

UNIT 80 – UPSC - Citizen's Charters

In any nation, there is a need of good governance for sustainable development, both economic and social. The three major aspects highlighted in good governance are transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the administration. Citizens' Charters initiative is a response to the mission for solving the problems which a citizen meets, day in and day out, while dealing with the organisations providing public services. The charter is the declaration of commitment to superiority in service to customers of the department. The citizen charter declares the standards for various services offered. It includes expectations of the Organisation from the Citizens for fulfilling its commitment. Citizen charter is available in India post website.



The concept of Citizens' Charter protects the trust between the service provider and its users. Citizens' Charter was first expressed and implemented in the United Kingdom by the Conservative Government of John Major in 1991 as a national programme with aim to constantly 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.

Citizen charter is necessary;

- To make administration accountable and citizen friendly.
- To ensure transparency.
- To take measures to improve customer service.
- To adopt a stakeholder approach.
- To save time of both Administration and the citizen.

Objective of the Citizens' Charter: Fundamental objectives of Citizens' Charter are as follows:

1. Goal of Citizens' Charter is to empower the citizen in relation to public service delivery. Six principles of the Citizens' Charter movement as originally framed, 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 taxpayers' money.
- v. Accountability: Individuals and Organisations.
- vi. Transparency: Rules/ Procedures/ Schemes/Grievances.

Later on, these were elaborated by the Labour Government as following nine principles of Service Delivery (1998):

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

The Indian Scenario

Since many years, in India, noteworthy progress has been made in the field of economic development. This, along with a considerable increase in the literacy rate, (from 51.63% to 65.38% in the last decade) has made Indian citizens increasingly aware of their rights. Citizens have become more articulate and expect 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 evolved in the Government on effective and responsive administration.

Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances in Government of India (DARPG) initiated the task of coordinating, formulating and operationalising Citizens' Charters. Guidelines for formulating the Charters as well as a list of do's and don'ts were communicated to various government departments/organisations 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 Charter has been developed by the Department and sent to all the State Governments/UT Administrations.

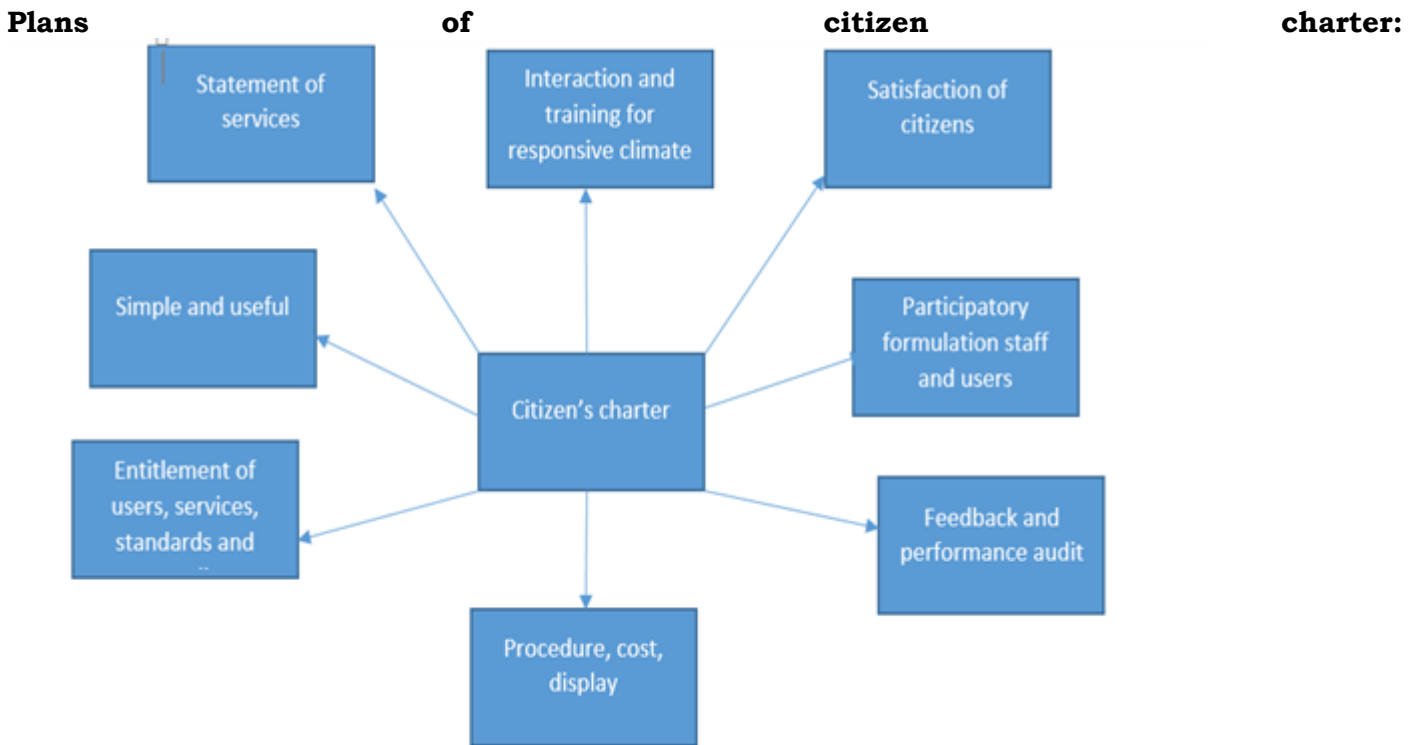
The Charters are expected to integrate the following elements:

1. Vision and Mission Statement.
2. Details of business transacted by the organisation.
3. Details of clients.
4. Details of services provided to each client group.
5. Details of grievance redress mechanism and how to access it.
6. Expectations from the clients.

Principally, an adaptation of the UK model, the Indian Citizens' Charter has an additional constituent of 'expectations from the clients'. Involvement of consumer organisations, citizen groups, and other stakeholders in the formulation of the Citizens' Charter is highlighted to confirm that the Citizens' Charter fulfils the needs of the users. Regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the Charters, both internally and through external agencies, are commanded. Till April, 2006, 111 Citizens' Charters had been articulated by the Central Government Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations and 668 Charters by various agencies of State Governments & Administrations of Union Territories. Most of the national Charters are posted on the government's websites and are open to public scrutiny. The organisations with Citizens' Charters are advised to give publicity to their Charters through such means as print/ electronic media and awareness crusades.

Components of Citizen Charter

- Vision and Mission Statement of the Organisation.
- Details of Business transacted by the Organisation.
- Details of 'Customers' or 'Clients'.
- Statement of services including standards, quality, time frame etc. provided to Customer/ Client and how/where to get the services.
- Details of Grievance Redressal Mechanism and how to access it.
- Expectations from the service recipients.



Citizen's Charters in India: Current Status:

Citizen's Charters have currently been in place in India for almost a decade. In 2006, the DARPG website listed 767 charters drafted by various government agencies around the country.

Problems faced in implementing the Charters:

As indicated, the Citizens' Charters initiative in India had started in 1997 and the Charters formulated are in embryonic stage of implementation. Introduction of a new thought is always difficult in any organisation. Introduction and implementation of the concept of Citizens' Charter in the Government of India was much more complicated due to the old bureaucratic set up/procedures and the rigid attitudes of the work force. The major obstacles encountered in this initiative were:

1. The general perception of organisations which formulated Citizens' Charters was that the exercise was to be performed because there was a direction from the top. The consultation process was minimal or largely absent. It thus became one of the routine activities of the organisation and had no focus.
2. For any Charter to thrive, the personnel responsible for its implementation should have proper training and orientation, as commitments of the Charter cannot be expected to be delivered by a workforce that is unaware of the spirit and content of the Charter. However, in many cases, the concerned staff were not sufficiently trained and sensitised.
3. Sometimes, transfers and reshuffles of concerned officers at the critical stages of formulation/implementation of a Citizens' Charter in an organisation severely destabilised the strategic processes which were put in place and hampered the progress of the initiative.
4. Awareness campaigns to teach clients about the Charter were not conducted systematically.

5. In some cases, the standards/time norms of services mentioned in Citizens' Charter were either too negligent or too tight and were impractical and created an unfavourable impression on the clients of the Charter.
6. The notion behind the Citizens' Charter was not accurately understood. Information brochures, publicity materials, pamphlets produced earlier by the organisations were mistaken for Citizens' Charters.

Deficiencies in the Existing Citizens' Charters

1. Lack of awareness and knowledge and inadequate publicity, hence loss of trust among service seekers.
2. No training to the operative and supervisory staff.
3. Lack of infrastructure and initiative.
4. Hierarchy gap between the Officers and the Operative Staff-Need of team effort.
5. Different mind-sets of officers and the Staff- Insensitiveness on the part of the Supervisors and the Staff because they are yet to be sensitized.
6. Staff is not prepared to shoulder the responsibility due to lack of motivation and accountability.
7. Non-revision, complicated and restrictive rules & procedures.

Guidelines for the Citizens' Charters in India

1. List all Offices according to type of services they provide to public - Indicate their location, areas they cover, type of services being rendered to public, and phone numbers.
2. There should be a separate Citizens' Charter (i.e., Local Citizens' Charters) for each office covering the services they provide. For example, there should be a separate Charter of the Directorate, its subordinate offices, Hospitals, Schools, etc. according to the particular services they provide.
3. Mention Service Standards - Step-by-step-Procedure based on 'Where to go; how to proceed', simple and easy to fill-in Forms, specimen of duly-filled in forms, documents, fees, etc. required, reasonable time schedule, Do's & Don'ts, etc., names, addresses and Tele. Nos. of concerned Officials, his alternate for each service, etc.
4. Minimum documentation, self-attestation and self-declaration.
5. No duplication - In case desired information and document submitted earlier like proof of residence (if there is no change), birth certificate, etc., it should not be asked again.
6. If promised services are not provided as per specified time schedule, an effective grievance redressal mechanism (including the provision of compensation to the concerned citizen in order to introduce accountability) should be introduced.
7. Provision of "TATKAL" (Immediate) Services if somebody is in urgent need (as in the case of Passport, Railways, etc.) to avoid touts, bribery, etc.
8. Simultaneous changes in the Performa and other requirements to be effected along with the changes made in the Citizens Charter.
9. Database of frequently required information, like ownership of property, vehicle, etc., tax and dues paid or pending, etc.
10. If possible, the services and their related information may be presented in a tabular form.

11. Salient features of each service should be prominently displayed in simple and easy language at all places likely to be visited by the service seekers.

To summarize, A Citizens' Charter denotes the promise of an organisation towards standard, quality and time frame of service delivery, grievance redressal mechanism, clearness and accountability. Based on the foreseen expectations and aspirations of public, Citizens' Charters are to be drawn-up with care and concern for the concerned service users. They allow the service seekers to avail the services of the government departments with minimum inconvenience and maximum speed.