



## **An Evaluation of a Citizen's Charter in Local Government A Case Study of Chandigarh, India**

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### **Abstract**

The Citizen's Charter, as one of the strategies of New Public Management, aims at providing quality services within a particular timeframe. It has been introduced in local government with the view of enhancing the excellence of public service deliverance in a responsive, transparent and accountable manner, which in turn aims at increasing the level of satisfaction. The present study aims at studying the Citizen's Charter being formulated by the Municipal Corporation Chandigarh, its implementation and effectiveness from point of view of the agency and as well from the citizens. The result of the implementation of the Citizen's Charter of the Municipal Corporation Chandigarh is a sheer failure and mere copying of the document for sake of procedural formalities. The reason behind this failure is lack of political will, failure of advertising and poor participation of the people. The study concludes with suggestions to make a Citizen's Charter effective and fruitful.

**Keywords:** Citizen's Charter, Local Government, India.

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## Introduction

The main test of a traditional system of administration is delivering goods and services in an efficient and effective manner. The administrations of South Asian countries are often termed as traditional administrative systems and various scholars claim that a traditional administrative system is ineffective, insensitive, inefficient and often hostile to the very people they are supposed to serve (Osborne and Plastrik: 1997, Peters: 1996). Further, it is argued that government as a whole has become increasingly divorced from the people. On the other side, at the local level governance when decentralized understands the concern of local residents, eliminates confusions of jurisdiction and makes decision-making responsive to people for whom services are intended (Oates, 1972). By reducing the gap between the government and the people, public officials are expected to have a greater ability to identify, understand and assure the quality of service and delivery more precisely (Montalvo 2009). With global media exposure and growing consciousness there has been a high level of expectation regarding the fairness and quality in the service delivery mechanism of the public sector. Citizens do not only demand efficiency, effectiveness and economy in service delivery but they also want public bodies to be more responsive to the users and consumers of public services" (Drewry 2005, p.321-340). Consequently Public Administration has been condemned for inefficiency and irresponsiveness, Based on such a response the doctrine of New Public Management emerged which aspire at introduction of competition in delivery of services, emphasis on performance evaluation of agencies, mission driven organizations, pro active government, decentralization of authority and adoption of participatory management, catalyst and entrepreneurial governance, redefining relations of government and citizen and transfer of control from bureaucracy to community with focus on empowering the citizens(Monga,2008),it can be deduced that concept of NPM advocates the role back of state and introduction of set principles of business management for public services for reaching the grassroots directly and efficiently in the changing environment of globalization, privatization and liberalization. It is in this backdrop the genesis of Citizen's Charter took place in national debate of good governance at a conference of chief secretaries of all states held in New Delhi, India in May, 1996. The Conference came out with the resolution "Action Plan for Effective and Responsive Government" 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).

## Citizen's Charter

The government of John Major implemented the Citizen's Charter Policy in the United Kingdom for the first time, in 1991, with the aim to continuously improve the quality of public services. The Citizen's Charter based on the model of United Kingdom has been adopted by developed nations including France (1992), Spain (1992), Belgium (1992), Canada (1995) and Australia (1997) as well as developing nations like Malaysia (1993) and India (1997). With the application of a Citizen's Charter it is anticipated to give

power to the citizen with the principles of choice, standards, value, accountability and transparency of the rules, procedures and grievance redress system of an institution. The elements of Citizen's Charters include the following:

- Setting measurable standards for service delivery
- Specifying service delivery and timeframe
- Giving opportunity to choose alternate services
- Scope to complaint and provision for corrective measure
- Value for money. All citizens will be given equal treatment and the value or service renders shall be more than the fees to be paid.

The Citizen's Charter is a document, which articulates the commitment of government organizations towards citizens through clearly specified yardsticks (Ghuman 2011). With the inception of New Public Management and its strategies around the globe, the local government of Chandigarh is under pressure to deliver the quality services in a responsive, transparent and accountable manner.

Thus, the Citizen's Charter at the local level is an important tool of good governance. It is in this backdrop that the present study analyzes the Citizen's Charter of an urban body in India – the Municipal Corporation Chandigarh. This is specifically done in the light of significant concepts of the Citizen's Charter which aim to enhance empowerment of the people, the timeframe of deliverance of services and to uproot corruption.

## **Research Methodology**

The present study examines the various facets of Citizen's Charter in Municipal Corporation Chandigarh, to accomplish these objectives both primary and secondary sources of information have been used. The secondary data was collected from office records, Citizen's Charter, consultation papers, reports of urban local bodies and commissions, books, journals, dissertations, internet, and newspapers. For various aspects of the Citizen's Charter of the Municipal Corporation and awareness among the inhabitants the study relied primarily on their website and informal interviews. The sources of primary data were interviews with the councilors of the municipal corporation and 100 walk in customers. The selection of includes individuals in the Public Relations Office and selected office bearers who deal directly with the people.

## **Background to the Case:**

The city of Chandigarh is one the most planned and clean cities in India (popularly known as 'City Beautiful'). It has a population of around 900,000. Chandigarh is one the fastest growing cities in India. Chandigarh became a union territory in 1966 and is the joint capital of two states, Punjab and Haryana. The jurisdiction of the Chandigarh Administration is around 114 square kilometers which includes approximately 25 villages. Since its inception as union territory civic functions such as water supply, sewerage and storm water drainage, city roads, and solid waste management are broadly performed by the Chandigarh Administration. With the formation of the Municipal Corporation

Chandigarh in 1994 (with 20 wards) with a jurisdictional area of 79.34 sq. out of 114 square kilometers local bodies were developed and some civic functions were transferred to them (Chandigarh Development Plan, 2006).

The functions which were transferred to municipalities under Article 243W, 74th CAA are urban planning including town planning, regulation of land use and construction of building, planning for economic and social development, roads and bridges, water supply, public health, sanitation, fire services, urban forestry, protection of environment and ecology, safeguarding the interest of weaker sections society including the handicapped and mentally retarded children, slum improvement and upgrading, urban poverty alleviation, provision of urban amenities and facilities which include parks, gardens and playgrounds, promotion of cultural , educational and aesthetic aspects, burials and burial grounds, cattle pounds, vital statistics including registration of births and deaths, public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops and public conveniences and regulation of slaughter houses. So in such a diversified field of public services the role of Citizen's Charter is very important to deliver the basic services in an efficient, effective and timely manner.

### Review of the Citizen's Charter at Municipal Corporation Chandigarh:

The concept of a charter took long time to originate; the idea was introduced as far back as 1999. It witnessed several drafts and amendments before it was finally introduced in 2004. The Charter informs the citizens about the area specific complaint centres of the various wings of the MCC. The information is available at the official website of the Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh (<http://mcchandigarh.gov.in/CITIZEN.pdf>). The thirty two page Citizen Charter is divided into various sections. Each section contains the information pertaining to area specific divisions, officers, compliant centers and phone numbers of concerned officials. The special feature of the Citizen Charter is the universal email address for all types of complaints i.e. [osd\\_mcc@chd.nic.in](mailto:osd_mcc@chd.nic.in) . It also states the timeframe in which a compliant will be resolved (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Complaints Will Be Attended

Blockage of sewer line	Within 1 day
Overflowing of sewer line	Within 1 day
Repair of damaged sewer line.	Within 2 days

### Results

#### *Citizen's Charter: A Mere Formality*

With the mounting pressure of deadlines set by the Government of India, Citizen's Charters have been prepared and it's not more than act of compiling earlier programmes relating to public services (Ghuman and Mehta, (2007). The document of

a Citizen Charter is one example of this procedural transfer. On basis of enquiry, It was found that the Citizen's Charter is a document of less importance for the municipal corporation as the Charter is not displayed anywhere at service areas or even at service windows of municipal corporation Chandigarh. Even the employees of the government agencies are not well informed regarding the Citizen's Charter. The Citizen's Charter which is available at official website of Municipal Corporation is obsolete; the access to internet is not common to all the inhabitants of the city.

Even the councilor of the civic body acknowledges that "The present Citizen's Charter is just a formality. There is no clause 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.

#### *Poor Design*

Charter formulation should be a very systematic process involving clients, users, stakeholders and the staff of service providers. The very fact that Municipal Corporation charters include all the programs shows that there is little relation to the standardization or the quality aspects, but in the present study, these aspects have not been given importance. It is difficult to imagine poorly designed Citizen's Charter as 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." Covering only a few MC departments in the charter shows the half-hearted approach of the civic body. During the meeting of the general house, one of the councilor lamented that the "Charter" was also approved in the year 2004 in which the time frame for completion of different types of works was mentioned and every type of information was mentioned for the benefit of the general public. But it is unfortunate that the said "Citizen's Charter" has not so far been implemented. She desired that every type of work should be time bound and the officers should be made accountable (Minutes of 170th meeting, August 2011).

#### *Poor Display of Right to Information Act*

Various inhabitants seeking information expressed anger at the Municipal Corporation for supplying imprecise and belated information on filing information. The research project findings found that indeed, seeking information from a public office in Chandigarh is difficult and time consuming. The information supplied is often incomplete and misleading and in addition to that the website of Municipal Corporation is not up-to-date (Sharma, 2010). This is against the spirit of a Citizen's Charter as Access to accurate and comprehensive information is one of the crucial components of a Citizen's Charter (Ghuman and Mehta, 2007).

#### *No Updating of 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



that should be provided to the citizens through the Charter. The Citizen's Charter found at the website of the MC is obsolete and old. A majority of the contact numbers have been changed. Through email inquiries made by the researcher there were no responses for the information sought.

### *Ineffective Public Relations*

The mere framing of a Citizen's Charters will not transform the mindset 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 being made to promote the Citizen's Charter. Almost eight years after the municipal corporation of Chandigarh (MCC) introduced the Citizen's Charter, the civic body has failed to popularize it, leaving the citizens high and dry. The residents continue to be confused regarding the functions of the MC and the UT administration.

### *Poor Awareness among Citizens*

From the very beginning the authorities stated that the rights of the citizens and the telephone numbers of their complaint redressal centres 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 clients at the office of the Municipal Corporation, it was found that 92 out of 100 were not aware of the concept of a Citizen's Charter and the rest knew it as a document without any significance.

### *Lack of professionalism among the employees*

A Citizen's Charter aims at providing specific 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. On the contrary, the findings show that the attitudes 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.

## **Inexcusable findings about the Citizen's Charter**

### *Poor Response to the complaints on the Social networking site (facebook)*

A beautiful initiative was taken by the corporation to identify the problems faced by the citizens over a social networking website. The following agonies of the complainants

depict the poor redressal of the complaints and the ineffective implementation of the Citizen's Charter.

Umesh, an engineer, posted a complaint on the Municipal Corporation's (MC) facebook page about the need to repair a dug-up road in Sector 40 on July 13 for the second time. He had earlier complained on June 29. MC officials responded saying that the matter "had been forwarded to the department concerned". Up to the end of August nothing had been done.

Dilip Kumar, a resident, posted his complaint on August 18 about an encroachment in front of SCOs 44 to 47 in Sector 47. He got a response from the MC after a week that his complaint had been forwarded to the official concerned. Up to the end of August nothing had been done

*'I feel there is no one in the MC entrusted with responding and acting on our requests. It is eyewash. I have been asking it to check encroachments in the Sector 34 market by sweet shops and shoe-sellers. But there has been no action and no reply.'* Amitpal Sharma posted this complaint on August 4 to the enforcement department.

*In front of house nos. 732-728, Sector 22-A, construction material has been lying on the road as well as on the footpath resulting in problems to pedestrians.* Ashutosh Sharma posted this complaint on July 1 to the road wing, but till July 13 no action was taken. Yet, the Charter states that a general complaint needs to be addressed within three days and in cases where a drive is needed, the MC needs 15 days

These are but a few out of scores of examples of the MC's lopsided complaint redress system under the Citizen's Charter. The charter was adopted by the MC in 2004. The Charter clearly detailed the response time of each complaint for which officials were designated. For the record, the MC's official website has posted all details of rules framed under the Charter (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Complaint Redress

Redress time limit	
Nature of complaint	Time frame
! Checking of blocked meter	Within 7 days
! Minor sewerage blockage problem	Within 2 days
! Replacement of broken road gullies	Within 2 days
! Pruning of trees on request	Within 7 days
! Removal of dead trees on request	Within 10 days
! Removal of carcass	Within 4 hours

Source: The Tribune , '29 August 2011' "Most complaints either go unnoticed or unattended to"

The above mentioned empirical results delineate the scenario of the Citizen's Charter of the Municipal Corporation Chandigarh. The initiative failed to generate quality services in a time bound manner. So there is great need to refine the process.

## Suggestions

A Citizen's Charter of local government services has been a gleaming initiative in the spirit that it has taken citizen centric governance to a new platform. Such an initiative creates a sense of quality governance. Measures should be taken to include all the services in the Citizen's Charter with a timeframe as the required time for any service is not unlimited. A Charter must indicate the specific quality standards to which the organization is committed. This will enable the citizens to exercise choice where available and raise voice where necessary to ensure that quality service is made available. A Charter should provide clear commitment on service delivery standards such as timelines, access, accuracy, reliability, affordability, responsiveness, fairness, sensitivity, and courtesy in the delivery of service. It is imperative that time frame for service delivery must be provided for each step at which explicit services are to be delivered, thus the involvement of staff also plays a crucial role in make Citizen's Charter a success, so there is significant need to train and sensitize all officials so that they can get familiar with the spirit of a Citizen's Charter.

Effective communication to and involvement of citizens at all the levels of the Citizen's Charter plays a crucial role, Proper publicity is required to ensure the citizens are aware of the Charter. It is essential to understand the pivotal role of public relations and media in promoting Citizen's Charter among the masses. The language of the Charter should necessarily be the language of the users. For example, in Chandigarh it is advisable to have the Charter in Hindi and English. In the research project it was found that the Citizen's Charter was solely in English, which could not be understood by all the inhabitants of the city. Further, the design of a Citizen's Charter should be such that it must be focused, simple and clear. Timely regulation, updating and evaluation of a Citizen's Charter hold the key to making it a fruitful endeavor.

## **Conclusion**

A Citizen's Charter, as an essence, is a quality assurance strategy that offers a type of consumer guarantee in order to make providers more responsive to consumers by consultation and more accountable to government and the community through performance monitoring. Although a Citizen's Charter has been implemented by Municipal Corporation Chandigarh, but it seems to be a procedural formality rather than an opportunity to introduce organized framework to boost quality of service delivery and enhance accountability. The study 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. The net outcome is that end-users lack the awareness to apply for services or redress their grievances in time bound manner. It is perceived that only when these roadblocks are addressed, the spirit of a Citizen's Charter would yield the desired results.

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## Case Study

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