



Governance by Commitment: Exploring Empirical Insights of Citizen Charter Model in Indian Administrative Culture

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Abstract

The Era of New Public Management (NPM) reforms and public choice approach led to structural changes in the service delivery to public/clients, resulting in development of more people oriented and time bound services from government officials. The evolution of Citizen Charter (CC) in the public sector is the most obvious and prominent mechanism for decentralized and citizen centric governance tool. Since 1997, Citizen Charter in Indian context has evolved significantly and still being modified to match the practical aspects of governance. In stages, it has been consistently institutionalized prominently in the central and state governments to develop a more transparent, service-oriented administrative culture with a clear focus of enhancing current efficiency levels. However, there have been severe issues and deficiencies with the theoretical aspects of charter formulated by governments and the execution, starting with those ministries and departments that have large public interfaces. From this perspective, the paper critically appraises and evaluates the citizen charter(s) formulated by ministries and departments of central government and state governments available on official websites. These issues have been analyzed through a conceptual and analytical framework. Based on findings, the study concluded that the lack of awareness and less publicity; absence of stakeholders' participation; institutional and administrative inability to ensure supervision and monitoring mechanism and almost non-existent periodical review of charters has affected its potential effectiveness. Finally, the paper qualitatively measures the competency

of charters on the assessment criteria articulated in Sevottam Model. Ultimately, it becomes mandatory on the part of administration to ensure necessary procedural modifications in citizen charter implementation by promoting citizen-centric administrative culture.

Keywords: Citizen Charter (CC); Department; Ministry; Participation; Service Delivery

1. BACKGROUND

The welfare state, as it developed in the post-world war period, was structured by concepts of formal rationality, bureaucratic dominance, centralized authority, and hierarchical control. In the modern neo-liberal state of affairs, the promotion of enhanced responsiveness in the course of service delivery to the user of public services forms the basis tenet of 'public service renewal'. This becomes pertinent for the governments to accommodate accountability along with the reform of the civil service, decentralisation, right to information, strengthening human resource management, and introduction of role of government as regulator. The New Management Reforms post 1980s marked the dynamic shift in the role of government which clearly spelt out the pluralism in public choice approach and gave birth to the public value theory. This new public management reform was termed as paradigm shift away from Weberian public administration, as institutionalized in the bureau-professionalism of the post-war welfare state. In fact, the two prominent theoretical in interpretations that has evolved from this are: an 'economic rationalist' model of public management, in which the market is emphasized as the central coordinating mechanism of bureaucratic action; and a 'post-bureaucratic' model characterized by mutual adjustment among public managers operating within a social dynamic of greater complexity, uncertainty and democratization. In this regard a series of service operations with the ultimate objective of maximizing citizens' welfare, the trend of use of management principles such as the Six Sigma concepts (data, focus on clients/citizens, quality) combined with Lean thinking (process flow, minimizing the costs of unnecessary complexity) came to be adopted with the vision to rejuvenate the conventional relation of government and citizen. This gave way to 'Citizens' Charter "a formal document that identifies obligations of government agencies to citizens based on specified transparency criteria" to transform government service organizations into more efficient and citizen friendly agencies.

As 'good governance, is primarily focused on provision of delivering the service in the notion of transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation, and responsiveness, the Citizen Charter tends to shift from the traditionally top-centric government bureaucracy into one that is bottom-up and citizen driven. In these respects, the social democratic conception of citizenship gets prominence to the combination of politics and markets from the mixed-economy perspective. In other words, CC is a document that outlines the commitment of the service provider towards the citizens through clearly specified benchmarks of quality and standards of service. The concept of Citizens' Charter enshrines the trust between the service provider and its users. A Citizens' Charter is a public declaration that outlines the rights of citizens to a specific service, the service standards, the requirements for users, and the remedies available to those users in the event that standards are not met. The Charter concept gives citizens more power to demand dependable service standards. Therefore, the fundamental goal of the Citizens' Charter is to make public services more focused on the needs of the citizens by ensuring that they are demand-driven rather than supply-driven.

1.1 First Articulation

It was the Conservative Government (United Kingdom) of John Major in 1991 which under its national programme operationalized the very concept. It was articulated and implemented 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*. Accordingly, "The Citizens' sees public services through the eyes of those

who use them. For too long the provider has dominated and now it is the turn of the user... The Citizens' Charter will raise quality, increase choice, secure better value and extend accountability (Cabinet Office, U.K., 1992). The initiative yielded promising results which necessitated the Labour Government (1998) of Tony Blair to reinstitute it as 'Services First.' Originally the Six principles of the Citizens Charter movement 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 taxpayer's money
- (v) *Accountability*: Individuals and Organizations'
- (vi) *Transparency*: Rules/ Procedures/ Schemes/Grievances

These six basic tenets were revised during 'Service First' into 9 principles:

- 1. Set standards of service;
- 2. Be open and provide full information;
- 3. Consult and involve;
- 4. Encourage access and promote choice;
- 5. Treat all fairly;
- 6. Put things right when they go wrong;
- 7. Use resources effectively;
- 8. Innovate and improve; and
- 9. Work with other providers

1.2 Citizen's Charter in India

The impressive feat of the citizen's charter in the UK has made this administrative tool popular across the globe and India is no exception to this trend (Ghuman, 2017). During May 1997 Chief Ministers' Conference (organised in the wake of National Debate for Responsive Administration, 1996) consensus was built on (a) enforcement of Citizen's Charters in all public service organisations, (b) redressal of public grievances, (c) decentralization and devolution of powers and (d) review of laws, regulations and procedures (Garg, 2006). Since May 1997, Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances in Government of India (DARPG) initiated the task of coordinating, formulating and operationalising Citizens' Charters to different Ministries/Departments of both central and state govt. On 31 May, 2002 a comprehensive Website of Citizens' Charter in Government of India (www.goicharters.nic.in) was launched by the DAR&PG as one point source to access the Citizens' Charters issued by Central Government Ministries/ Departments/ Organizations' and State Governments. The Charters formulated in India is supposed to enshrine: (i) *Vision and Mission Statement*; (ii) *Details of business transacted by the organisation*; (iii) *Details of clients*; (iv) *Details of services provided to each client group*; (v) *Details of grievance redress mechanism and how to access it*; and (vi) *Expectations from the clients*.

1.3 Objective

This study is an attempt to explore and analyze the Citizen's Charter adopted by the Ministries/ Depts. of central govt. In this pursuit the study examines the charters from the overarching elements originally spelt out to formulate CC in Indian context and identify the shortcomings of same. Further, the study investigates the parameters announced by "*Sevottam Model*" and its compliance in the charters formulated. Finally, there are recommendations based on the findings of the study.

1.4 Data sources & Methodology

The charters have been purposively selected from their respective official website. The study is based on qualitative research methods. Hence, the study has adopted an explanatory method to assess the Charters.

2. THE INDIVIDUAL CHARTERS

Analysis of Citizens' Charters

An evaluation of the Citizens' Charters of various government agencies was carried out by DARPG and Consumer Coordination Council, New Delhi, an NGO, in October 1998 which was then followed by authorizing a professional agency to develop a standardised model for internal and external evaluation of Citizens' Charters in a more effective, quantifiable and objective manner in Ministries/Departments and State Governments/UTs in the Year 2002-03. The current study intends to focus on those organizations which have a direct interface with citizens on a routine basis. We have analysed the Citizens' Charters of Ministries/Departments of GOI and Delhi Women Commission (Govt. of NCT).

2.1 Citizen's / Client's Charter of Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs, GOI: ¹

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) is the apex authority of Government of India at the central level to formulate policies, sponsor and support programme, coordinate the activities of various Central Ministries, State Governments and other nodal authorities and monitor the programmes concerning all the issues of housing and urban affairs in the country. The Citizen's/ Client's Charter² of the ministry was issued in December 2011 and since then it has continued to exist in operation even though it was supposed to be reviewed in December 2012. It is envisioned to create economically vibrant, inclusive, efficient, and sustainable urban habitats in order to ensure improved urban life.

Deficiency: Even if MoHUA's constitutional and legal authority is limited only to Delhi and UTs, it has dominant influence on pattern of urbanization and real estate investment through its national policy, development schemes and grants. Since there is a gap of almost 11yrs when it was first operationalized; it is technically outdated and redundant. Charter has been vaguely designed and lacks a comprehensive approach to process the request of stakeholders. Though it assures service standards for only Main Services / Transactions but fails to ensure Grievance Redressal process in specified time. There must agency specific CC to categorically define its service limits.

Lack of administrative efficiency to update and review the service delivery process and adequate service standards defies the vision of citizen centric governance.

2.2 Citizen's/Client's Charter for Ministry of Women & Child Development (MoWCD, GOI) ³

The ministry is mandated to ensure holistic development of both women and children in the nation and advances its goals through legislations, policies and programmes by coordinating with state agencies and NGOs. It's recently updated Citizen's Charter 2022-23 visions to "*Empower women living with dignity and contributing as equal partners in development in an environment free from violence and discrimination and well-nurtured children with full opportunities for growth and development in a safe and protective environment.*" Through its policies and programmes, by creating awareness about their rights and facilitating institutional and legislative support; this Charter is aimed at promoting social and economic empowerment of women while mainstreaming gender concerns, ensuring development, care

¹ <https://mohua.gov.in/cms/citizen-charter.php>

² [https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/citizencharter2010_2\(3\).pdf](https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/citizencharter2010_2(3).pdf)

³ <https://wcd.nic.in/about-us/citizens-clients-charter>

and protection of children by facilitating access to learning and nutritional support. This is the fourth (past CCs 2018-19; 2011-12; 2013-14) charter that has been operationalized; however, it wasn't reviewed regularly to accommodate changes in policies and service. It had categorically specified the different services of ministry with its Success Indicators and tentative Service Standards. To name few:

- Under Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 for Anganwadi Services average time taken for releasing funds to the State Governments/UT Administrations after for previous quarter of year within 30 Working days.
- For Organizing/ Facilitating Gender Budgeting trainings/workshops conducted by State Governments/ UT Administrations, its Success Indicators depends upon as percentage of trainings/workshops organised within three months of sanction amounts which provides it 80% as Service Standards.

However, according to charter of the ministry, individual citizens aren't identified as one of the 13 stakeholders that it lists. As the direct benefit of policies of the ministry is coordinated by the NGOs or state agencies, the charter doesn't provide any model guidelines for decentralised service delivery process. In the absence of agency specific measures, Responsibility Centres and Subordinate Organizations of the ministry just replicate the CC provided by the MoWCD website. Ministries need to acknowledge that the beneficiaries of the policies at the field level units remain unknown to the service delivery mechanism. Further, the process for availing grievance redressal should be clearly spelt out for the ground level units while adhering to the overarching principles adopted by the organization.

2.3 Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), (GOI):

The MoSJE is responsible for welfare, social justice and empowerment of disadvantaged and marginalised sections of society, including scheduled castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC), LGBT people, the disabled, the elderly, and the victims of drug abuse. GoI is party to (i) Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and the Pacific Region - adopted at Beijing in December 1992, and (ii) The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Primarily ministry tends to make these disadvantaged people educationally, socially and economically empowered which is done through its two departments:

2.3.1 Department of Social Justice and Empowerment:⁴ Citizen Charter of 2016-17 has been republished and operationalized from Feb.2022 which visions *equal opportunities are ensured for the growth and development for SCs, OBCs, and adequate support and opportunities are ensured for Senior citizens and victims of substance abuse*. For past 6years it hasn't been reviewed and new welfare mechanisms don't find any mention about process or service standards. Individual activists, academicians and associations of the target groups of the Ministry working in the subject areas of the Ministry are its clients besides agencies through which all the Schemes/Programmes are implemented, as per the guidelines/standing instructions. The charter is more like an official brochure which is quite abstract and doesn't provide valid operational guidelines to its agencies to provide programmes of educational, economic and social development and rehabilitation of its target groups.

Exigency: To accommodate inclusivity in policy execution, it needs to review and monitor the charter on an annual basis. This must be done in concurrence of feedback received from its stakeholders and citizens. Its field agencies are ordered to mandatorily incorporate CC in its functioning, keeping in mind the wholesome approach of the ministry.

⁴ <https://socialjustice.gov.in/common/76722>

2.3.2 Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan):⁵ This department was created to look after the specialised nature of the subject on "Disability" and work in tandem as vision enshrined in the UNCRPD. This Charter of year 2019-20 focuses on Persons with Disabilities (PwD) for their socio-economic and educational empowerment and holistic development through physical rehabilitation, by increasing accessibility and prominently focusing on advocacy and awareness generation. This department also doesn't mention individual citizens as its stakeholders however they are subjected to receive benefits of all the Schemes/Programmes of the department through State Governments, Central autonomous institutions of the Department, educational institutions and NGOs. Services as specified by the charter are supposed to be disposed of from a minimum of 1 day to in some cases up to 120 working days.

For National Overseas Scholarship, offline applications are invited throughout the year, which is processed. Tentatively takes 38 days in all from screening of applications till issue provisional award letter to the students. MoSJE has no field set-up of its own; this makes its implementing agencies formulate charters in all accordance with the inclusive vision of ministry. As only these agencies have citizen interface on a regular basis, they must be devised keeping in view the issues faced by PwD and provide timeframes for service delivery.

2.4 Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance (GOI): ⁶

The Department of Revenue exercises control in respect of matters relating to tax collection in India through two statutory Boards namely, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

2.4.1 Taxpayers' Charter of Income Tax Department (ITD): ⁷ The agency undertakes direct tax collection for the government of India by enforcing various direct tax laws (the Income-tax Act, 1961) from businesses, professionals, NGOs, income earning citizens, and local authorities, among others. The Citizens' Charter (March, 2007) of ITD was analysed was Second Administrative Reforms Commission in its *Twelfth Report: Citizen Centric Administration the Heart of Governance* which affirmed the need of CC at the level of field units by ascertaining the ground situation. The charter of 2007 was further reviewed in July 2010 and again was issued in April 2014 (department was supposed to review the charter within a period of three years). However, on August 13, 2020 "*The Taxpayers' Charter*" was launched and it promises to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of income taxpayers and to reduce the cost of compliance with tax laws. The charter lists in total 14 commitments to the income taxpayer as well as list 6 points that the department expects from the taxpayers. To list out commitments as:

- *provide fair, courteous, and reasonable treatment in dealings with taxpayers*
- *treat taxpayer as honest unless there is a reason to believe otherwise*
- *provide fair and impartial appeal and review mechanism*
- *provide complete and accurate information*
- *provide timely decisions*
- *collect the correct amount of tax*
- *respect privacy of taxpayer*

⁵ <https://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/citizen-charter.php>

⁶ <https://dor.gov.in/link/citizen-charter>

⁷ <https://www.incometax.gov.in/iec/foportal/sites/default/files/2022-08/taxpayer-charter-english.pdf#>

- *maintain confidentiality and shan't disclose any information provided by taxpayer to the department unless authorized by law*
- *hold its authorities accountable for their actions*
- *enable representative of choice to every taxpayer*
- *provide mechanism to lodge complaint and prompt disposal*
- *provide a fair & just system to resolve tax issues in a time-bound manner*
- *publish service standards and report periodically*
- *reduce cost of compliance when administering tax legislation*

Vagueness: Through its commitments, the Taxpayer's Charter aims to build a voluntary compliance and trust between a taxpayer and the tax administration and reduce harassment. But these commitments have been defined vaguely in a cursory manner and lacks comprehensive details about service standards and timelines for delivery of services. However, a Citizens' Charter is not enforceable by law, while the Taxpayers' Charter has been enshrined in the statute of the income tax law that makes it binding on the tax department. It asks taxpayers to approach the Taxpayers' Charter Cell under the Principal Chief Commissioner of Income tax in each zone for its compliance. But the field units across the country differ on account of workload (i.e. number of cases, complexity involved), public officials and accessibility to its taxpayers. Simultaneously, it doesn't spell out the review process and simplify the procedures according to supporting taxpayers and truly streamlining assessments.

Remedy: Charter accentuates respect for taxpayers' privacy and maintaining confidentiality is a standout step in approach towards its clients. Though, there is a need to significantly publicise the charter both through mass media and social media platforms and create an awareness campaign at community level to actively receive feedback from its clients. Further, there is need to mention specific time to review and evaluate the charter in due course the extent to which the specified times as spelled out is being strictly adhered to and ensure suitable remedial measures accordingly. Due to tax collection being done through regional offices; there is a need to publicise Charter in local language to ensure effective response. Simultaneously it is equally important to ensure third party evaluation of commitments made in the charter and incorporate that feedback with larger goals of service delivery relation between taxpayers and the department itself.

2.5 Model Citizen Charter for Gram Panchayats (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GOI): ⁸

This specific Model Citizen Charter for Panchayats was prepared by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) in collaboration with National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) in June, 2021 which was needed to be operationalised from 15 August 2021 by specific Gram Panchayats as according to their needs. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) constitute the third tier of government in the rural areas and represent the first level of Government interaction for over 60% of the Indian population. The formulation of Citizen Charter for Gram Panchayats has for the first time decentralized the service delivery approach for government to the grassroots level. It aims to provide services to the people through Panchayats in a time bound manner for empowering citizens, redressing their grievances and promoting the inclusive and sustainable growth of rural India. *'The basic objective of 'Gram Panchayat Citizens' Charter is to empower the Citizens in relation to public services and improve service quality on the lines of Citizens expectations. The creation of Charter brings professionalism in Panchayat functioning and helps to reach out to all sections of community without any discrimination. The standards committed by the Panchayats are useful yardsticks for monitoring and evaluation of service delivery.'*

⁸ https://www.panchayat.gov.in/en/whats-new-content/-/asset_publisher/4ySMdMHjZlHP/content/citizen-charter-1

- **Process of Preparation of ‘Gram Panchayat Citizens’ Charter:** It has clearly mandated each Gram Panchayat to formulate its CC separately. It recommends the participation of Panchayats while preparing the charter and seeking the views of the Panchayat Secretary and other officers of the concerned line departments. It guides the Panchayats to include only those services that are delivered by the Panchayat on a regular basis. Simultaneously specifying the fee leviable for particular services and time limit of each service.
- **Service Standards:** It has been developed for the delivery of the services across the 29 sectors, aligning actions with localised Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Grievance redressal:** The Charter specifically mentions Sarpanch and the Panchayat Secretary as grievances redressal body while further designating higher appellate authority to consider the unsatisfactory response.
- **Points Up:** The model charter has been issued as a comprehensive guideline for the Panchayats, and every Gram Panchayat is expected to formulate charters according to their local needs. This flexibility in adoption of charter has given local population direct participation in charter formulation process which can generate proactive governance at grassroots level through final approval by Gram Sabha.
- The model Charter acknowledges the Panchayat specific issues in governance; hence it authorizes them to act as the facilitators for the residents to avail the requisite services wherein Panchayats are not competent enough to directly offer services.

The Model charter has left it to Panchayat to determine the fee to avail the various services. This authorizes competent authority to ensure inclusivity in governance for people to access services. Charter has clubbed local services offered by the Panchayat in 13 categories which have been further sub-divided according to issues that are pertinent to every rural setting.

1. *Certificate / License / Permissions*
2. *Administrative / Governance*
3. *Development Related*
4. *COVID/ Public Health Related measures*
5. *Taxation*
6. *Drinking Water Supply*
7. *Sanitation*
8. *Street Lighting*
9. *Community Assets*
10. *Welfare Related*
11. *Public Libraries*
12. *Connectivity*
13. *Digital Services*

The Charter has set a comprehensive indicative time limit for delivery of the service as a whole, but Panchayats have been given flexibility to customize/align according to their local level. Time frame for service disposal varies from 1day to maximum 30 day where Panchayat Secretary/Sarpanch/Panchayat President/Pradhan/ other Panchayat nominated person have been authorised to be contacted or to be customized per the local responsibilities, in coordination with the representatives of concerned line departments. It seeks Panchayat officials to forward service requests digitally to the concerned line department for processing wherever it is needed. To mention few services to be disposed in time frame:

- Sanitization of public places such as roads, drains, marketplaces, govt. schools, AWC, and Complaint against nonfunctional streetlights to be disposed in 1 day
- Request for supply of bin for waste disposal, complains of overflowing drain/ stagnation of water on road and repairs to hand pumps to be disposed in 2 days
- Issue of Certificates such as Birth/ Death/ Marriage/property ownership, issue of trade license, provision of facilities at worksite for beneficiaries under MGNREGA, issues relating to water quality and quantity- regularity to be solved in 3 days
- Request for convening Gram Sabha, to recommend for skill training under SANKALP, recognition of Prior Learning (RPL,) to arrange veterinary care services, sanction of water supply connection, provision for drinking water for animals, cleaning of rainwater harvesting structures installed in community areas and issues related to internet service in Panchayat etc. to be solved in 7 days
- Issue of MGNREGA Job Card, request for work under MGNREGA, NOC for setting up small industry in village, construction permissions for residential / commercial, improvements in Common Service Centre, request for enrolling in skill training programmes, transfer of ownership of property/ Mutation etc. to be solved in 15 days
- Request to construct rainwater harvesting structures in govt. schools/ AWC, Appeal petition against tax assessment, maintenance/improvements in playground/public parks, addition/ deletion of name in ration card to be disposed in 30 days

Even so, the major challenge with the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India remains the lack of capacity, in terms of funds, functions as well as functionaries. But since this charter is supposed to be customized as according to local needs, it heralds a new citizen centric governance model to be adopted on such a large scale globally. The service standards promised in the charter need to be evaluated and reviewed regularly to improve its benchmark. For this, administrative efficiency of Panchayats personnel needs to be professionally trained to stand out with the vision of charters. This must be the duty of Panchayat Secretary to keep supervision on standards which are being followed by his office staff. Since grievance redressal rests with him, it must be made sure that disposal of complaints to be completed in a time bound manner and in case of failure it must be forwarded to appellate authority above him.

2.6 Delhi Commission for Women (DCW, Government of NCT of Delhi, India): ⁹

DCW started functioning in the year 1996 with its mandate to investigate and examine all matters relating to the safeguards provided to women under the Constitution and other laws while making recommendations to Delhi Govt. to consistently improve conditions of women. In some cases, it is mandated to take *suo-moto* notice of matters pertaining to Deprivation of women's rights, non-implementation and non-compliance of policy decisions, ensuring welfare and providing relief to women. Charter published in the DCW website mentions that it functions as Civil Court.

Issues: The charter seems very symbolic and illustrative of the various programmes offered by the govt. even though NCT is subjected to horrific gender crimes and issues; this charter hasn't been updated since July 2015. It has been poorly formulated without mentioning its service standards for Projects & Programmes. It lacks the comprehensive grievance redressal mechanism, and neither has it mentioned stakeholders who are subjected to receive help.

Suggested Remedy: DCW being premier agency to accommodate women related matters; it needs to mandatorily review the charter. Simultaneously, it should elaborate mode of operation for awareness schemes and consistently update feedback. DCW has direct interface with the women; hence it should

⁹ http://web.delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/Lib_DCW/DCW/Home/Citizens+Charter

prominently incorporate their vision. It should clearly specify organisational vision as the services rendered by it must show improvement in longer terms.

3. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

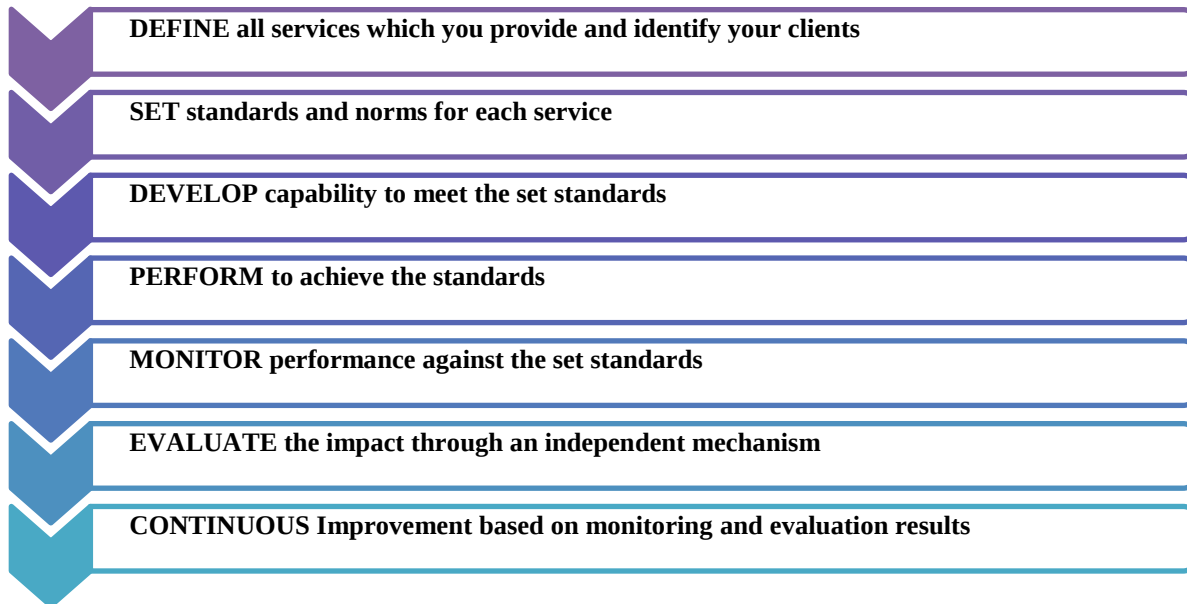
There are only a few more than 700 charters adopted in the country. Findings suggest that responsiveness and accountability dimensions are relatively explained, but participation and reactivity are not. The analysis of above six different Charters brings out major findings:

- 1) **Lack of quantifiable delivery standards:** The Charters seldom stipulate quantifiable delivery standards. In case when standards of delivery in specific charters are adopted there is no institutional mechanism to make a fair assessment to ascertain the expected level of service achieved or not. There is a lack of supervisory plan of action which could determine that these standards are actually adhered to.
- 2) **No Compensation:** These charters don't provide any standards to compensate the citizen if the organization fails its commitments made in the charters. This further impairs the citizen-friendly mechanism by creating closed institutional culture.
- 3) **Uniform Citizen's Charter:** Every parent ministry/department adopts their charters according to their organisational goals and needs. But in most cases their subordinate offices, field units or agencies replicate the same parent organizational charters. The ground interface is overlooked, resulting in a lack of flexibility in operation.
- 4) **No Stakeholders/clients participation:** Stakeholders participation has been the primary step in CC formulation but in majority of cases consultation process was minimal or largely absent. Further, it results in routine activities of the organization and standards that are spelled out in charters are far from reality.
- 5) **Official Handbook:** Most Charters are compendium of organisational schemes and unrealistic or reflect the aspirations of the organization.
- 6) **No Periodic Revision:** This is one of the most dramatic failures of CC in India. Due to complete inability of administration to regularly update or revisit the charters, the very essence of citizen-centric approach of service delivery fails. In some cases, charters haven't been updated since the very first time it was operationalised. Almost all of the state government agencies haven't been able to revise its charters, or if they revisit, it simply republishes them with the concerned year.
- 7) **Inadequate publicity:** Most service providers are unaware of the Charter's philosophy, objectives, and key elements. In none of the Departments assessed, the Charters have been adequately publicized to the citizens. Lack of awareness among citizens defies the nature of CC in order to act as an administrative obligation. It aggravates the exclusion of access to services in a time-bound, responsive manner.

4. SEVOTTAM Model

India's transition from a predominantly colonial, rule-bound and procedure-oriented bureaucracy to a citizen-centric administrative system created the need for institutional mechanisms capable of converting formal administrative commitments into measurable improvements in public service delivery. The colonial legacy, characterised by hierarchical structures, rigid procedures, limited citizen participation and a predominantly authority-centric administrative culture, posed significant challenges to

the effective institutionalisation of the Citizen's Charter. The emergence of the Citizen's Charter, complemented by the Right to Information (RTI), therefore marked an important shift towards transparency, accountability, responsiveness and greater recognition of citizens as rights-bearing stakeholders rather than passive recipients of public services.



However, the experience of Citizen's Charters demonstrated that merely declaring service standards was insufficient to guarantee quality public service delivery. This necessitated a more comprehensive institutional framework that could connect service commitments with actual performance, grievance redressal and organisational capability. In this context, the Sevottam Model, developed under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), represents an integrated framework for institutionalising excellence in public service delivery. The "Sevottam" is made of two Hindi words *Seva* (Service) and *Uttam* (Excellent) which means 'Excellence in Service', emphasizing the idea of "Service." Sevottam Model was designed and operationalised as an assessment tool for service delivery by DARPG in 2006 which embodies the normative shift from "administration of rules" to "excellence in service."

SEVOTTAM Model

Figure 1: Second ARC Seven Step Model for Citizen Centricity

(This model draws from the principles of the IS 15700:2005, the Sevottam model and the Customer Service Excellence Model of the UK)

The model rests on three mutually reinforcing components: (i) Citizen's Charter, which defines the organisation's service commitments and standards; (ii) Public Grievance Redressal Mechanism, which provides citizens with an institutional avenue for seeking resolution when service commitments are not fulfilled; and (iii) Capability Building for Service Delivery, which strengthens organisational processes, human resources and institutional capacity required to consistently meet those commitments. Thus, Sevottam moves beyond a declaration-based approach and establishes a continuous improvement cycle of commitment to service delivery using grievance redressal mechanism by consistently working on

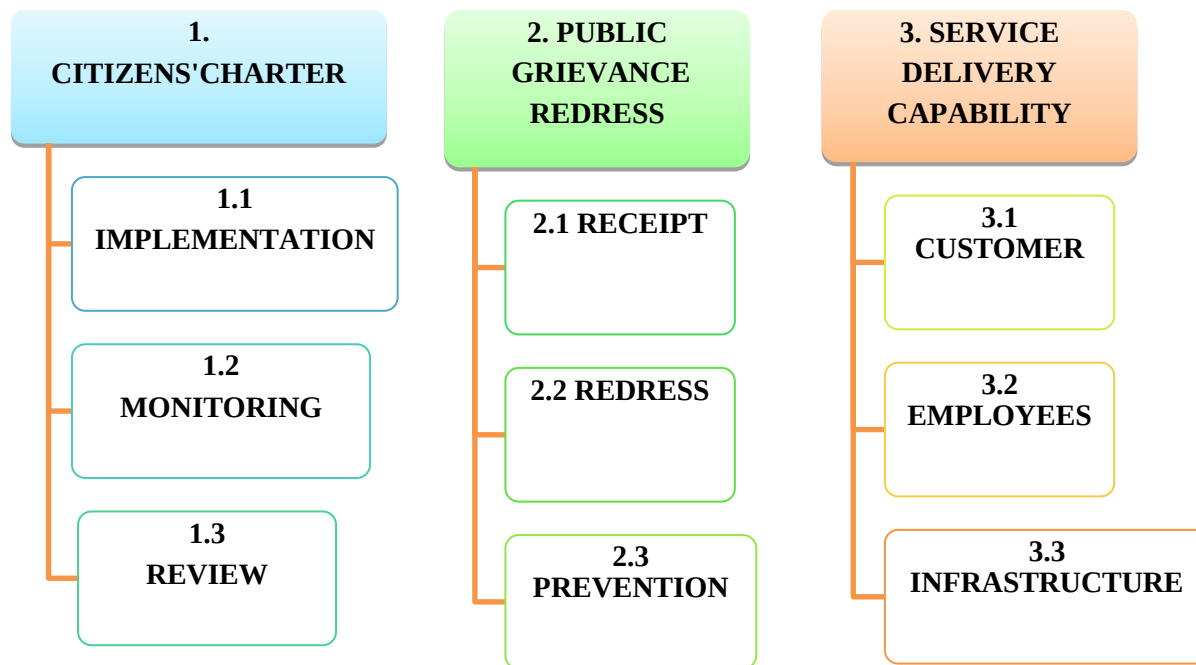
feedbacks received from stakeholder and improving on organisational learning and finally resulting into improved service quality.

In this sense, Sevottam can be understood not merely as a Quality Management System (QMS), but as an institutional architecture for citizen-centric governance, seeking to bridge the gap between administrative intent and citizens' lived experience of public services. Its significance lies in embedding measurable service standards, accountability, feedback, process improvement and organisational capacity within the public administration system. Consequently, the model provides a benchmark-oriented framework through which government institutions can pursue responsive, transparent, accountable, inclusive and continuously improving public service delivery, thereby strengthening the broader transformation towards a genuinely citizen-centric administrative culture.

The Sevottam model is a three-module assessment tool with 11 elements in each module based on 'Nine Compliance Criteria Model for Citizen Centricity' that comprehensively cover all aspects of service delivery to monitor gaps as well as improvement sets a benchmark which is to be complied with while enhancing customer satisfaction, monitoring performance or assessing efficient and continual improvements in service delivery (*Figure 1*). The Sevottam Model was certified as IS 15700:2005 by the Bureau of Indian Standards in December 2005, and the Department of Posts, Government of India, New Delhi, was awarded the first *Sevottam* Certification in March 2008. *Sevottam* is a never-ending journey to bring our public service delivery systems up to the level of excellence desired by citizens (*Figure 2*). It combines e-governance solutions, process re-engineering, public servant capacity building, and collaboration with social groups to achieve transparency and accountability in delivery systems. This is subject to benchmark excellence.

The colonial bureaucratic setup/procedures and closed administrative procedures India inherited, was one of the issues that hampered the introduction and implementation of the concept of the citizen's charter in the Government of India. The Citizen charter along with RTI heralded a new plan of action in India based on citizen-centric administrative culture. The QMS of *Sevottam* tends to be an all-inclusive conceptual framework for institutionalizing sustained enhancement to ensure effective public service delivery.

Figure 2: Sevottam Model Assessment Criteria



CONCLUSION

The study acknowledges that the adoption of Citizen's Charter in India has earmarked a transparent and accountable public service delivery culture. Research findings reveal the changing nature of state-society interaction in India have been utilized in the elements of CC but there are signs that its 'value-added elements' varies considerably from service to service embodying it as only moral dimension of civil service accountability. The implementation of a Citizen's Charter depends upon its organisational accountability towards service delivery mechanisms. The study argues that the administrative inability and failure to address conceptual challenges in formulation of citizens' charter have impeded its end goals resulting in slight contribution to service quality at field units. It must be made mandatory for every public agency to institutionalize the elements of CC in its administrative culture. The extent to which CCs are effective is based on a number of interrelated factors which is reflected in the citizens' priorities and service standards promised.

The Charter does not by itself create new legal rights but helps in enforcing existing rights (Figure 3). This is a document based on mutual trust between the organization and the citizens. The paper concludes with suggestions to make the Citizen's Charter effective and thus improving the governance quality:

Figure 3: Ten Step for Citizen Centricity

1. **Process-orientation:** to involve street level bureaucrats in the charter programme
2. **Stakeholder's participation** in Citizens' Charter formulation process
3. **Process-orientation:** simple and accessible in vernacular language
4. **Organizational accountability:** charter should be customized as per the needs and functioning of the particular office/agency
5. **Quality orientation:** orientations programmes to equip values system in public personnel
6. **Regular monitoring and supervision:** to maintain the service standards & commitments
7. **Time bound grievance redress mechanism**
8. **Generate Awareness about Citizen's Charters:** mass media, display of CC at public offices, use of social media platforms
9. **Feedback Mechanism:** Citizens' Survey, Citizen Panels/dialogues, Consultations
10. **Periodic review:** Commitment to continuous improvement of charters' to set benchmark

The Sevottam Model represents a significant evolution in India's journey from a procedure-centric and authority-oriented bureaucracy towards a performance-driven and citizen-centric administrative system. By integrating the Citizen's Charter, grievance redressal and organisational capability, it recognises that quality governance cannot be achieved merely through the declaration of service standards; it requires institutional capacity, measurable performance, citizen feedback and continuous improvement. Thus, Sevottam provides a framework for transforming the Citizen's Charter from a formal statement of administrative intent into a living instrument of accountability and public value creation. Its effective institutionalisation can strengthen the responsiveness, transparency, efficiency and legitimacy of public administration, thereby making "*excellence in service*" an integral principle of India's evolving administrative culture.

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