



- A Citizens' Charter represents the commitment of the Organisation towards standard, quality and time frame of service delivery, grievance redress mechanism, transparency and accountability.
- Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, in the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Government of India, in its efforts to provide more responsive and citizen-friendly governance coordinates the efforts to formulate and operationalise Citizens' Charters.
- Various Central Government Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations have brought out their Citizens' Charters.
- Why is Govt and the Governmental Machinery perceived as not being sufficiently responsive to the people?
  - It is not because Government is inherently apathetic, or lacks concern for the people.
  - It is because little effort has been made either by Government, or by organised groups of citizens to make the Governmental Machinery more citizen friendly that the Governmental Machinery has become so impersonal, in its approach, as to appear irresponsible to the needs of the people.
  - There is very little public accountability & even less transparency.
  - Also there has been no noticeable public participation in the formulation of policies by Govt.
  - It is also because the citizens have not been able to overcome their passivity, fear and cynicism.
  - They think they do not have the power, knowledge and initiative to demand better service as also transparency & public accountability.

**MAIN OBJECTIVE OF CITIZEN CHARTER**

- The main objective of Citizens' Charter is to find ways of overcoming the various negative aspects mentioned earlier, and to bring about a change in the way the governmental machinery functions at all levels.
- Citizens' Charter is not theoretical in its approach.
- It is practical in terms of involving & motivating those who constitute the Governmental Machinery themselves and the citizens to work out and adopt a more responsive organisational set up with increased public accountability and transparency, besides courteous and efficient service, responsive to the citizens' needs.

**GOVT AS A SERVICE PROVIDER**

- All public services are paid for by individual citizens, either directly or indirectly through taxes.

- The citizens' have therefore every right to expect high quality of service responsive to their needs to be provided efficiently & at a reasonable cost.
- Where the State is engaged in regulating taxing or administering justice, these functions too must be carried out in a fair, effective and courteous manner.

**NEED FOR THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL**

- Formulation of a Citizen's Charter obviously requires an evaluation of the Government functions.
- The Performance of various departments, organisations and institutions should be comprehensively analysed and assessed, not necessarily through outside agencies, but through a participative programme, between the organisations themselves and the citizens who use them.
- Performance should be judged against well laid down & well publicised basic standards, to be developed by every governmental organisation having public contact with involvement of various categories of its uses.

**WHAT IS CITIZEN'S CHARTER?**

- The Citizens' Charter, in short is a set of viewpoints of the users of public services.
- It is not meant to be a formula which imposes a dry and uniform pattern of response of all public services.
- It is meant to be a tool kit of initiatives and ideas to raise standards of performance in the way most appropriate to each service
- It is intended to give more power to the citizens.
- It is not a plea for more State action.
- The Citizen's Charter is further based on the people's right to be informed all choose for themselves.
- It emphasises the point that "For too long the provider has dominated, now it is the turn of the user".
- Above all it believes that there is a spring of talent, energy, care and commitment in our public services.
- The charter's aim is, therefore, to release these qualities so that we can have services, in which the citizens can have confidence & public servants can have pride.

**THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF CITIZEN'S CHARTER**

- The main objective of the citizen's charter is to evolve and lay down a code of conduct for the public utilities, various service providers and other governmental organisations that have an interface

with the public, so that when published as a document it can serve as a "Charter".

- Quality : – a sustained new programme for improving the quality of public services
- Choice : – Choice wherever possible between competing providers is the best spur to quality improvement.
- Standards : – The citizen must be told what service standards are and be able to act where service is unacceptable
- Value : - The citizen as a taxpayer has a right to expect that public services must give value for money within a tax bill the nation can afford.
- Accountability : – By holding both individuals and organisations responsible for performance in keeping with the specified standards and also ensuring that lapses if any are dealt with firmly and in an exemplary manner.
- Transparency : – Not only should make service providers available relevant information to the public but also provide easy access to such information, especially in regard to rules and procedures and redressal of grievances.

#### STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE

- Every citizen will be entitled to expect Standards of Services which are
  - Properly evolved & explicitly adopted with a commitment of the organisation at all levels to implement them; and
  - Published & also prominently displayed at the point of delivery of the service.
  - Courtesy and helpfulness from staff
  - Accuracy in accordance with statutory entitlements
  - A commitment for prompt action expressed in terms of target's response time or waiting time.
  - There should be a clear presumption that standards will be progressively improved as services become more efficient.

#### TRANSPARENCY

- Regarding the availability of & access to information, it is pressured that there should be no secrecy about how public services are run. The public should know:
  - What Rules and procedures they follow in making available such services through easily understandable and easily available pamphlets. These should also be displayed prominently.
  - Wherever charges are levied these should be made known clearly and unambiguously.
  - Names, designations, telephone numbers etc. Of those who are in charge with indication as to when they could be approached by the public should be clearly indicated
  - Information on the extent to which targets as set are being achieved should be displayed.
  - Public Servants should not be anonymous. Save only where there is a real threat to their safety, all

those who deal directly with the public should wear name badges and give their names on the telephone while answering calls and in letters wherever replies are sent.

- Full and accurate information should readily be available in plain language both in the form of pamphlets and display about what services are being provided and at what locations in the premises.
- Target time for providing such services together with full audited information about results achieved in the past and attempts to improve performance should be indicated.

#### CHOICES & ACCESSIBILITY

- The public should have choice in obtaining various services from more than one provider, because competition is the best spur to improve standards.
- Feedback should be obtained regularly & systematically from the users to ensure informed decisions about what services should be provided and how they should be provided
- Non discrimination should be ensured by making available various services regardless of caste, race or sex.
- Essential information about the services provided should be available in different languages, wherever there is need.
- Services provided should be easily accessible to the public.
- The availability of the services should suit the convenience of the public and not that of the staff of the organisation.
- This means flexible operating hours and providing information and facilitation centres with knowledgeable persons who can help the public in obtaining the services.
- Sufficient number of telephonic enquiry points, which can connect callers quickly to someone who can help them, should be provided and wherever possible modern information technology with the help of online computers should provide quick and correct information to the public

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

- The most important element that is lacking to a great extent in our present system of Governmental Machinery is Accountability.
- At present the system of fixing responsibility for lapses both in the case of individuals and organisations as a whole is far from satisfactory.
- The general impression is that neither responsibility is fixed nor appropriate punishment meted out for lapses
- The citizens should therefore have a right to expect that not only will their complaints be acted upon and responsibility fixed for lapses, but also they should have the right to be informed of the action taken on their complaints.

- Accountability in its broader sense also means holding both individuals and organisation responsible for performance, measured as objectively as possible.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

- Traditional Accountability system generally exist only at the national or Macro level more as institutional mechanisms as part of the democratic system.
- But they are not sufficiently focused to provide that level of public accountability which will result in improved services to the people (Example: Legislative Review and the Budgetary Procedure).
- Their attention is more focused on the inputs rather than the outputs
- Political leaders legislators and supervising bureaucrats including traditional audit act as 'proxies' for the public and generally use 'hierarchical control' to enforce what little accountability that exists today
- The effectiveness of these traditional systems, in ensuring public accountability has decreased steadily with the expanding role of the State.
- Besides scope of collusion between politicians, bureaucrats and other interests and the subverting of accountability by those charged with empowering them denies the benefit of services to the citizens for whom they are meant.
- Such lack of accountability combined with lack of transparency and denial of access to information, has led to the perpetration of various types of financial irregularities of different magnitudes
- There has been an emergence of what may be called 'legal accountability' with the judicial system taking a more proactive role in public and social issues, there are obvious limitations in ensuring public accountability through the judicial process.
- Audit and Legislative Review : – The results of their findings and the action taken to improve or rectify the deficiencies as pointed out should be made public and widely circulated.
- Participation in Budgetary Policy : – Finance Ministers invites different interest groups for pre-budget discussion. This is more a ritual at present as was evidenced by the discussion which three successive Finance Ministers had with the representatives of Consumer Organisations.
- There should be discussions on issues and a system of obtaining of feedback and inputs from them, rather than the process of budget making being cloaked in so much secrecy as at present.
- Public Feedback on Policies : – There is no mechanism available at present for this. A systematised methodology should be found for informed public interaction on important policy issues.
- Provision of External Review and Public Feedback on Public Expenditure : – Independent Audit does

exist and does play an important role. However it is not sufficiently effective in improving the functioning of the Governmental machinery or its accountability.

- Legal Provision for Norms for Services : – In the absence of any enforceable standards for providing such services, there is hardly any public accountability on the part of such service providers
- Autonomy for Public Service Agencies : – Such autonomy exists at present only in name. There is hardly any flexibility in their approach and their budget allocation as also their staff and their careers mostly remain unaffected, irrespective of their good or bad performance. There is no incentive for them to be responsive and accountable.
- If an enabling environment is created by Government – by adopting and declaring Citizens' Charter Principles as a National Policy – as was done in Britain when the Government placed a White Paper on the subject in the British Parliament.

#### REMEDIES FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF CITIZEN'S CHARTER

- ❖ Providing Legal provisions to facilitate participation, transparency and organisational autonomy and to induce responsiveness in the public sector.
- ❖ Deregulation, franchising and contracting out of services to multiple providers and public-private or public-public competition with adequate safety nets to the interest of citizens.
- ❖ Project Level Accountability Mechanism : – Participation of the relevant stakeholders (staff, users, citizens etc.) In the preparation, design, implementation and evaluation of projects to improve public accountability
- ❖ Systematic User Surveys : – to assess customer satisfaction regarding quality adequacy – Citizen groups consumer organisations and other ngos should also be encouraged to provide such feedback.
- ❖ Performance Plans and Agreement : – Public Agencies/enterprises responsible for major investments and services should prepare annual Performance Plans that specify their goals and standards for service delivery.
- ❖ User Charges for Participation : – User charges on the other hand encourages individuals and other groups to demand better performance and accountability – not necessarily imply that such charges should be levied for cost recovery
- ❖ Public Hearings : – Setting up of regulatory agencies with adequate legal backing in respect of important service which can hold public hearings on important issues, such as tariff structure etc. Can strengthen public accountability through participation

#### WHO GIVES WHAT ?

- All Government Organisations at different levels, whether it be the Central Government, the State Government, District Administration, Local Municipal Bodies who deal with the public, as also the various public utilities and other organisations – would be required to work out and : –
- Set standards for their various services, indicating the reasonable minimum and maximum response time, or frequency of providing services, as the case may be, as far as possible in consultation with the users of the services to suit their convenience.
- Such standards should be prominently displayed and published and be readily available to the public on demand, in easily understandable local languages.
- If services are not satisfactory, or the standards are not adhered to, without valid explanation or justification, there should be a duly notified grievance redressal procedure, indicating clearly, response time for replies to complaints with easy access to the officials concerned.
- There should be transparency and easy access to information, when required, with well defined and

notified display regarding who should be approached for what information.

- As far as possible there should be a single window disposal, instead of the citizen being pushed around

#### WHO GETS WHAT IN CITIZEN'S CHARTER ?

- If the 'Citizens' Charter' becomes a reality then:
  - The first benefit that the Common citizen would get is the confidence that he would be heard by the "man behind the counter" - a situation which is sadly lacking today.
  - The Common citizen would know that he can expect and demand, courteous and efficient service with prescribed minimum standards, as a matter of right.
  - If things go wrong the citizen would know what to do and whom to approach, for redressal of his grievances and above all he will know that he will no longer be pushed from pillar to post and full frustrated in getting his grievances redressed.
- The citizen will then be able to shed the apathy, passivity and fear & be able to raise his voice against maladministration and inefficiency, as also various corrupt practices and thus become a force to be reckoned with.



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