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An Evaluation of Citizen's Charter in Local Government: A Case Study of Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, India

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INTRODUCTION

LOCAL GOVERNANCE signifies an organized, legitimized way of exercising authority through which planning, decision making, rule enforcement and accountability are achieved. Local governance is not only confined to governance, rather it includes variety of community and civil society steps by which people organize to act collectively, which in turn is real empowerment. True empowerment enhances the opportunities and capabilities to make and express choices into desired actions and outcomes. The immediate representation of people in governance makes the process and empowerment fruitful (Stigler, 1957). Governance at the local level is decentralized because it understands the concern of local residents, eliminates the confusion of jurisdiction and makes the 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 more precisely (Montalvo 2009). With the global media exposure and growing consciousness, there has been a keen level of peoples and expectations for the fairness and quality in the service delivery mechanism of public sector. Citizens do not only demand the efficiency, and flourishing economy in service delivery but they also want public bodies to be more responsive to the users and consumers of public services (Drewry 2005). Based on New Public Management (NPM) doctrine for reaching the grassroots more directly, the Citizen Charter initiative has been introduced; "the key objectives were to improve the quality of public services and to provide better value for money." (Rhodes 2003, p. 97).

Citizen's Charter: The Government of John Major had expressed and implemented the citizen charter policy in United Kingdom for the first time, in 1991, with the aim to continuously improve the quality

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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), India (1997). With the appliance of Citizen's Charter it is anticipated to give power to the citizen with the principles of choice, standards, value, accountability and transparency on the rules, procedures and grievance redress system of an institution. The element of Citizen Charter's includes the following:

- Ø Setting measurable standard for service delivery
- Ø Flashing service provider's identity
- Ø Cost of service delivery and time frame
- Ø Giving opportunity to choose alternative services
- Ø Scope to register complaint and redressal measure
- Ø Value for money: All citizens will be given equal treatment and the value or service rendered shall be more than the fees paid.

The Citizen 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 Charter at local level is an important tool of good governance. It is in this backdrop, the present study analyzes and evaluates the Citizen's Charter of an urban body in India—the Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh. This is specifically done in the light of a significant inception of Citizen Charter's aiming to enhance people's empowerment and uproot corruption.

Research Methodology: The present study examines the various facets of Citizen Charter in Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh, to accomplish these objectives; both primary and secondary sources of information have been used. The secondary data has been collected from office records, Citizen Charter, consultation papers, and reports of urban local bodies and commissions; books; journals; dissertations; internet; and newspapers. For various aspects of Citizen Charter of the Municipal Corporation and awareness among the inhabitants, the study relied primarily on their website and informal interviews. The

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sources of primary data were interviews with the officers, councilors of the municipal corporation and walk-in customers. The selection of office includes Public Relation Office, Heads of various departments and selected office bearers who deal directly with the people. The effectiveness of e-governance will also be checked through qualitative enquiries.

Introduction to the Case

The city of Chandigarh is one the most planned and clean city of India (popularly known as 'City Beautiful') with 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 also 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 of Chandigarh in 1994 (with 20 wards) with a jurisdictional area of 79.34 sq km 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 of society including the handicapped and mentally retarded children, slum improvement and upgradation, 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.

The functions in the 74th Constitutional Amendment are partly incorporated. There are multiple agencies which are functioning in Chandigarh. Table 1 depicts the numerous agencies and their functions.

To further compound the issue of multiple agencies have their own precedence, administrative dealings, lines of liability, and

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TABLE 1: AGENCY AND FUNCTIONS

Name	Area of operation
Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh	Water supply, Sewerage, drainage, roads, sanitation, fire wing, property tax
Chandigarh Housing Board	Construction of urban housing for the city.
Chandigarh Industrial & Tourism Corporation	Tourism and Industries
Chandigarh Transport Undertaking	Transportation

Source: Report of the Finance Secretary, Chandigarh Administration.

financing model, which often may not be in compliance with those of the Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh and Urban Local Bodies. The transfer of primary health care and education is latest development for the Municipal Corporation. There are 18 dispensaries and seven government schools which are being transferred by the Chandigarh administration. There are several problems ranging from finance to personnel in context of the newly transferred departments. It would not be easy for the Municipal Corporation to handle them efficiently until they design comprehensive policies to overcome present problems (Barnia, 2010) so in such an environment the role of citizen charter is very important to deliver the basic services in an effective and time bound manner.

Glance of Citizen's Charter at Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh

The concept of charter took over a decade to originate, as the idea was introduced way back in 1999, witnessing several drafts and amendments before it was finally introduced in 2004. Charter informs the citizens about the area wise complaint centres of various wings of the MCC. The information is available at official website of Municipal Corporation, Chandigarh (<http://mcchandigarh.gov.in/CITIZEN.pdf>), the 32 page citizen charters is divided into various sections. Each section contains the information pertaining to area wise division, officers, complaint centres and phone numbers of concerned officials. The special feature of citizen charter is its universal e-mail address for all types of complaints, i.e. osd_mcc@chd.nic.in. It also characterizes the time frame within which a complaint will be resolved.

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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

Citizen s Charter: A Mere Formality

With the momentum of globalization gaining, policy transfer is the only option left with the countries (Ghuman and Mehta). The document of citizen charter is one of the examples of this procedural fill up. It has been found that citizen charter is a document of less importance for the corporation as there is no display of citizen charter at the institution and at service windows. Even the employees of the agency are not well aware of 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 civic body comments. "The present citizen charter is just a formality. There is no clause in it that makes anybody accountable if a department fails to redress public complaints(MC citizen charter no good, Deepak Yadav, Times of India)," This practice is against the spirit of citizen's charter.

Poor Design: 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.

Poor Display of Right to Information Act

Various inhabitants seeking information expressed anger for supplying imprecise and belated information. It has been found that seeking information from a public office is difficult and time consuming. The information supplied is often incomplete and misleading, in addition to that the website of Municipal Corporation is not up-to-date. (Sharma, 2010). This is against the spirit of citizen charter as Access to Accurate and comprehensive Information is one of the crucial components of citizen charter (Ghuman and Mehta 2007).

No Updation 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. The citizen charter found at the website of the

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corporation is obsolete and old. Majority of the contact numbers have been changed. On inquiry through email, there is no response for the information sought (exercise carried out by the researcher).

Ineffective Public Relations: Public Relation is considered as the back bone of any institution. It has been found that there are no public relation campaigns, being held by the department to strengthen the relations among citizen. There are hardly any efforts which are being made to promote the citizen charter. Almost eight years after the municipal corporation of Chandigarh (MCC) introduced the Citizen's Charter, the civic body has failed to popularise it, leaving the citizens high and dry. The residents continue to get confused lot regarding the functions of the MC and the UT administration.

Poor Awareness among Citizens: From the very beginning the authorities were stating 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 at public places. However, it seems to be a distant dream as the authorities have now decided against installing such boards. On basis of conversation analysis with one hundred walk-in clients at the office of the Municipal Corporation, it has been found that 92 per cent are not aware about the term and the rest of them know it due to wake up call by social activist Anna Hazare.

Lack of professionalism among the employees: The attitudes of the employees of the corporation are adding more trouble to the existing scenario. On telephonic conversation it has been found that the official dealing with the particular complaint is not around the workplace. This shows lack of professionalism among the employees.

Inexcusable findings about 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". Nothing has been done to date.

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. But no action has been taken.

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These are only two examples of the MC's lopsided complaint redressal system under the Citizen 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.

Poor Response to the complaints on the Social networking site (facebook): An initiative has been taken by the corporation to identify the problems faced by the citizens over social networking website. Following are the instances of the complaints which depict the poor redressal of the complaints and ineffective implementation of Citizen's Charter.

Complaint 1: "I feel there is no one in the MC entrusted with responding and acting on our requests. It is an 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.

Citizen Charter Replies: A general complaint needs to be addressed within three days and in cases where a drive is needed, the MC needs 15 days.

Complaint 2: In front of house nos. 732-728, Sector 22-A, construction material has been lying on the road as well as on the footpath causing in problems to pedestrians. Ashutosh Sharma posted this complaint on July 1 to the road wing, but till July 13 no action was taken.

Citizen Charter Replies: Minor blockage in sewer lines will be removed within two days from the date of the complaint.

Redress time limit

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

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

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Language Barrier

The language of the Charters should necessarily be the language of the users. It is advisable to have the Charter in Hindi and English also. In our analysis (study) it has been found that the Citizen's Charter is solely in English, which cannot be understood by all the inhabitants of the city.

The above mentioned empirical results delineate the scenario of citizen charter at Municipal Corporation Chandigarh. The initiative has failed squarely to generate quality services in a time bound manner. So there is great need to refine the process.

Suggestions

Citizen Charter of local government services has been a gleaming initiative in the spirit that it has taken citizen centric governance to new platform, such initiative created a sense of quality governance. Measures should be taken to include all the services in the Citizen Charter with time frame as the required time for any service is not unlimited. Proper publicity is required to make the citizens aware of citizen's charter, it is essential to understand the pivotal role of media in promoting citizen charter among the masses. The involvement of staff also plays a crucial role in making citizen charter a success, so there is significant need to train and sensitize all officials so that they could get familiar with the spirit of citizen charter. The effective communication and involvement of citizens at all the levels of citizen charter also play a crucial role. Further the design of citizen charter should be such that it must be focused, simple and clear. Timely regulation, updation and evaluation of citizen charter hold the key to make it fruitful.

CONCLUSION

There is a need to address these institutional and other challenges to good governance in city administration. Unless the obstructions are removed, good governance is hampered and efficient service delivery becomes difficult. This unfavorably impacts the society, particularly the citizens. There is need, therefore, to reorganize the strategies, eradicate the roadblocks and make efficient the lines of accountability and sense of responsibility.

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