

## THE CITIZEN'S CHARTER: AN INSTRUMENT OF RESPONSIVENESS

---

Dr. Verinder Kumar Awana\*

### ABSTRACT

*The concept of Citizen's Charter generates 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 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 programme was re-launched in 1998 by the Labour Government of Tony Blair which rechristened it "Service First". Throughout the world, it has been recognized 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 "Citizens 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. The basic objective of the Citizen's Charter is to empower the citizen in relation to public service delivery.*

---

**Keywords:** *Citizen's Charter, Conservative Government. Sustainable Development, Responsiveness.*

---

### Introduction

#### The Concept and Its Objectives

Six principles of the Citizen's 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 Organizations; and (vi) Transparency: Rules/ Procedures/ Schemes/ Grievances.

#### The International Scene

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 Users' Charter 1992), Canada (Service Standards Initiative, 1995), France (Service Charter, 1992), India (Citizen's Charter 1997), Jamaica (Citizen's Charter 1994), Malaysia (Client Charter 1993), Portugal (The Quality Charter in Public Services, 1993) and Spain (The Quality Observatory, 1992) (OECD, 1996). A comparison of the 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 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.

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Master Hazari Lal Sharma Government College, Chirwa, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

### **Margaret Thatcher's Policy Reforms**

Financial Management Initiative, performance indicators and privatization formed the dominant themes of the reform pursued by Margaret Thatcher (1979-90). These arose as a sequel to policies designed to 'cut back' the public sector. The public sector was becoming a burden on nation economy as they were not giving good results. The commanding heights of the economy - gas, telephones, electricity, coal - were, as a result, moved out of the direct control of the government. Thatcher's privatization drive was directed at reducing the public spending in absolute terms and securing enhanced efficiency of the nationalised industries.

### **Developments Under John Major**

The citizen's charter initiative in the U.K. was inaugurated with a White Paper in July, 1991. The programme (now in the tenth year of its existence) was the brainchild of the then conservative Prime Minister, John Major, who, as has been pointed out above succeeded Margaret Thatcher in 1990. In his introduction to the 1991 White Paper, John Major had said: to make public services answer better to the wishes of their users, and to raise their quality overall, have been ambition of mine ever since I was a local councillor in Lambeth over 20 years ago. I want the Citizen's Charter to be one of the central themes of public life in the 1990s.

### **The Charter Mark Scheme**

The introduction of the charter mark scheme, in 1992, to recognize and reward excellence in the delivery of public services, constitutes a milestone in the development of the charter initiative during the Prime Minister Major's years in the office (1990-97). Not only has the scheme since become an integral part of the programme, it has gone on to grow in stature and weight with the charter mark awards being characterized as the 'Oscar' and the 'Olympic Gold' for public services. In 1992, the first year of the scheme, 36 charter mark awards were given away. In 1999, some 4000 organizations applied for charter mark; and nearly 1200 held the award at the corresponding point of time. Charter mark is a certification of excellence; it marks a standard of excellence. Therefore, the applicants do not compete; there is no limit to the number of winners.

### **Charter Programme under Tony Blair after 1997**

Upon the Labour Party's election victory in May 1997, with Tony Blair assuming the power of government, the charter programme underwent substantial changes in form as well as substance. The Programme took on a new name; it was now called the 'Service First' programme. The Citizen's Charter Unit was correspondingly renamed as the 'Service First Unit'. Nine new principles of public service delivery, to further build up instead of six principle of Citizen Charter. In other words, the Charter programme not only survived the 1997 change of government but John Major's legacy has in fact been carried forward with an undiminished zeal by his successor and political adversary, Tony Blair.

### **1998 White Paper**

Two other initiatives of the Labour Government must be noted in completing the present account: first, the issuance of a White Paper on local government, in 1998", and second, arrival on the scene, in 1999, of Modernizing Government, which incorporates, the governments long-term programme of public service reform. The 1998 White Paper (Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People) makes the local authorities' consultation with people (particularly the socially disadvantaged) mandatory, when community plans and proposals for improving local services are framed. This, in sum, represents the Labour Government's commitment to modernize local government based on values of democracy and grass root action.

### **Citizen's Charters in India**

The 'Concept Note on Citizen's Charter', authored by the Union Government's Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (AR & PG) - the nodal agency at the apex for coordinating the programme - forms the basic documentary source outlining the scope, contours and contents of the country's citizen's charter programme.

The 'Concept Note' is a multifaceted effort, but the document presents itself chiefly as a compact do-it-yourself guide for the government departments and agencies, elaborately spelling out the concerns that their respective charter programmes may embrace. It underscores considerations that define a citizen's charter's purpose and constitute its *raison d'être*: the need, on the part of the service providers, to demonstrate complete transparency on the range, and the quality and

standards, of services they provide and the means available to the users to record displeasure and secure redress if the providers failed to keep the stipulated service specifications. The various interlocking doctrinal elements of the citizen's charter, as set out in the Concept Note, are given below:

- Comprehensively list out all what the agency believes the service-user must do to help it in achieving greater efficacy in delivering the various services.
- Set up a system for independent scrutiny of the agency's performance.
- State the range of services being offered by the department/agency.
- Provide for a periodic review of the charter to allow a revision of the benchmarks (the standard-practice-guides).
- Set service standards (i.e. response time for various public transactions, service quality, etc.; these standards representing the provider's commitments to the users).
- List remedies to which the customer may take recourse when the service-provider fails to adhere to the declared specifications/ commitments.
- Outline the methods for obtaining the user feedback.
- Spell out the procedures for availing particular services.
- Anticipate the different variety of information a customer may need; and provide indication of the sources from which such information might be obtained.
- Incorporate provision for the agency's performance audit.

#### **The Citizen's Role**

The citizen's role in charter formulation is indicated in emphatic and clear terms; as stated previously, there is provision in the task forces, entrusted with the job of formulating the agencies' citizen's charters, for the users' representatives. And a reinforcing exhortation appears elsewhere, as reported previously in a different context: involve customers and staff in formulating and implementing' the charter.

#### **Problems faced in Implementing the Charters**

Introduction and implementation of the concept of Citizens' Charter in the Government of India was much more difficult due to the old bureaucratic set up/ procedures and the rigid attitudes of the work force. The major obstacles encountered in this initiative were:

- Sometimes, transfers and reshuffles of concerned officers at the crucial stages of formulation/implementation of a Citizen's Charter in an organisation severely undermined the strategic processes which were put in place and hampered the progress of the initiative.
- Awareness campaigns to educate clients about the Charter were not conducted systematically.
- The concept behind the Citizen's Charter was not properly understood. Information brochures, publicity materials, pamphlets produced earlier by the organizations were mistaken for Citizen's Charters.
- In some cases, the standards/time norms of services mentioned in Citizen's Charter were either too lax or too tight and were, therefore, unrealistic and created an unfavourable impression on the clients of the Charter.
- The general perception of organizations which formulated Citizens' Charters was that the exercise was to be carried out 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.
- For any Charter to succeed the employees 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 adequately trained and sensitized.

**Implementation at the Union Level: An Overview**

The preceding exercise furnishes the basic framework and specific sets of criteria with reference to which one might investigate implementation of the charter programme at the union government level. According to the latest count, the number of the union government agencies which have formulated charters has crossed the 65 mark and presently rests at 68.

**Grievance Redress**

Under the impetus provided by the charter's citizen-centric image, efforts have been made to prune the extant complaints procedures in departments. Recourse was also had to the computerization of complaints. Complaints monitoring at the supra - departmental level was also strengthened. However, these measures, without the concomitant steps to secure a time-bound disposal of the citizen complaints would not appreciably improve the responsiveness of the Charter.

**Rajasthan Government's Charter Programme: Its Salient Features**

A case study of Rajasthan where efforts in the direction of implementing the charter initiative had commenced in the second half of 1997 itself; which means that these (efforts) progressed more or less parallelly with those of the ministries at the union government level. Rajasthan was amongst the earliest states to have adopted the programme and as such there would be - in terms of the patterns evolved for designing charters, publicizing the measure, orientation of the staff as well as monitoring and evaluation of the programme - at least some general abstractions to draw and, more importantly, disseminate for the guidance of the states which may arrive late on the scene or who despite having adopted the charter programme, formally, displayed signs of vacillating. While the location specific experiences it might be difficult, or even unwise, to try to replicate elsewhere, it may not be difficult to abstract, from such an exercise, some general guidelines. The decision to adopt the charter initiative in the state of Rajasthan was made in a meeting of the secretaries, which the State's Chief Secretary chaired. 'The basic decision adopted in the meeting, which took place on 18-11-1997, was to the effect that the charter programme in the state would be operated on a pan-governmental scale but that, to begin with, the initiative might be confined to such of the state government's departments and agencies as had a large public interface.

**The Revenue Department's Citizen's Charter**

The charter was first produced in the form of a draft, which was published in the Revenue Board's widely circulated in-house journal (titled RAVIRA March, 1999 issue) for comments and suggestions. This was how the charter formulation exercise began, in which three workshops - attended by the revenue functionaries across the board (patwari at the bottom and the divisional commissioner at the top of the pyramid) and the elective non-officials - respectively at Jodhpur, Bharatpur, and Bhilwara formed the next step. These preparatory exercises, designed to evoke widest possible participation of the stakeholders, culminated in the government order of October 12, 1999 which accorded a formal sanction to the initiative.

**Citizen Charter of RSRTC**

For enhancing the convenience of Rajasthan's Travelling public, Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation was set up on 1st October, 1964 under the provisions of Road Transport Act, 1950. Ever since the corporation was set up in 1964, a well-coordinated and integrated transport policy was framed to achieve basic goals and secure social stability this was achieved through national integration. This facilitated free personnel movement inside the country. RSRTC is proud of its national role and its firm resolve to expand its operations taking pride in corporate discipline and resolute management. With the ives and targets of all round development, we have on record an impressive pattern of road transport growth over the years. Our fleet has increased to 4668 from 421. We are transporting daily about 9.94 lacs passengers and operating on routes connecting 32 districts of Rajasthan and neighbouring states. Extended travelling facility to the colonies and sub-urban towns in and around Jaipur city, irrespective of the heavy financial loss on this operation, RSRTC has been operating about 250 city buses per day.

**Suggestion and Complaints**

RSRTC always welcomes for improvement in the quality of services. Complaint and Suggestion boxes/books are available at all bus stations to record the opinion of passengers. In addition through RSRTC Help Line at phone number 9610300900 passengers can lodge their complaints/suggestions at head office control room phone number 367043, passengers can record their suggestion/complaint round the clock.

**References**

1. Arvind K. Sharma and Indu Sharma, *Inducing Client-Focus in Bureaucracy, The Citizen's Charters India, Scrutinising the Pioneer's Experience*, Kanisha Publishers Distributors, New Delhi, 2002, page 3.
2. *Citizen Charter - A Concept Note*, page 15-17.
3. Discussion in the Rest of the Section III is based on an Article which Appeared in *Institutions Ravira* - See Damodar Sharma 'Coordination between Panchayati Raj and Revenue Administration, 'Ravira, JulyAugust 2000, Ajmer Board of Revenue, page 8-9.
4. *Modern Local Government: In Touch with People*, Comnd. 4014 London, HMSO, 1998.
5. See Government of Rajasthan, *Report of Administrative Reform Commission (Vol. 1) Jaipur 2000*, page 284-287.
6. The Account Provided here of the Charter Mark Scheme is Mainly based on a Cabinet Office's 1999, Publication titled *A Guide of Quality Scheme for the Public Sector*, page 9-10.
7. *The Citizen Charter - Five Year on Cmnd.*, 3370, London, HMSO, 1976.
8. The Discussion on State State's Charter Programme is based on (a) the Minutes of the Secretaries' meeting dated 18-11-1997 (issued vide government of Rajasthan Deptt. AR and Co-ordination Circular No. P.10/AR/Co-ordination/Sec-1/97 dated 04-12-1997)
9. The Titled 'Ravivra' is derived from the Hindi Abbreviation of the Department's Name: *Rajasva Vibhag, Rajathan*
10. Vivek K. Agnihotri, *OP Citi*, page 126.

