CITIZEN'S CHARTER

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Now a days, in Indian scenario there has been raised an issue of black money, kept in Swiss bank. In Parliament, few leaders raised their voice against this issue, and demanded to bring back Indian money from foreign countries especially form Swiss bank in Switzerland. After 15th Lok Sabha election Parliament has took some steps to bring back that huge amount from abroad. This issue strikes in mind and a question is raised that how has it been gathered such a huge amount in foreign countries? What kind of methods, ways have been adapted to send this large amount by the senders? This whole episode shows the level of corruption in India and failure of governance. It has been developed gradually in the absence of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, rule of law, equality etc. Citizen Charter is considered as a major tool, which can ensure the elements of good governance and it also can fill the loopholes present in governance process. Besides, it is just not a document of services or facilities provided by the government/ organization but also are a real spirit of the good governance.

Over the years, in India, significant progress has been made in the field of economic development. This, along with a substantial increase in the literacy rate, (from 51.63% to 65.38% in the last decade) has made our citizens increasingly aware of their rights. They have become more articulate and expert the administration not merely to respond to their demands but also to anticipate them. It was in this climate that since 1996 a consensus had been 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 Response Conference was that the Central and state Governments would formulate Citizen's Charters, starting with those sectors that have a large public interface (e.g. Railways, Telecom, Posts, Public Distribution Systems). These Charters were required to include standards of

service and time limits that the public can reasonably expect avenues of grievance redress and a provision for independent scrutiny with the involvement of citizen and consumer groups.[1]

Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances in Government of India initiated the task of coordinating, formulating and operationalising Citizen's Charters. Guidelines for formulating the Charters as well as a list of do have and don'ts were communicated to various government departments/organizations to enable them to bring out focused and effective charters. For the formulation of the Charters, the government agencies at the Centre and State levels were advised to constitute a task force with representation from users, senior management and the cutting edge staff. A handbook on Citizen's Charters has been developed by the Department and sent to all the State Government/UT Administrations.

Primarily an adaptation of the UK model, the Indian Citizen's Charter has an additional component of 'expectations from the clients' or in other words 'obligations of the users'. Involvement of consumer organizations, citizen groups, and other stakeholders in the formulation of the Citizen's Charter meets the needs of the users. Regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the Charters, both internally and through external agencies enjoined. Till April, 2006, 111 Citizen's Charters had been formulated by the Central Government Ministries/Departments/Organizations and 668 Charters by various agencies of State Governments & Administration of Union Territories. Most of the national charters are posted on the government's websites and are open to public scrutiny. The organizations with Citizen's Charters are advised to give publicity to their charters through such means as print/electronic media and awareness campaigns.[2]

It has been well recognized world over that good governance is essential for sustainable development, both economic and social. The three essential aspects emphasized in good governance are transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the administration. "Citizen's 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 organizations providing public services.

Concept of Citizen Charter

The concept of Citizen's Charters 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

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[1] http://goicharters.nic.in/cchandbook.htm
[2] Ibid.

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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 basic objective of the Citizen's Charter is to empower the citizen in relation to public service delivery. Six principles of the Citizen's Charter movement as originally framed were: (i) Quality (ii) Choice (iii) Standards (iv) Value (v) Accountability and (vi) Transparency. These were later elaborated by the Labour Government as following nine principles of Service Delivery (1998):

- Set standards of service
- Be open and provide full information
- Consult and involve
- Encourage access and the promotion of choice
- Treat all fairly
- Put things right when they go wrong
- Use resources effectively
- Innovative and improve
- Work with other providers.[3]

Components

Citizen's/Client's Charter is a document which represents a systematic effort to focus on the commitment of the organization towards it's Citizen's/Clients in respect of Standard of Services, Information, Choice and Consultation, Non-discrimination and Accessibility, Grievances Redress, Courtesy and Value for Money. This also includes expectations of the Organization from the Citizen/Client for fulfilling the commitment of the Organization.

A Charter comprises of the following components-

- Vision and Mission statement;
- Details of Business transacted by the Organization;
- Details of Customer/Clients;
- Statement of services provided to each Citizen/Client Group separately;
- Details of Grievances Redress Mechanism and how to access the same' and
- Expectation from the Citizen/Client.

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[3] Sharma, Damodar, "Good Governance, Right to Information and Citizen Charter: The Rajasthan Scenario", Good Governance, Globlization and Civil Society, (ed.) B., M., Sharma, Roop Singh Bareth, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p. 345.

Global Scenario of Citizen Charter

The UK's Citizen's Charter initiative aroused considerable interest around the world and several countries implemented similar programmes e.g. Australia (Service Charter, 1997), Belgium (Public Service User's Charter, 1992), Canada (Service Standards Initiative, 1995), France (Service Charter, 1992), India (Citizen's Charter, 1997), Jamaica (Citizen Charter, 1994), Malaysia(Client Charter, 1993), Portugal (The Quality Charter in Public Services, 1993), and Spain (The Quality Observatory, 1992) (OECD, 1996). Some of these initiatives are pitched somewhere in between. Even in the UK, in the context of the Next Steps/Modernizing Government Initiatives, Citizen's Charters have acquired a service quality face for delivery of public services. The quality tools adopted for improving public services include the Business Excellence Model, Investors in People, Charter Mark, ISO 9000 and Best Value (Government of UK, 1999).[4]

The Government of Malaysia issued Guidelines on the Client's Charter in 1993 to assist government agencies to prepare and implement Client's Charter, which is "a written commitment by an agency to deliver outputs or services according to specified standards of quality" (Government of Malaysia, 1998). A best Client's Charter Awards was instituted in 1993. The Malaysia system of Client's Charter closely follows the UK Model. A distinction is made between agency-wide and unit charters. The concept of 'service recovery' enjoins taking steps to restore the trust and confidence of the client in a proactive manner when things go wrong.[5]

The Common wealth Government of Australia launched its Service Charter initiative in 1997 as part of its on –going commitment to improve the quality of service provided by agencies to the Australian community by moving the government organization away from bureaucratic processes to customer-focused outcomes. Services Charter are considered a powerful tool for fostering change and require the organization to focus on services delivered, to measure and assess performance, and to initiative performance improvement. By providing goals foe agencies to strive towards, a charter acts as a surrogate for competition where none exists (department of Finance and Administration, 1999). Center link is a one-stop that provides access to Australian government services for over six million customers. Center link has adopted one-to-one service as an innovative and personalized approach to service delivery. One-to-one service treats customers with respect and consistency and takes the complexity out of dealing with government.[6]

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[4] http://goicharters.nic.in/cchandbook.htm
[5] Ibid.
[6] Sharma, Damodar, op. cit., p. 344.

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The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat started a Service Standard Initiative in 1995 which took its cue from the Citizen's Charters of the United Kingdom, but enlarged the scope considerably. This Service Standard Initiative in Canada was started against the backdrop of citizen expectations relating to friendly, respectful and courteous service; fast response times; extended hours at government officers; and "one-stop-shopping". At the same time there was a need to reduce the deficit and provide value for money through more efficient use of resources (Treasury Board of Canada, 1995).

An overview of these four major Citizen's Charter initiatives shows that the service quality approach is embedded in them in different degrees. Once a decision is taken to make public services citizen-centric, the customer's focus of the Total Quality Management (TQM) variety cannot be far behind. In fact, the Citizen's Charter approach has several things in common with TQM. Both begin by focusing on meeting customer/citizen requirements. Other key common elements are conformance to standards, stakeholder involvement and continuous improvement.

Need for a Clean Vision

Vision implies the ultimate direction in which the organization seeks to move. Clarity of vision enables the organization to plan and prepare itself to deliver specific outcomes. Every organization has to be clear within as well as to the citizens as regards its vision. Vision may originate from an open and consultative process, involving multiple points in the organization as well as citizens, client groups or stakeholders. The broadening of processes for defining vision through an active interface with citizens is likely to lend way to a vision which has far greater degree of acceptability and active support in fulfillment than would otherwise be possible.[7]

Sprit of Missionary zeal

Mission zeal provides the specific objectives and these objectives drive the organization in tune with its vision. Specificity of Mission zeal is significant to enable the organization to move towards its vision. Organization needs to think of the manner in which the vision is to be realized. This should help it frame its mission in more concrete rather than ambiguous terms.

Identification of Services

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[7] Kaushik, P., D., "E-Governance: Government Initiative in India", Agenda for Improving Governance, (ed.), Bibek Deboroy, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2004. Pp. 208-209.

The Charter should clearly identify the services, which would be provided by the organization to attain its mission and vision. This should list all the services, which would be made available through its various agencies. And there should be a clear identification of the levels at which specific services would be provided. This would enable the citizens/clients to know the levels at which they can access a specific service and not waste their time and energy.

Client Recognition

There has to be some confusion about the recognition of the clients in the organizations. Hence, a clear understanding of the client by the organizations would be necessary for an increased interface in matter of policy and administration. This will also enable the organization to serve to the needs of people better. It has been observed that most of the Charters of Union Ministries/Departments do not identify the client groups/ stakeholders/ users with reference to the services offered. This serious deficiency needs rectification.[8]

Time-bound Services

A clear commitment about the time frame for delivery of specific services in the Charter has to be ensured. It would save the organization from undue expectations as also enable it to project its capacity to commit delivery of service as well as to work towards it in its own organizational plans. Awareness of time-lines will also enable the citizen to opt for specific providers where options are available and better understand the capacity of organization the capacity of organization to deliver a service in a specific time-frame.

Service Quality and Delivery Standards

Charter should have the specific quality standards to which the organization is committed. This will enable the citizens/client group to exercise choice where available and raise voice where necessary to ensure that quality service is made available. Moreover, the organization can also exercise internal controls once standards are publicly specified. There would also be advantage for the organization to do a comparative assessment of performance on meeting service quality standards. There must be commitment on service delivery standards such as timelines, access, accuracy, reliability, affordability, responsiveness, fairness, sensitivity, and courtesy in the delivery of service. These standards should be stated as clearly as possible and should be in the form of commitments.

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[8] Sharma, Damodar, op. cit., p.344.

Clear Information

It has to be ensured that the Charter provides information about the procedures etc. involved in obtaining the service and facilitates the client to obtain it. Information about the forms, which may have to be submitted or the payment required to access a specific service have to provide in the Charter.

Contact Points

The names and address of the contact persons for obtaining specific services should be mentioned in the Charter. When they can be contacted should also be stated. This should be done with reference to the specific levels of organization/ agencies at specific levels and locations. The specific location of the Information Facilitation Centers must be mentioned in the Charter. This will enable citizens know how they can get their quires settled.

Public Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Awareness of grievances is the first step which an organization can take towards introducing correctives in its functioning. Charter should encourage the citizens/ clients to ventilate their grievances and organizations should aspire to redress these. Charter should clearly lay down the grievance redressal procedures in case citizens/users/clients/stakeholders have any grievances and would like to seek redressal. Charter must clearly inform about the grievance redress mechanism available to the citizens/clients at various levels in the organization.[9]

Time-frame for Public Grievance Redress

Time frame of the grievance redressal should be an essential feature of all the Charters. It should be realistic and implementable by the employees. The organization should ensure that the timeframe is actually honored and acted upon. Required reply should be sent to the aggrieved person within the specified period with details of action taken.

Provision for Suggestions

Charter should have provision for invite suggestions from the public about the activities and functions of the organization. The department is implementing programmes and schemes, may be

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[9] Narayana , B.V.L., Citizen Charter-Strategies for Successful Implementation in India, IJPA, No.2, Vol., April-June, 2004, p. 440.

request the citizens to give their suggestions about the programmes or schemes. This may include in ways of improving the delivery mechanism.

Review of Suggestions

The Contact Officer for suggestions should be responsible for letting the suggestion-maker know whether his suggestion has been accepted or rejected and if rejected, the reasons for rejection. For suggestions received on-line, replies/responses can also be provided on-line. This would improve the image of the officers.

Processing of Suggestions

The 'Contact Officer for Suggestions' should ensure that the suggestions Boxes of his Department are emptied daily and all suggestions are diarized in a separate register on a daily basis. The same register should have columns to indicate disposal of each suggestion and the number and date of the letter by which the suggestion-maker was informed of the acceptance or rejection of his suggestion. The Contact Officer should be held responsible for acknowledging each suggestion, letting the suggestion-maker know whether his suggestion has been accepted or rejected and if rejected, the reasons for rejection. All on-line suggestions should also be processed and responded to on-line by the contact officer and a record of progress made on these should be maintained.

Outcome of Review of Suggestions

Proper review of suggestion if undertaken, sharing it with the public can add credibility to the organization as well as enthuse citizens to provide valuable inputs to the organization for improving its performance. Many times the solutions to a problem are within reach, yet these are beyond the imagination of officers in the organization. Such ideas reach the decision makers through suggestions of citizens and therefore this should be encouraged and duly analyzed. In case any citizen surveys are conducted and the outcome of the review of these should also be shared with the public. This would help in having better interaction with the citizens.

Monitoring Mechanism

There should be clear information in the Charter about the monitoring mechanisms created by the organizations in order to ensure that Charter does not remain merely a superficial document, with little capacity to ensure its own implementation. This monitoring mechanism may include people from the organizations as well those outside-the clients/stakeholders or civil society groups.

Relevant Information on Web-site

The Charter should indicate the information/services, which can be obtained through the website of the Ministry along with the address of the web-site. Forms and other processes available on-line should also be mentioned. The web-site must be updated from time to time.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that Citizen Charter is an effective tool of providing right type of guidance to the citizens about the programmes and schemes formulated for their benefits. It would be better if citizens the officials concerned are taken into confidence right from the initial stage. Every Citizen Charter should be in simple and easily understandable language. Whenever the citizen's charters are finalized wider publicity through print media, poster, banners, debates, handbills, brochure, local newspapers, and electronic media should be ensured. Sufficient funds are earmarked. There has to be adequate monitoring to make it sure that citizens charter is not on paper but really put into practice. Those who are having indifferent attitude must be brought to book. Services of NGOs and civil societies can be obtained for dissemination of knowledge and information.