



# Citizen's Charter in Public Services: Development, Principles and Practice

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**Abstract:** *This paper presents the consequences and development of the citizen's charters over the decades after their introduction in the United Kingdom (UK) on 22 July 1991. It has used a systematic literature review to organize and present the development process of the citizens' charter over the years. It does not focus on or target any specific zone or state but is initiated more to connect the links between Commonwealth nations. However, the citizen's charter is a process to link citizens and public administrators in a more formal/official manner. It has changed a lot over the last three decades. The paper tried to critically investigate the degree of change, development, and practice.*

**Keywords:** *citizen; citizens' charter; citizens' role; public administration; public service*

## I. Introduction

The concept of the citizen's charter is one of the reform agendas that originated in the UK in the firmament of the civil service or public administration reform during the early 90s (Mullen, 2006). The concept of this charter is to publish the task to the citizens as they may be concerned about their rights and get them accordingly (Kavanagh, 2009). The charters concept is purposed to ensure better service delivery, transparency, efficiency, and accountability of the utility service providing organizations of the state or public sector organizations. It spearheaded a breakthrough among all the previous reform agendas in the civil service. As soon as emerging dregs the UK gained importance and almost unanimous acceptance by other developed and developing states (Schiavo, 2000).

All public services, from hospitals to prison services, local government offices to fire services, would have to publish clear targets for service levels (Mullen, 2006). Citizen's charter was the brainchild of UK Prime Minister John Major, who declared it in 1991. According to John Major, "the charter program will find better ways of converting money into better services"(James et al. 2005; Kavanagh, 2009). It was related to client/public service downwards from government and its bureaucratic system, and into the hands of ordinary citizens. The Prime Minister's foreword to the white paper made easy and clear his concern about civil rights. Nonetheless, it empowers the citizens by all means.

The multiparty engagement made the process very complex. Edelenbos et. al. (2009) stated that the involvement of citizens/civil society and/or NGOs in decision-making were found in many countries. Interactive policy-making, citizen panels, citizen charters, new forms of participation, and other forms are being used to increase the influence of citizens on decision-making. An important issue in the scientific debate is the relationship between citizen participation and existing democratic institutions. It concluded that the organization of the

interconnection between interactive processes and existing representative democratic institutions is very difficult and needs constant maintenance.

Torres (2003 & 2006) analyzed the effects of public service charters in Anglo-American countries and countries in continental Europe, especially in Spain, and found that many public service providers enhanced the quality of their services delivered by the government using modernized tools. It resulted in an increased citizen trust a lot.

Taylor (1999) concluded that the charter system was inadequate to safeguard consumers' and citizens' interests and that they would have to have a greater input to ensure success. Taylor's focus on initiatives such as the Citizen's Charter would benefit from more strategic or systematic preparation that incorporates the views and expertise of a wide range of stakeholders before being introduced and for the initiative to become an integral part of the approach to standards of service thereafter.

Following its introduction in 1991, the Charter initiative certainly made an impact and by 1997 there were 40 main characters and perhaps 10,000 local ones. However, since then the original 'Citizen'. Charter has, in the words of one commentator, 'perished, or at least atrophied' (Drewry, 2002). There is little doubt that it could have been more effective. For example, tax charters seem to have had more success - indeed the UK Taxpayers' Charter pre-dates the Citizen'. Charter, having been introduced in 1986.

James, et. al. (2005) reviews the Charter initiative in light of the development of tax charters and describes a particularly successful one - the Australian Taxpayers' Charter, which continues to provide a clear focus on twelve basic principles of tax administration.

Paul (2008) presented an assessment of the progress of the citizens charter imitative which is an effort to make public service providers more open citizen-friendly and accountable but in most cases, it failed. In the year of 1997, the government of India launched a reform initiative to reduce public expenditure but increase public service delivery.

Citizen Charters were introduced by the Government of Kenya in 2004 as part of reforms aimed at improving service delivery in public sector institutions that have a bearing on service delivery namely; public involvement in their design, organizational commitment to set standards, and the existence of mechanisms for grievance redress (Jela, 2005).

This paper presents a brief overview of the concept with explanations that evolved from historical perspectives, the difference between citizenship and nationality, and some rights and privileges of the citizens. In the third part theoretical underpinnings of the citizen's charter along with the cardinal, factors or forces of the citizen's charter concepts have been explained briefly. In the following part, the concept and its principles with chronological development are given. Then an endeavor was employed to make a heuristic search about the implication and practical aspect of the citizen's charter concepts across the globe. The paper concludes that the prime success of any reform lies with political commitments and real practice and continued innovation and development of the concept.

## II. Research Method

This descriptive research work is mainly based on the content analysis method. Data and information were gathered through secondary sources. Most of the materials are collected from journal articles, research reports, books, working papers, etc. A huge number of published and unpublished official documents regarding the citizens' charter are considered vital sources of information as well.

## III. Results and Discussion

Every socio-economic-political system and institution has its roots deep in the past. The citizenship concept has no exception to this axiomatic fact. The concept of citizenship originated in Greece, especially from philosopher Aristotle with the concept of democracy (Hebert, 2002).

Later on, the Romans made further development in the concept of citizenship (Wasson, 2016). In ancient Egypt, only the Pharaohs were considered citizens whereas in China the educated people were deemed citizens (Mark, 2013).

Citizenship' and 'nationality' very often emphasize the different aspects of the same notion, viz., membership of a state (Parolin, 2009). Citizenship refers to the relationship of a person with a state from the national or municipal aspect while nationality stresses the international nationality as between nations applies to an independent community as an organic whole, regardless of territorial divisions and the method adopted for their government. The major activities that are performed by the citizens of a nation are as follows-

- a. Citizen votes
- b. Citizens pay taxes
- c. Citizens obey the law
- d. Citizens seek to understand issues and problems
- e. Citizens working for the betterment of the community
- f. Citizen chooses candidates who will represent him
- g. Citizens are ever watchful of public welfare
- h. Citizens serve on juries
- i. Citizens protect the rights of individuals and groups
- j. Citizens set and maintain high standards of good local government
- k. Citizens are international citizens

It is all about fixing the service standard, publishing it, controlling it, and integrating it into the citizens' charter. Thus a citizen's charter essentially consists of the three elements such as customers, communication, and control as the customer is the citizen who is the ultimate destination of service delivery, communicates the process of the service delivery and the standard of services which should be accessible to the citizens, and finally, it requires measuring the result (Haque, 2005; Beale & Pollitt, 1994; Barron & Scott, 1992).

Development Process: Citizens enjoy certain privileges, rights, duties, and responsibilities, which are generally reflected and protected in the constitution of the country (UNHR, 2018 Warner, 2012). In recent times the concept of a citizen's charter is a widely discussed issue in the academic discourse. It emerged in the civil service of the United Kingdom during John Major's government. As of now, significant development has taken place in the British civil service with the launching of the Citizen's Charter in July 1991

(Mullen, 2006). The end product is expected to include high-quality services provided sufficiently and at a reasonable cost. The Citizen's six important principles are designed to emphasize the idea of the citizen as a customer of public service and transform it (the idea) into a reality in the everyday management and operation of those services.

Adopting the principles of the citizens' charter was mandatory for the service-providing state or public sector organizations (Government of United Kingdom, 1991). As soon as the concept was mooted and discussed in the cabinet meeting in UK Parliament (Memo No. 1599), the utility service-providing organizations tried to develop their citizen's charter in line with the six principles, which were little elaborated on and explained in the following:

**a. Quality (Improving the Service Quality)**

Explicit and measurable standards for civil service be established and monitored (Drewry, 2005). The citizens must know these standards so that they know what services are expected and whether standards have been met or not while providing stipulated services.

**b. Choice (If Possible)**

Information and openness are needed, among other things, to build rapport and trust between civil servants and members of the public. Within the broad ambit of the public sector, citizens should be provided with maximum opportunity to choose, among competing services. It is widely believed that choice is possibly the best stimulant to improve quality. Regular and systematic consultation must take place between civil servants and users of services. This is because users' views about services and suggestions for improving them are critically important for taking final decisions on standards.

**c. Standards (Fixing the Benchmark)**

It is crucial to ensure that accurate information, which is readily available and easily accessible about civil service, specifies what to expect and how to act if standards are not met. It is important to focus on what it costs, how well it performs and who is in charge, and at what point to maintain the standards of service.

**d. Value of Citizens Tax (Citizens' Contribution to Nation)**

The basic premise behind courtesy and helpfulness is that public service should be provided equally and without discrimination or bias to all who are entitled and run. Citizens' welfare would be given priority while services are being provided.

**e. Accountability (To the Citizens as Taxpayers)**

Accountability provides better service and prevents corruption in organizations. That is why an organization or an institution should be accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Civil servants must always be aware of what to do when things go wrong. The actions to be taken in such situations include offering an unconditional and public apology, a full explanation as to where and how things went off the track, and initiating swift and effective measures to remedy the mistakes committed, but things cannot be put right unless complaint procedures are well publicized, in place and easy to deal with. Independent reviews of procedures should be undertaken from time to time to bring them to the needs of the users.

#### **f. Transparency (of Rules/ Procedures/ Schemes/Grievances)**

Transparency is the way to make decisions and enforce them within rules and regulations. To promote transparency in the decision-making process, it is necessary to make the information available and accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also requires that enough information should be provided in easily understandable. It should be maintained at all levels to ensure people's rights and requirements.

It is imperative from the above discussion that all the principles are interrelated and standards of performance are critical for rights and value for money.

#### **Citizens Charter Practice (Global) and Development:**

- a) The UK and Europe: Tony Blair's 'New Labor' Government came into office committed to a comprehensive 'modernization' of the country's institutions and practices, and anything as closely identified with the former Prime Minister as the Citizen's Charter clearly could not survive unscathed. A review was undertaken by the Cabinet Office, accompanied by a nationwide consultation exercise and a series of workshops with front-line staff. The outcome was Service First - the new Charter program, introduced in June 1998 (Schiavo, 2000).
- b) Asia and Developing Nations: Many developing countries' reform efforts also indicate a clear shift away from traditional concerns mostly with rules and regulations to increasing emphasis on quality culture, performance targets, contracting out of services, customer orientation, accountability, and transparency (Rahman et. Al., 2006).
- c) USA and Australia: The US has had a 'Putting Customers First' program since 1994, and later 'Hammer Awards' to reward quality initiatives by public service agencies (Mills,1991). Australia introduced government service charters in its 1997 'Putting Service First' program.

Citizen's charter aims to build bridges between citizens and public administration while meeting the requirements to be produced and delivered in an open and accountable manner so that customers have full access to the responsible officials and relevant information in the service delivery. Therefore, it is more of a demand-driven approach where substantial departure from the traditional public administration is required. That means a change in administrative culture from a top-down to a more bottom-up approach.

In other words, a charter must ensure consumers' sovereignty in the public sector and not bureaucratic diktat (Ohemeng, 2010). As long as the charter concept has been in operation it attracted huge attention from the consecutive and successive governments in the UK. Innovation and modification are on and on a regular and continual basis. The present government of the UK has researched the impact of the citizen's charter and identified some limitations of the concept. Now a citizen's panel has been formed to monitor the quality and efficiency of the service delivery of the state agencies. The success of the charter concept was possible due to its continued and sustained political support and the acceptance of the implementers, whose performance is continually monitored and evaluated by the members of civil society organizations and academics. But in developing countries, it has produced mixed results. The political leaders and the bureaucracy of the third world countries failed to understand the real essence of the concepts and citizens' oppression and tyranny is still there and any aspect of service delivery is yet to improve there as per the wishes and needs of the citizens.

## V. Conclusion

The journey of citizens' charter in Bangladesh is not old enough (Aminuzzaman, 2006). But there has been noteworthy progress since the introduction of the citizen's charter in the year of 2008 (Kundo, 2016). However, it requires more development in practice and establishment. Hence, it is mainly producer dominated and their grand rhetorics are far away to achieve reality. Though it had been discovered in the UK, it was established in the USA already compared to the UK or other European nations. Recent media reports indicate Citizen's Charters in most public sector organizations are still ineffective in many of the public offices (Razzaque, 2012). It is expected that the introduction has been done and now the proper time for implementation and monitoring of second-generation charters toward more effective service delivery in public offices in the context of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

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