices. India is a country where more than one-third of its population is illiterate. Dolly Arora opines that shortage of constitutional provisions and other statutes pertaining to the rights of the citizens, the responsibilities of the government towards the citizens and at the same time in a country where almost 38 per cent of people are illiterate, citizen's charters make no difference to the citizens in claiming the services from the government agencies. Under such conditions it may not be appropriate to expect a turnaround of the administrative processes and practices. Besides, everything is left to the good sense of the service provider. Added to illiteracy, the efficacy of charters is shrouded in mystery, as Indian administration had been a user-friendly system to customers (who pay bribe), rather than citizens (who cannot pay bribe). Customers in this context are the individuals with the clout of money and power, who often bypass rules for their benefits, whereas citizens are those marginalized

groups who lack even basic amenities like food, water and shelter. For those marginalized groups, charters are of little value. Nevertheless, it is a matter of time when citizens form a strong and coherent group and demand services as specified in citizen's charters.

The citizen's charters are quite laudable in the context of changing administrative scenario under LPG. These charters act as directive principles for the governments as well as the administration world over. In most part of the countries, the orientation of the government is fast changing only to serve the people better. Citizen's charters, as laid down by the governments, act as guidance to the public officials as well as citizens. The thinking of the governments is fast changing from hitherto experience towards treating the people as customers rather than subjects. The maxim found in economics that the customer is the king in the market is the spirit behind the charters that are framed by governments. The survival of the governments, in true sense of term under the present context, depends on acceptability of people for the services rendered by the former. Otherwise, the negative fallout is perhaps dismissal of the governments for their ineffective delivery system.

The citizen's charters are laudable in spirit and content. Certain countries like Australia and South Africa laid down the objective in charters, which are realizable. For instance, the citizens in Australia are not given any legal rights against the implementation of citizen's charters but only assurances are given to them for receiving services from the government agencies.

In South Africa, the citizens possess certain provisions for the redressal of their grievances regarding the implementation of citizen's charters. If the public agencies fails to deliver goods and services to people on time and do not maintain the quality and standard, public agencies are under the obligation to tender apology apart from compensate the losses incurred by the citizens.

The public officials hitherto were managing public administration according to their whims and fancies and the citizens were at the receiving end. But under the changing economic and administrative scenario under LPG, the orientation and outlook of administration shall have to undergo a sea change or else the administration has to lose its credibility in the eyes of the people.



