



## **Citizen's Charter as a Tool of People's Participation in Local Government: A Case Study of Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India**

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### ABSTRACT

Citizens' Charter was incorporated into Indian administration in 1997. The idea was to offset the usually cumbersome official procedures that Citizens encounter in their day to day lives and make it easier for them to obtain smooth delivery of services.

The paper evaluates the efficacy of Citizens' Charter in enhancing peoples' participation in local governance and tries to establish whether the Charter has proved effective. A case study of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation has been undertaken for the purpose.

The present study seeks to test three hypotheses. First, Citizens' Charter as implemented by Aurangabad Municipal Corporation has benefitted the citizens in a very limited manner. Second, administrative apathy is main hurdle in way of implementing the Charter successfully, and third, Citizens' Charter, instead of being an effective mechanism to redress peoples' grievances, has remained just another link in the chain of cumbersome official procedure.

Since its inception, various governmental and non-governmental organizations have implemented the idea of Citizens' Charter in the country. However, closer look at the way most organizations and institutions function shows that the Citizens' Charter often hangs on the wall of the offices along with the portraits of national leaders without benefitting the ordinary citizens in the matter of timely delivery of services. The Charter is meant to ensure accountability, transparency of the rules, procedures and grievance redress system within an institution. It seeks to establish a renewed citizen-administration interface, informed by governmental commitment to citizenry. In most cases, however, its stated objective has failed.

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## Introduction

The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is known for administrative reforms because of introduction and implementation of Citizen's Charter in the administration worldwide. Developing countries like India is also step towards its involvement in Indian administration in 1990s. So it is need to study the performance of Citizen's Charter in various sectors as well as institutions. It is also a duty of researcher to search people's response towards this new type of administrative setup.

Governments are shifting to people-centered governance worldwide. The centerpiece of the reinventing the government movement is also turning citizens into customers and making the customer's (not the bureaucracy's) needs the goal of government agencies. However, what we find is that the Weberian model of "man as machine" still virtually mandates the daily actions of public administrators-namely encounters with the NGOs, the citizens, staff, peers, media and other civil society constituents. The edict that all relationship with all stakeholders be conducted "Without Sympathy or Enthusiasm" is considerably visible. Osborne and Gabler argued, "While business strives to please customers, government agencies strive to please interest groups." As a result a citizen becomes irritated with the "arrogance of the bureaucracy". Reform they concluded requires "getting closer to the customer and putting customers into the driver's seat"(Osborne and Gabler, 1992)

Democratic government is a people's government and all public services are people's service. Relationships are the DNA of governance. At the 1996 OECD Ministerial Symposium on the Future of Public Services, governance was defined entirely in terms of relationship. The OECD ministers concluded that governance "encompass the set of relationship between governments and citizen. (Preeti Garg, 2006)

## Citizen's Charter

It has been recognised world over that good governance is essential for sustainable development, both economic and social. The three essential aspects emphasised in good governance are transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the administration. "Citizens' Charters" initiative is a response to the quest for solving the problems

which a citizen encounters, day in and day out, while dealing with the organisations providing public services.

The concept of Citizens' Charter enshrines the trust between the service provider and its users. The concept was first articulated and implemented in the United Kingdom by the Conservative Government of John Major in 1991 as a national programme with a simple aim: to continuously improve the quality of public services for the people of the country so that these services respond to the needs and wishes of the users. The programme was re-launched in 1998 by the Labour Government of Tony Blair which rechristened it "Services First".

The basic objective of the Citizens' Charter is to empower the citizen in relation to public service delivery. Six principles of the Citizens' Charter movement as originally framed were:

- (i) Quality: Improving the quality of services;
- (ii) Choice: Wherever possible;
- (iii) Standards: Specify what to expect and how to act if standards are not met;
- (iv) Value: For the taxpayers' money;
- (v) Accountability: Individuals and Organisations; and
- (vi) Transparency: Rules/ Procedures/ Schemes/Grievances.

These were later elaborated by the Labour Government under nine principles of Service Delivery in 1998.

## The Indian Scenario

Post independent Indian society is undergoing gigantic transformations. Indian citizens are becoming increasingly aware of their rights. Citizens are getting more articulate and are expecting the administration not only to respond to their demands but also to anticipate them. It was in this climate that since 1996 a consensus had evolved in the Government on effective and responsive administration. In a Conference of Chief Ministers of various States and Union Territories held on 24 May, 1997 in New Delhi, presided over by the Prime Minister of India, an "Action Plan for Effective and Responsive Government" at the Centre and State levels was adopted, which in turn led to initiation of Citizen's Charter movement (Kumar, 2010). The key objectives of Citizen's Charter were to improve the quality of public services and to provide better value for money. (Rhodes, 2003) One of the major decisions at that

Conference was that the Central and State Governments would formulate Citizens' Charters.

Primarily an adaptation of the UK model, the Indian Citizens' Charter has an additional component of 'expectations from the clients' or in other words 'obligations of the users'. Involvement of consumer organisations, citizen groups, and other stakeholders in the formulation of the Citizens' Charter is emphasised to ensure that the Citizens' Charter meets the needs of the users. Regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the Charters, both internally and through external agencies, are enjoined. Till April, 2006, 111 Citizens' Charters had been formulated by the Central Government Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations and 668 Charters by various agencies of State Governments & Administrations of Union Territories. Most of the national Charters are posted on the government's websites and are open to public scrutiny. The organisations with Citizens' Charters are advised to give publicity to their Charters through such means as print/ electronic media and awareness campaigns.

### **Citizen's Charter of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation**

Aurangabad city is the historic city as well as tourist centre in India. The city has been established in AD 1610 by great visionary Malik Amber. The city spread around 123KM<sup>2</sup> (47 Sq. mile), it has the population of eleven lakh (according to 2011 census). The Aurangabad Municipal Corporation was established on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1983.

As per the directives of central and state government Aurangabad Municipal Corporation has formulated its Citizen's Charter in 2004. This Charter includes all the fourteen programs. For every program there are four columns in each table, the column detailing particulars of work, time duration for work completion and the addresses of the concerned officials. This site was developed & implemented by ABM knowledgeware Ltd. in 2004 and it was renewed in 2008. The municipal commission also published information booklet of Citizen's Charter for the staff. The booklet contains information about twenty services along with the expectation of the commissioner for better delivery of services.

**Citizen's Charter: A Mere Formality** - With the time-bound pressure and deadline set by the

Government of India, Citizen's Charter has been prepared and it's not more than act of compiling earlier programmes relating to public services (Ghuman and Mehta, 2007). A Citizen's Charter is one example of this procedural transfer. The Charter remains hidden in the ever increasing heaps of files somewhere; it is not to be seen anywhere in the service areas of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation. Worst part is even the officials of Corporation do not know much about the Charter. The Corporation has made it available online, but the problem is most citizens do not use or do not know how to use Internet.

It was shocking to know the councilor of the civic body acknowledging that the Citizen's Charter as a mere formality. There is no clause and arrangement in it that makes anybody accountable if a department fails to redress public complaints" (Yadav, 2012). This practice is against the spirit of a Citizen's Charter.

**Designing Defaults** - Citizen's Charter needs to be formulated very systematically, which involves client, users, stakeholders and the staff of service providers. The very fact that Municipal Corporation Charter includes all the programs shows that there is little relation to the standardization or the quality aspect, but in the present study, these aspects have not been given importance. That the Charter is poorly designed reflects from the statement of one of the councilors pointed out that "there should be a clause to penalize the officials and employees if they fail to redress the complaints." One of the councilors complained that the Citizen's Charter was formed in 2004 and the information contained in it is outdated.

Samual Paul studied and classified 200 Citizen's Charters on the basis of region, sector, and design of charter and inclusion of grievance redress mechanism. His assessment is none of the charter is 'very good', about 30% Charters are 'good', 60% 'average', whereas 10% are 'poor'. (Samual Paul, 2008)

On the basis of Paul's study Citizen's Charters of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation may be categorized as 'average' about its design; it would be rated as 'poor' about inclusion of grievance redress mechanism.

**No updating the Charter** - E-governance, which is a paradigm shift over the traditional approaches in Public Administration, means rendering of

government services and information to the public using electronic means (Monga 2008). The spirit of a Citizen's Charter aims to provide as many services as possible online and enable interface with citizens by creating online windows in this regard. The Charter must be made interactive and information about it should be provided to the citizens through the charter. The Citizen's Charter found at the website of the Municipal Corporation is obsolete and old which is still the same as it made in 2004. A majority of the contact number have been changed, the administrative services charges also changed but Citizen's Charter has not updated these changes. Email inquiries made by this researcher did not fetch any response whatsoever. The response of the concerned officials after this researcher personally met them was outright apathetic to say the least.

**Ineffective Public Relation** - The mere framing of a Citizen's Charters will not transform the mind set in the administrative machinery. There are a few other attendant measures that are required to turn a Citizen's Charters into true instruments of empowerment. Mass communication is a powerful mechanism and it should be used for increasing the awareness among people on a Citizen's Charters. Public relations are considered as the back bone of any institution. It was found that there were no public relation campaigns undertaken by the department to heighten the awareness amongst the people. There were hardly any efforts at promoting the Citizen's Charter. Almost ten years after the Municipal Corporation of Aurangabad introduced the Citizen's Charters, the civic body has failed to popularize it, leaving the citizens high and dry.

**Poor Awareness among Citizens** - From the very beginning the authorities stated that the rights of the citizens and the telephone numbers of their complaint redress centers would be made public by installing notice boards carrying information in public places. However, this now seems to be a distant dream as the authorities decided against installing such boards. On basis of conversation analysis with one hundred walk-in stakeholders at the office of the Municipal Corporation, it was found that 83 out of 100 were not aware of the concept of a Citizen's Charter and rest knew it as a document without any significance.

**Lack of professionalism among the employees** - A Citizen's Charter aims at providing special

location of 'Information Facilitation Counters' which require high standards of professionalism among employees for disseminating the right information which will equip citizens the knowledge of how they can get their queries and grievances settled. (Sharma, 2012) On the contrary, the findings show that the attitude of the employees of the corporation added more trouble to the existing scenario. In a telephonic conversation regarding a particular complaint it was found that the official who dealt with that particular form of complaint was not at the workplace. This shows a lack of professionalism among the employees which, in turn, completely hampers the facilitation process.

### **Peoples Participation in Local Governance through Citizen's Charter: an experience**

For the study people's participation through Citizen's Charter in local governance, we choose peoples of Aurangabad as a sample and check their participation through Citizen's Charter in the administration of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation by using formatted interview scheduled.

We chose one hundred stakeholders as samples. We asked them some questions about their response to the Citizen's Charter. These include:

- (i) Do you know about Citizen's Charter of Aurangabad Municipal Corporation?
- (ii) Do you understand the objectives of Citizen's Charter?
- (iii) Do you use Citizen's Charter for resolving your problems?
- (iv) Do you know about any mechanism to register your complaints through Citizen's Charter?
- (v) Do you think that Citizen's Charter is useful way to participate in administration?
- (vi) Are you satisfied with the Citizen's Charter of Municipal Corporation?
- (vii) Is Citizen's Charter accessible to you?
- (viii) Do you access Corporation's Website and if yes, did you find the Charter updated?
- (ix) Do you think that formulation of Citizen's Charter of the Municipal Corporation has made the administration more active, effective and responsive?

After analyzing the data, following conclusions were drawn.

- (i) Eighty three percent stakeholders don't know what Citizen's Charter is all about. Out of seventeen percent (who are familiar with the Citizen's Charter) most of them are unaware about the objectives of formation of Citizen's Charter.
- (ii) Only twenty percent stakeholders accessed the website (on dated 11 September 2014 with this researcher being 4281 person to access the Citizen's charter webpage of Municipal Corporations website) and out of them fifty percent are not accessing it second time due to its outdated version.
- (iii) The technical support staff of the Municipal Corporation admitted that no one is looking after the Citizen's Charter in the day to day administration.
- (iv) The Citizen's Charter was formulated in 2004, it is shown on the website but one cannot register one's complaint online or through email.

Most of the respondents were not satisfied with the Citizen's Charter. No one looked positive about active, effective and responsiveness of the Municipal Corporation's administration.

### **Evaluating Hypothesis**

The paper attempted to evaluate the efficacy of Citizens' Charter in enhancing peoples' participation in local governance. At the beginning of this study we formed some hypotheses and found by way of conclusion that most hypotheses were proved right. After the analysis of collected data and interviewing the stakeholders, it is clear that Citizens' Charter as implemented by Aurangabad Municipal Corporation has not benefitted the citizens in any significant manner. Administrative apathy is main hurdle in way of implementing the Charter successfully. People did not show interest in giving this module of participation a try. So Citizens' Charter, instead of being an effective mechanism to redress peoples' grievances, has remained just another link in the chain of cumbersome official procedure.

The stakeholders are unaware about this important tool of governance. It has been ten years since Corporation introduced Citizens' Charter, but it continues to remain in its original form with nothing being updated therein. Administrative authority is least concerned about it.

### **Conclusion**

Idea of Citizen's Charter is no doubt a good one. However, in the background of Indian administrative mindset and rigid setup its implementation is hedged in by a number of limitations. Our study found that the citizens' involvement and accountability in local self-governance were mostly missing in urban areas. It is noted that low level of people's awareness, poor participation of citizens and lack of political will were the main reasons behind the failure of the Charter.

The study also found that there were serious lapses in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter ranging from design and poor advertising to implementation, timely updates and evaluation. By all means the Charter has remained just an administrative formality, with no one looking after its implementation.

### **Suggestions**

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, following suggestions may be made to make the Citizens' Charter more effective and responsive.

1. Awareness campaigns to be initiated to educate clients about the Charter.
2. Timely evaluation of Citizen's Charter should be undertaken.
3. Staff should be properly educated about the objectives of Citizen's Charter.
4. Updating of Charter is necessary.
5. The Charter should have a built-in mechanism for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the way in which the charter is working, preferably through an outside agency.
6. Public relations are considered as the backbone of any institution. Public relation campaigns are needed to heighten the awareness amongst the people.
7. Civic body has to take efforts to popularize Citizen's Charter.
8. Telephone numbers of the complaint redress centers would be made public by installing notice boards carrying information in public places.

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