

Citizen's Charters: An Empirical Study

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1. Introduction

In a civil society every day life of people is dependent upon the service network provided by the system. Services include trade, business and industrial activity, and public utility services either from public sector or private sector. People, who are the users/customers, are the focus of all these agencies. If the services provided by these agencies are good, people will be happy, otherwise not. Generally the customers' interest was taken for granted and neglected by almost all the service providers.

To address these issues economists, industrialists, planners and administrators together worked out a draft charter in UK during 1980s to improve the level of people/customers' satisfaction. This initiative was called '*Citizen's Charter*', and was made popular by John Major the then Prime Minister of United Kingdom. This experiment was a great success and yielded the desired results. Encouraged by this success the next government led by Mr. Tony Blair fine tuned the Charter concept and called "*Service first*". More than four hundred Citizen's Charters were developed with in a short period both in the public and private sectors. This was followed by good number of South East Asian as well as European countries.

India was no exception to this. The conference of chief secretaries in 1996 prepared an agenda for providing a *responsive administration*. Followed by this, the Chief Ministers conference in 1997 prepared an **Action-Plan** and called for to adopt the following in governance:

- *Make administration accountable and citizen friendly,*
- *Ensure transparency and right to information,*
- *Take measures to clean and motivate civil services.*

To make the government accountable and citizen friendly the conference came out very clearly to:

- *Enforce Citizen's Charter,*
- *Redress Public Grievances,*
- *De-centralization and Devolution of Powers,*
- *Review of laws, Regulations and Procedures.*

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With the unanimous approval of the Action-Plan in the Chief Ministers' conference, the government of India decided to adopt **Citizen's Charter** in all the government and public sector undertakings. The Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) was given the responsibility to popularize the charters in governance. More than 400 Citizen's Charters have been formulated so far both by the government and public sector undertakings. Many state governments have also taken up initiatives in this regard. Nodal departments and nodal officers have been identified to take necessary steps to popularize Citizen's Charters in their respective states.

2. What is a Citizen's Charter?

“Citizen's Charter is a written, voluntary declaration by service providers that highlights the standards of service delivery that they must subscribe to, availability of choice for consumers, avenues for grievance redressal and other related information”.

In simple words, a Citizen's Charter is an expression of understanding between the citizen and the service provider about the nature of services that the latter is obliged to provide. The Citizen's Charter is a tool to improve the quality of services, address the needs of citizens' rights and set clear standards of performance.

Customer's satisfaction is the hallmark of the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery of the services. They are interrelated and interdependent. In fact the Citizen's Charters aim at improvement in the level of satisfaction of the customer continuously. This is the key to success of the Charters and important reason for its spread throughout the world.

About 107 Citizen Charters learnt to have been formulated by the center and state departments and about 629 Charters from other organizations. The Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) of New Delhi has conducted a campaign for creating awareness on Citizen's Charters. It has conducted surveys, published leaflets, campaign kits etc... An external evaluation conducted to study the effectiveness of these charters reveals that:

- *Creation of Charters were not voluntary initiations,*
- *The staff involvement at the time of formulation of Charter was very poor,*
- *The responsible officers transferred and alternative arrangements were not made,*
- *The public was either not informed or ignorant about the Charters,*
- *Unrealistic assurances on the quality and conditions kept the Charters away from the people,*
- *The formulators of the Charters had not understood the concept of Citizen Charters properly.*

3. The position of Citizen's Charters in Karnataka

The Department of Public Administration and Reforms (DPAR) is the nodal department to initiate Charters formulation in Karnataka. Few government departments, some public sector undertakings like KSRTC, BWSSB, KPTCL and good number of

banks have formulated the Citizen's Charters. There appears to be no study/ reports made on Charters so far except the Citizen Report Card (CRC), which is the only study that throw some light on the effectiveness of the Charters. There are three CRC studies undertaken by the Bangalore based NGO Public Affairs Committee on the effective delivery of services by the public undertakings like BMC, KSRRTC, BWSSB, BDA etc.,. But, there appears to be no studies conducted directly on the functioning and effectiveness of the Citizen Charters in general and in the government departments of Karnataka in particular. Even the Citizen Report Cards also focus on the effective delivery of Service and not on the effectiveness of the Charters. It is thus interesting to study formulations and their implementation.

Citizen's Charters have been claimed to be an effective tool for good governance wherever it has been taken up seriously but there hardly exists detailed studies to support this. In the absence of any such study, it is difficult, either to claim that the Citizen Charters are effective or not, and have made any impact at all. Administrative Training Institute, Mysore has been engaged in organizing training programs on Citizen's Charters since 2002-03. One Regional Workshop sponsored by DARPG was also conducted in ATI during January 2004, to train the officers and resource persons on the concept of Citizen's Charter. Similarly, training workshops and seminars were also conducted by the DPAR in Bangalore. Apart from this exercise not much has been done in this regard. It is with this background that it was felt to conduct a small study in the form of an Action Research, which would enhance the quality and input on the Charters. The empirical study on the Citizen's Charters was conducted in Karnataka.

4. Aim of the study:

The aim of the study is to enable the government departments to adopt the concept and formulate the Citizen's Charters effectively there by making the services citizen friendly.

5. Objective of the Study:

1. Study how the Charters have been formulated.
2. Analyze whether the Charters have all the essential components of a good/ model Charter.
3. Examine the steps taken by the departments to formulate the Charters.
4. Develop guidelines to formulate good Citizen Charters to make the concept effective.

6. Method of Study:

This is the first study on **Citizen's Charters in Karnataka**. As such it gave an opportunity to study the existing Charters in government departments, and to study how these departments have formulated the Charters. Twenty departments responded to the

request and sent in their Charters copy. All the 20 Charters were considered for the study.

7. Tools of Data collection:

The required data for the study were obtained through letters followed by Questionnaires. The study was undertaken from 31.11.2005 to 31.05.2006. The Charters were examined keeping in mind the various aspects of formulation and their components. In fact, over 50 head of the departments were requested to support the action research by sending the required information in the prescribed questionnaires. Twenty departments responded favorably and sent in their department's Citizen's Charter copy along with additional information sought for. These twenty Citizen's Charters have been included for the current study. While seeking the information from the departments the questionnaires were so designed as to get the required data on the essential steps for formulation of a Charter.

8. Scope of the study:

Being an empirical study it was decided to focus only on the Charters pertaining to the state government departments in the first phase, and the public sector undertakings will be covered in the second phase. The study confines to the Citizen's Charters prepared by the government departments of Karnataka.

9. Analysis of the Citizen's Charters

Charters formulated in Karnataka (Year-wise)

Year	No.
1999-2000	01
2000-2001	02
2003-2004	02
2004-2005	02
NA	08
Total	20

The department of sericulture was the first to formulate the Charters on 06.01.1999, followed by food and civil supplies and KGID department in 2001. Seven departments did not furnish the date of commencement of the Charters.

10. Jurisdiction:

The Charters' jurisdiction depends upon the activities of the departments. It can be local if the nature of activities is so defined or it may spread to different levels depending up on the jurisdiction of the department. While the jurisdiction of the Charter of a hospital is restricted to that particular place and hospital it may extend to the entire state or Karnataka Lokayukta. It may be concurrent i.e. taluk, district and state in case of Kannada and Culture department. It was found that this aspect has not been given serious thought while formulating the Charters. In most of the cases the head offices have formulated the Charters on behalf of the district and taluk level offices, and claim to have the state jurisdiction there by these offices are free from the obligations. The lower offices will be simply asked to follow the suite. The charters may not be that effective if the offices that implement them are not involved in the formulation process. The Charters could be made more effective if the head offices give a model Charter for their department and ask the lower offices to develop their own depending up on the local needs.

11. Programmes:

The Charters may be formulated for any single program or for multiple programs depending upon the purpose. This is a thoughtful exercise. But while going through the Charters it is very clear that the departments have an impression that one Charter can be developed for all department programs. The Citizen Charter of the education department and food & civil supplies department runs to 39 and 19 pages respectively. They have included all the programs of their departments. The very fact that charters include all the programs shows that there is little relation to the standardization or the quality aspects. The Charters of the transport department makes a sincere effort to list only the important programs, which have larger public interface and also spell out the quality and the cost of services. This is a positive sign. In brief, the charters in general have not given importance to the service standards and standardization. It is important that the Charter formulators give due consideration to this aspect.

12. Initiatives:

The Citizen Charter initiative was adopted by the states following the guidelines issued by the government of India. On going through the records it is seen that the GOI has initiated series of actions spreading and marketing the concept of Charter across the country. It was found that only two departments have formulated the Charters based on the guidelines of GOI. Eight departments say that they have formulated their Charters as per the guidelines of GOK. Only one department has taken the initiative. Perhaps this department might also have been guided by the GOK. Ten departments have not answered at all. In the absence of this information it may be construed that these

departments must also have been guided by the DPAR. No department has come out with the information that they have followed other departments in formulating their Charters. It is clear that the departments in Karnataka have followed the guidelines issued by the DPAR.

13. Available model:

It was intended to know whether there was any model Citizen Charter available for immediate reference. Four departments have replied and have informed that a Citizen Charter formulated by other departments have been used as guidelines. One department has come out with a specific answer saying that it had the guidelines from IIPM (K). Another department has answered that it had the reference of GOI. In general, it can be said that the DPAR and its model Charter have guided the majority of the departments.

14. Formulation of Citizen's Charter:

The formulation of Citizen's Charter and steps to be adopted is a very important stage. A Citizen's Charter is the expression of an understanding between the citizen and the public service about the quantity and quality of services citizens receive in exchange for their taxes. It is essentially about the rights of the public and the obligation of the public servants. As citizens fund public services, either directly or indirectly they have the right to expect a particular quality that is responsive to their needs and which is provided efficiently at a reasonable cost. This essentially involves very clear-cut, well-defined steps to be followed:

- *Agreed and published standards for service deliver.*
- *Choice and consultation with users.*
- *Identifying and engaging with stakeholders.*

These are very important steps that are required to be observed at the time of formulation of Charters, without which the Charters become defective in formulation. We cannot imagine a Citizen's Charter without the above three important aspects.

The process of formulation of Citizen's Charter involves identifying the services, felt need, clearly spelt objectives and scope, involvement of the staff, consultation of the stakeholders, expectations of the users, and the resources available. Without these considerations the formulation of Charters are impossible.

It is surprising to note that none of the departments have adopted this method required to formulate the Charters. Seven departments have answered that the Charters have been formulated through an official communication. Perhaps the senior level officers through the official file movement system have developed the Charters. For example, head of the department asking the senior officers in the head office to formulate the Charters as per the guidelines of DPAR, and these officers are responding to it accordingly.

One department has answered that the subordinate officers have developed the Charter. Perhaps the head office instructing the district office and get the Charter formulated as per the guidelines of DPAR.

Two departments have come out openly saying that individual officers have developed the Charters for their department. No department has got the Charters prepared by an outside agency/NGO. This is also a good sign. At least this task has not been outsourced!

Ten departments have not furnished any information as to how the Charters have been formulated. May be, those departments do not have any information. This is a clear indication as to how the essential aspects of the formulation of Charters have been totally made insignificant. This non-observance of the condition precedent to formulate the Charters resulted in the defective formulation of Charter. Naturally, the Charters can never deliver the desired results with these serious defects. None of the essential steps that are to be followed as listed above are observed. Hence it can be construed that the Charters have become a mere formal documents than being an effective tool of making the services Citizen centric.

The above points are further strengthened in the last question of the questionnaire wherein it is intended further to know the steps taken before the formulation of the Charters. It was desired to know whether any meeting of the staff, users, stakeholders and others was conducted before. Only three departments have answered that they have conducted meetings. There is no information about any brain storming sessions or workshop conducted as a preparatory step to formulate the Charters. Seven departments have answered that the Charters were formulated in the course of routine official file movement i.e. the Charters have been developed by the middle level staff following the guidelines and put up for approval. These Charters might have been approved just like any other routine file, which clearly indicates that no special effort was made. Charters cannot be developed the way in which they have been developed. It is too much to expect from such weak tools.

15. Components of Citizen's Charters:

Citizen's Charter represents a systematic effort to focus on the commitment of an organization in the delivery of its services to its users. It is an assurance that services rendered will comply with the standards declared as quality standards.

Though there is no set of rules for the formulation of Citizen's Charters the experience shows that a good Citizen Charter should essentially include the following important components for its effectiveness and usefulness:

- *Vision and Mission statement of the Organization,*
- *Details of business transaction by the organization,*
- *Details of the “CITIZEN” or “CLIENTS”,*
- *Statement of services including Standard, Quality, Time frame etc provided to each Citizen/Client group separately and how/ where to get services,*
- *Details of Grievance Redress Mechanism and how to access it,*
- *Expectations from the Citizens or Clients,*
- *Remedies available at the disposal of the Customers/ Citizens in case of deviation from the standards,*
- *Additional comments such as compensation in the event of failure of service delivery,*
- *Language of the clients/customers.*

The Charter is a written document. It begins with a noble statement, usually giving the objectives and followed by the **Vision** statement. What is this vision statement? The best Citizen’s Charters adopted a practice of making a noble statement expressing their desire to achieve an ideal state of condition, which is not usually seen. This has been followed in the Indian Charters also. The Vision statement gives an opportunity to what the organization is going to achieve in an ideal situation. This is a wish statement showing the positive attitude of the department.

The **Mission** statement is all about the committed staff and the whole of the department willing to be with the Charters implementation. It declares the organizations total commitment to the general public. It is like setting the house in order before going to the public. Both the vision and mission statements provide necessary motivation to the organization as well as to the general public as to the honest intentions of the department.

The charters that have been received for the study have variety in themselves. Only seven Charters have vision and mission statements. Where as the remaining 13 Charters do not have the statements. They simply open their front page with “Aims and Objectives” of the department. The Charters could be still more effective if the aims and objective statements follow the “vision and mission” statements. The statements can really attract the customer. The sericulture and the commercial tax departments have made out a very good and also appealing **Vision and Mission** statement, which can be good example. Remaining Charters have made a bold statement in their routine official language.

The second important component of a Charter is that the department can state the services provided. The purpose of making this public is not to list out various services that are available but to inform what services are useful to the public at large. The departments have grossly misunderstood this. Eleven departments have included their services in the Charter in a way the public can get the required messages. In the remaining Charters there is some confusion whether to call as services or “**our commitments**”. It is to be known whether the public want every thing about the services like origin and development of the scheme, scope, eligibility, procedure to get the benefits and so on. If all these details are to be given in the Charter then departments

may better printout the booklets of services. Charter is not the document to give all these details. The Charter of the education department is one such example where it runs to 39 pages. Can the department think of supplying these copies to all the public free of cost? It is difficult. A charter should include only that information as required by the users. It should be brief as much as possible. Details can be made available in the office.

Third and very important component of a Charter is to identify who is the Client? The Charter is an understanding between the citizen and the service provider. The Charter becomes incomplete with out the role of citizens. The aim of all Charters is to fulfill the aspirations of the users. They strive hard to meet the expectations of the clients. If the citizens have no role in the formulation of the Charters then how can any organization think of meeting the needs of the users?

The users/clients/beneficiaries are to be involved at every stage of the formulation of the Charters. First they should be identified and then consulted. A Charter with out mentioning the client is one sided document and defective in nature. It is surprising to note that only four Charters have mentioned about their clients. They have identified the users. The other Charters have neither mentioned the clients nor consulted them at all. In either case, the process is incomplete and they are one sided. The Charters are meant for those who are the users. If the users are not consulted, then what purpose the Charters serve? It will be a futile exercise. Nothing significant can be expected from the Charter exercises. For example, the Charter of commercial tax department does not explicitly say for whom the Charter assurance is made. Of course, the tax payers could be the answers. If this is missing then one may feel that it is just a statement made to the general public. Majority of the Charters have committed the same mistake. They are one-sided declarations.

The fourth component is the essence of the whole Charter exercise i.e., effective delivery of services to the satisfaction of the clients. The Charter initiatives aims at standardization of services, quick delivery, cost effectiveness and user friendly approach. All these aspects contribute to satisfaction of the customer. If these aspects are not included in the Charter then again the exercise of the Charter becomes a mere formality and serves no purpose.

It was also found that only seven departments have thought fit to include the services provided by them. Some of them are in detail and some are in brief. The Charter should essentially cover a statement of services, standards, quality and time frame. There may be some difficulty in giving this information in brief and defining the standard and set time frame. But this is a real challenge. People expect all these information from the service providers. They should be able to do it. The departments of transport and social welfare have attempted to give this information and partly they are successful. But too much of information also keeps the reader away, for example education department. A Charter is incomplete without this information and serves no purpose. They cannot meet the expectations of the people. The charters become futile and dry documents. The success of Charters in UK is because of the fact that they were very clear about all these

aspects. Improving the efficiency and making cost effective delivery needs continuous efforts. People can judge the quality of service before and after the Charters.

Fifth component of the Charter is the provision for grievance redressal system. If the clients are not happy with the services provided by the organization they should have an inbuilt system of redress of their grievances. Otherwise, the dissatisfaction will lead to the customer turning away from the organization. It is this neglect of users that lead to increased dissatisfaction and related poor performances. Only seven departments have thought of redressing the grievances, and their Charters do contain these provisions. Thirteen departments have not included provisions to redress the grievances in their Charters. If the users are not happy with the service providers what is the remedy, and where should they go? If the Charter is silent about the problems of the users then those Charters or the departments cannot claim to be user friendly, which is against the spirit of Citizen's Charters.

16. Expectations from the Citizens/ Clients:

The Citizen's Charters are known as the bridge between users and the service providers. The organizations consult the users before they decide the service delivery system. While the organizations work on the system of providing services they also expect the users to follow certain conditions, i.e., expectations from the clients. The understanding should be mutual. The users will also realize that they have an obligation too. This is a good sign of a Charter.

The charters that have identified the clients are the one that have made provisions for the expectations also. Only four Charters have given the obligation clause in their Charters. The rest have no expectations. This is an indication to show that the charter formulation process lacks directions.

17. Remedies:

The charters should also contain clear and effective remedies when things go wrong. If the standards committed in the charter are not met whom, where and how the users should contact to get the remedy. None of the Charters in the study have made any provisions for remedies.

To make the charters more users' friendly and appealing there is a practice of giving additional information, which will help the user to access the services easily. Few Charters have thought of giving additional information in the form of "Help Lines". The sericulture, animal husbandry and KGID departments are some examples for giving additional information. Charters of education and FCS departments have gone in detail about right to information and its relevance to their services.

18. Language:

The language of the Charters should necessarily be the language of the users. It is advisable to have the Charter in English also. In our analysis (study) nine Charters are in Kannada and the remaining is in English.

19. Conclusions:

On examination of all the charters, it was found that Charters formulation was deficient on the following grounds:

1. Date of formulation is not available in most of the Charters, and it was not considered significant.
2. The head of the departments has developed the Charters. It is presumed to have statewide jurisdiction. In fact, no thought has been given as to spell out the jurisdiction or the area of application.
3. Good Charters usually cover those services which can be standardized and having larger public interface. Charter can be for all or for selected few services. But whatever services selected under Charters necessarily is defined as to the quality, standard and cost effectiveness so that the consumer is aware of the improvement after the Charter's initiative. But this aspect has not been given its due importance. The Charters cover all departmental services with out any exception. Many Charters simply list out all the programs in detail.
4. Since the concept of Charters is new to our country, the guidelines developed by the GOI based on UK's experience serves as the basis for formulation of Charter. It was expected that the Charters relay upon these guidelines and follow some good models. But the study reveals that all the Charters covered have followed the guidelines perhaps issued by the DPAR, which in turn has received these guidelines from DARPG. How the DPAR could not ensure adoption of the good guidelines developed by DARPG is again a point for further study. In fact, the guidelines developed by GOI are based on the success stories of UK's experience. The fact that good number of central departments and the public sector under takings have successfully implemented the Charters should serve as an eye opener to many. This has not happened in Karnataka.
5. The Charter formulation exercises in Karnataka should have the advantage of following any good model of Charter. No doubt Charters can never be identical for the simple reason that services and users are different. Nevertheless there can be so much variation at least in their basic structures. There appears to be many models.
6. The Charter formulation is a very systematic process involving the clients, users, stakeholders and in addition to the staff of the service providers. But in the

present study, these aspects have not been given importance. It is difficult to imagine a Charter without the involvement of the users and the stakeholders. This is clear violation of the guidelines and against the spirit of the Charters. The method followed to formulate the Charters is defective. Hence the Charters can also be defective. These Charters can neither produce any significant results nor satisfy the users.

7. Usually the Charter formulation exercises precede number of preparatory stages like number of meetings with the users/clients/stakeholders, identifying the services, standardization process, draft formulation, workshops, seminars etc.,. But the way the Charters appears to have been formulated gives an impression that the Charters were formulated through official file movements. Hence the process of the formulation of the Charters is also defective. There may be 2-3 exceptions.
8. Components of Charters are equally important to make them effective. Here the standard practice of making a good Charter on the lines of UK's experience has been considered as model. All Charters make a good beginning with a vision and mission statement which is a well thought practice. Only seven Charters have this statement. Others begin with either with introduction or with a preamble.
9. Provision to include the services provided in brief have neither been understood properly nor reflected in the Charters. Eight Charters have attempted to give their services in brief. Whereas others have listed all the programs in detail in which the users are not interested. The information given in the Charter should be required by the users. Service providers' interest is not very important.
10. Charters cannot be formulated without identifying the users/clients. But only four have identified their clients and the rest have addressed without considering the users. This clearly indicates the position of the users in the Charters. In fact the users occupy focal point in any good charter, which really intends customer satisfaction. The Charters in the study have not considered this important aspect and making the whole exercise looking one sided.
11. The grievance redress system is an integral part of any Charter. Only seven Charters have made provision for this. The others have either given their address or local office address for further contacts. There should be genuine concern for the hardships faced by the clients and sincere efforts should be made to address their problems if any. Otherwise, the Charters become insensitive to the needs of the users and serve no purpose.
12. To gain the confidence of the users Charters provide useful additional information to help them. Few Charters have made provisions for "Help Line". This is a good move showing concern to guide the users.

Considering all the aspects discussed above it may be construed that the Citizen's Charters formulation process is defective in nature. The Charter formulation exercises lack guidance and does not include the most essential and vital components, which make a Charter really effective. Most of the provisions included in the Charters are not focusing on the user's needs and give an impression that they are a routine department exercise. Nevertheless, it is too much to expect at this stage as the Citizen's Charters will be helpful in improving the standard of delivery of services, and satisfaction of the customers. Unless the departments develop customer satisfaction as their foremost objective, the Citizen's Charters remain a formal document without any significance.