

# UNIT 76 – UPSC - Concept of Public Service

A public service is associated with government and it is offered by administrative bodies to people living within its region and considered essential to modern life. The term is linked with a social agreement (usually expressed through democratic elections) that numerous services should be offered to all, irrespective of income. Even where public services are neither publicly provided nor publicly financed, for social and political reasons they are usually subject to directive going beyond that applying to most economic sectors. Public service is also subject taught in education curriculum of students in colleges and university such as the fire brigade, police, army, and paramedics. It is stated that the provision of public services for example health care, education, sanitation and criminal justice is major duty of government. People care about public services and depend on them being delivered well. Public services offer the most common interface between people and the state, and their functioning shapes people's sense of trust in and expectations of government. At national level, public services support human welfare and economic growth.



Some political experts recognized the immense importance of Public services for moral reasons. Their universal provision should be guaranteed. They may be related with fundamental human rights (such as the right to water). The Volunteer Fire Dept. and Ambulance Corps are institutions with the mission of servicing the community. A service is helping others with a particular need or want. In this regard, service ranges from a doctor curing an illness, to a repair person, to a food pantry. It has been emphasized by scholars that Public services need to be delivered with honesty, centred around citizens, and responsive to their requirements, particularly to the needs of the most vulnerable. Promoting greater transparency and allowing ordinary citizens to assess the quality, adequacy and effectiveness of elementary services, to voice their needs and preferences and to become involved in innovation offers an opportunity to enable better use of public funds, and improve service delivery (Ringold et al, 2013).

## Historical Review

When evaluating past records, it is stated that extensive provision of public services in developed countries usually started in the late nineteenth century, often with the municipal development of gas and water services. After that governments began to provide other services such as electricity and healthcare. In most developed countries such services are still provided by local or national government, the biggest exceptions being the U.S. and the UK, where private provision is more significant. However, such privately provided public services are often strongly regulated, for example (in the US) by Public Utility Commissions. In developing countries, public services tend to be much less developed. For example, water services might only be available to the wealthy middle class. For political reasons the service is often subsidized, which reduces the finance available for expansion to poorer communities.

In modern developed countries, the term "public services" (or "services of general interest") often includes:

1. Electricity
2. Education
3. Emergency services
4. Environmental protection
5. Fire service
6. Gas
7. Health care
8. Law enforcement
9. Military
10. Postal service
11. Public broadcasting
12. Public library
13. Public security
14. Public transportation
15. Public housing
16. Social services
17. Telecommunications
18. Town planning
19. Waste management
20. Water supply network

Basically, Public services account for a large percentage of government budgets, but increased spending has often not been harmonized by enhancements in outcomes. Several times, it is observed that public services can be disrupted by corruption which leads to money intended for books, teachers, dispensaries, medical supplies and infrastructure being syphoned off by officials or private contractors (World Bank, 2004).

In Indian context, the state and local governments in India invest huge budgets for public services and development of infrastructure. The nature and scale economies of most public services are such that government has a virtual monopoly in their production and delivery. Recently, the government of India and the state governments have invested an increasing share of their budgets to expand the reach of these services. Many experts consider that the lack of improvements in the provider agencies and the limited 'exit' options available to the people continue to make it difficult

for the weaker sections of society to access these services. But comprehensive studies of public services are visible by their absence (PROBE 1999). The range of public services and problems in tracking their delivery are major reasons in public service access, productivity and quality.

In educational field, around the world, children still leave school, unable to read and do basic arithmetic, and the quality of healthcare remains uneven. Statistical reports indicated that just increasing resources, equipment, financial, or personnel, does not guarantee that the quality of education or health care will improve. The quality of service delivery is precarious.

In health care, it is observed that the practice of public health has been dynamic in India, and has perceived many hurdles in its attempt to affect the lives of the people of this country. Since independence, major public health problems such as malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, high maternal and child mortality and currently, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) have been addressed through a rigorous action of the government. The new programme for Public Health in India includes the epidemiological transition (rising burden of chronic non-communicable diseases), demographic transition (increasing elderly population) and environmental changes. Important issues in health systems are lack of financial and material resources, health workforce issues and the stewardship challenge of implementing pro-equity health policies in a pluralistic environment.

In telecommunication, public services have played a major role for the growth of country as well as enhancing living standard of people. The Indian telecom sector is now heavily dominated by wireless technologies, which include cellular mobile and fixed wireless technologies. Comprehensive Government policies have played a crucial role in shaping the structure of the Indian telecom sector.

In water supply network, the responsibility for water supply and sanitation at the central and state level is shared by various Ministries. At the central level three Ministries have responsibilities in the sector: The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (until 2011 the Department of Drinking Water Supply in the Ministry of Rural Development) is responsible for rural water supply and sanitation; the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and the Ministry of Urban Development share the responsibility for urban water supply and sanitation. Except for the National Capital Territory of Delhi and other Union Territories, the central Ministries only have an advisory capacity and a limited role in funding. Sector policy thus is a prerogative of state governments.

Numerous innovative approaches to improve water supply and sanitation have been tested in India, in particular in the early 2000s. These include community-led total sanitation, demand-driven approaches in rural water supply, public-private partnerships to improve the continuity of urban water supply in Karnataka, and the use of microcredits in water supply and sanitation to women in order to improve access to water.

Regarding public service in postal area, The Department of Posts, trading as India Post, is a government-operated postal system in India; it is generally referred to within India as the Post Office.

The policies of urban development and housing in India have emerged since 1950s. The general observation of the policy makers was that India is pre-dominantly an agricultural and rural economy and that there are potent dangers of over urbanisation which will lead to the drain of resources from the countryside to feed the cities. The positive aspects of cities as engines of

economic growth in the context of national economic policies were not much appreciated and, therefore, the problems of urban areas were treated more as welfare problems and sectors of residual investment rather than as issues of national economic importance. Urban planning as presently practised in India is essentially concerned with planning the use and development of land in cities. Government is implementing smart city policies to some towns. Development is merely seen as physical manifestation in most of the town planning legislation

## Attributes of Public Service

Major features of a public service is public goods (being non-rivalrous and non-excludable), but most are services which may (according to prevailing social norms) be under-provided by the market. In most cases, public services are services, i.e. they do not involve manufacturing of goods. They may be delivered by local or national monopolies, especially in sectors which are natural monopolies.

They may involve outputs that are hard to attribute to specific individual effort and/or hard to measure in terms of major characteristics such as quality. They often need high levels of training and education. They may attract people with a public service beliefs who wish to give something to the wider public or community through their efforts.

A proficient public service is vital for creating a favourable investment climate and facilitating people's participation in economic life. In pattern of globalization, governments undergo numerous cross-cutting issues, such as economic instability, climate change and migration. Public service delivery has developed new dimensions as governments need to respond not only to changes in the global environment but also to the demands of an active citizenry. In order to formulate integrated policies and their effective implementation, it is imperative that there must be an adaptable and efficient public service that can forestall emerging challenges and ensure that potential strategies are informed by better understanding of future contexts.

Sometimes, public services are privatized. There are several ways to privatize public services. A free-market company may be established and sold to private investors, relinquishing government control altogether. Thus it becomes a private (not public) service. Another option is to establish a corporation, but keep ownership or voting power essentially in the hands of the government. For example, the Finnish state owned 49% of Kemira until 2007, the rest being owned by private investors. A 49% share did not make it a "government enterprise", but it meant that all other investors together would have to oppose the state's opinion in order to overturn the state's decisions in the shareholder's meeting.

Regulated corporation can also acquire permits on the agreement that they fulfil certain public service duties. When a private company runs a natural monopoly, then the corporation is more controlled, to prevent abuse of monopoly power. Finally, the government can buy the service on the free market. In many countries, medication is provided in this manner: the government reimburses part of the price of the medication. Also, bus traffic, electricity, healthcare and waste management are privatized in this way. One recent modernisation, used in the UK, Australia and Canada is public-private partnerships. This involves giving a long lease to private consortia in return for partly funding infrastructure.

For the public sector, the provision of customer-centric services is not an easy task. A number of significant challenges need to be overcome. Services must be delivered on a wide scale. It has been documented in reports that Public services have to face major challenges in coming years; severe financial pressures and cuts; growing demand; raising public and user expectations; decentralisation and community empowerment; opportunities to deploy new technology; and global competition. This will result in a changing relationship between citizen and services users with the state and service providers. Delivering effective public services needs multi-level transformation such as changing the way public sector organisations think and act, how they view their roles, and how they share information between agencies, with businesses and with their customers.

## **Five elements are integral to build this capacity**

1. Strategy (performance improvement and process reform, aided by technology).
2. Leadership (securing the understanding and support of top level leadership).
3. Organisational design (creating empowered institutions responsible for a pan-government focus on customer-centricity and connected government).
4. People/Capacity/Training (focusing on the internal capacity-building that is needed to manage the transformation, managing talent and training public sector people to respond to changing customer needs).
5. Culture (change management throughout the organisation is the key to a successful customer centric strategy).

To, summarize, public service in both the developed and developing world has significant contribution in providing public goods, such as defence, public order, property rights, macro-economic management, basic education, public health, disaster relief, protection of environment, and managing private sector activity.