

Challenges and Prospects of Implementing Citizen Charter: A Study of Union Parishad in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to identify complexities and drawback of citizen charter at Union Parishad in Bangladesh. Generally, A Citizen's Charter composes of the 3 Cs: Customer-driven service standards, Communication and Control. Citizen charter has become a traditional attempt of providing better service delivery, tools for empowerment of local people and implementing government policy at grassroots level. In order to expand the quality of public service to the mass people, the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh introduced a "citizen's charter" at the grassroots level to empower the local populace and promoting them with meaningful participation, equitable and accountable delivery of public services. The study is based on review of the relevant literature, applying primary data with a small scale survey and discussions with service users in the localities. Collected Data obtained from the field survey show that the introduction of citizen's charter in Bangladesh had nominal impact due to poor publicity campaign that caused in low awareness among the citizens, a person-centered approach to service delivery in local committees and apathy and lack of interest among stakeholders. The key objective is to identify the challenges involved in applying the citizen's charter efficiently at local level and present insight for toward developing approaches for effective implementation of the charter at the local level in developing countries. The paper comes to an end with fragile implementation strategies and practices in developing countries encumbering empowerment of citizens and do not allow local authority to perform effectively.

1. Introduction:

Citizen's charter notifies the public about the availability of public services from the service station. The Citizen's Charter includes information on the commitment of the agency towards the public with regard to standard and time frame for providing services, scope for choice and consultation of service delivery, non-discrimination, grievance redress, and demonstrated value for money. The Charter also seeks to assure accessibility and courteous services. Generally, a citizen's charter includes the vision and mission of the agency and its operations, details on standards, quality, time frame for delivery, and redress mechanisms (Haque & Ahsan; 2016). The traditional system of administration all over the world at present is facing crisis in terms of its failure in efficient and effective delivery of goods and services and it is no more compatible with new environment of governance (PGP; 2011). The bureaucracy in service delivery system has followed by increasing degree of displeasure among the citizens that has led to search for a model of governance which promotes efficiency and economy in administration (Beniwal; 2005). The South Asian administrators and many scholars argued that this traditional system is ineffective, insufficient, insensitive and hostile to the actual needs of the people (Osborne & Plastrik, 1997). The case of Bangladesh is no exception. Since the constitution of Bangladesh declares all powers in the republic belong to people, the administrative machinery has to strive all times to serve the people (Article 7 & 21) by providing with different services in conformance to the administrative principle of 3'Es (economy, efficiency and effectiveness), specially in recent decades. Union Parishad (UP), the lowest tier of local government, is acting as an agent for root level direct service delivery to the people who has embodied with the constitutional ownership of the republic and they have the right to expect certain level of standard for the services as they provide taxes to state.

The state of service delivery to the root level people by UP has been debated since its commencement in several ways. The government of Bangladesh has taken myriad of initiatives to develop the service delivery mechanism of all tiers of the local government, in particular Ups with response to the agenda of international development agencies. One such initiative is introduction of Citizen Charter (CC) in UP 2009. Since then the CC is playing vital role in local level governance. However, CC has both problems and prospects in efficient delivery of public service which is the important concern in present competitive world (Khan; 2009). This study explores the factors that inhibit the effective implementation of the citizen charter and what major changes occurred after implementing Citizen's Charter in the Union Parishad.

2. Objectives:

The core aims and objectives of the Citizen's Charter in UPs of Bangladesh will be specified and cleared by the following two points in short:

- To review responsibility, accountability, transparency, and people-friendly behavior of public

representatives.

- To bring changes within the service delivery mechanism by the introduction of service choices, a culture of consultation, and practicing the essential mechanism of redressing public grievances.

3. Methodology:

The study has been designed on the basis of formulating objectives and research priority. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied in the study and descriptive research design has been followed. The purpose of the study is to analyze the views and perceptions of the respondents both from the officials who provide services and also the general people who receive services from the Union Parishad reported in the citizen's charter (CC) of the Parishad. The Primary data collection method has been applied for the study. The sample for the study selected purposively because of time & resource constraint and to make easy of collecting needed information. All the data collected through formal and informal interview, questionnaire survey. The total respondents of the study are 50. Among the respondents, the UP officials are 14 and general people who are the core focus of introduction of the CC in UP are 36.

Table 1: The number of respondents

Respondents type			Total
Service providers(officials)	UP Chairman	1	14
	UP Secretary	1	
	Members	12	
Service receivers(citizens)	General People	36	36
Total Respondents			N= 50

4. Background and Key issues of Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh:

A Citizen's Charter essentially consists of the 3 Cs: Customer-driven service standards, Communication and Control. The concept of The Citizen's Charter usually indicates the rights and services available to the citizens, process, how these will be delivered, remedy that will be available if the services not reach to the intended targets (Haque; 2005). To trace the history of CC, the scholars James, Murphy & Reinhart (2005) stated that the history of CC is owed to the Magna Charta of 1215 as well as to the People's Charter of 1838.

The concept of modern citizens charter was first formulated and implemented in the United Kingdom by the Government of John Major in 1991 as a national program with a simple aim: to improve continuously the quality of public services for the people (Sharma and Agnihotri; 2001). The program was launched again in 1998 by the Labor Government of Tony Blair which renamed it 'Services First' (Falconer and Ross; 1999).

The argument made that the six principles of the citizen's charter movement as originally were: (i) Quality-improving the quality of services (ii) Choice-whenever possible (iii) Standards- specify what to expect and how to act if standards are not met; (iv) Value- for the taxpayers' money (v) Accountability- to individuals and organizations and (vi) Transparency rules, procedures, grievances (Barron and Scott, 1992). Following the successfulness of citizen charter in UK, the Indian government, our close neighbor, also introduced Citizen's Charter in 1997 (Paul, 2008) and has been accredited by the national and international observer in this way.

In Bangladesh at least 17 reform commissions have been formed to bring positive changes in service delivery since its independence in 1971. More than 20 reports on Public Administration Reform have been prepared by these Commissions and Committees (Khan; 1998) and these reports reflect the true spirit of citizen centric management (Sarkar; 2004). The thought of CC is the direct outcome of the recommendations given by Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) (Jahan, 2006; UNDP, 2010) in 1997, which was mandated to recommend policies, programs and activities to improve the level of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency in public organizations (Nayem; 2010). At last in 2007 the Caretaker government adapted CC in government offices for the first time. Consequently, The Secretariat Instruction (2008) of Bangladesh has given instruction with well details to formulate and publish Citizen's Charter.

The UPs as the important tier of Local governance of Bangladesh was also asked to adopt citizen charter in conformance to the basic instrument and guidelines embodied in Local Government Union Parishad Act-2009. Under the Act the UP councils were directed to adopt Citizen's Charter with description of various types of services, terms and time limit for specific service; assurance of service; complaint address if failed rendering service etc.

5. Pathalia Union Parishad (The Case Union)

Pahalia Union Parishad is a union under Savar Upazila, Dhaka. Like any Union Parishad of Bangladesh Pathalia Union composed of: 1 elected chairman, 12 elected members (3 of whom are women from reserved seat), 1 appointed secretary, 10 appointed village police (1 Dafadar, 9 Mahalladars). Beside this formal structure, Pathalia Union Parishad has an assistant secretary paid by Union, to assist the very task of the secretary. Furthermore, the union parishad contains 93, 150 population, literacy rate is 62%, educational institution is 41,

and total number of village is 67.

5.1 Assessment of knowledge about Citizen Charter

Table No: 2 Knowledge about existence of CC

Do you know Union Parishad has introduced a document called the citizen charter?		Total No. of respondents-50		Total
		Yes, I know	Don't Know	
	UP officials	20%	8%	28%
	Citizens	60%	12%	72%
	Total	80%	20%	100%

Source: Field Survey

The question was asked to assess the people whether they have known or not that UP introduced a document called CC? The study found that among the officials 20% respondents were said they know. Other 8% said they do not know(they are practicing CC but unknown to the term). This statistics shows that potential number of officials totally unknown about the term CC, that is unexpected and alarming from the officials who will provide service. Among the general people only 60% said they have heard and know the CC and almost 12% mentioned they do not know. This is also alarming for effective implementation of CC.

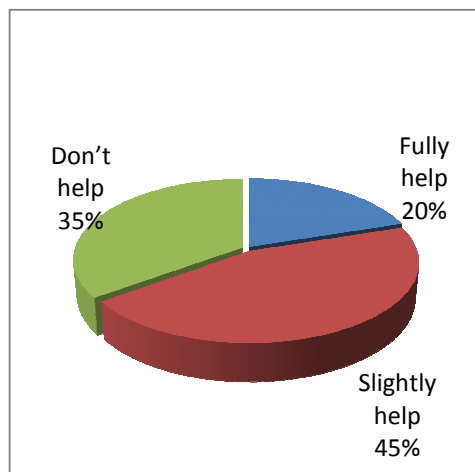
5.2 Awareness level: Another common question was asked to the respondents that if you know about citizen charter how much aware you are? Among the 80% respondents who know about CC, 50% said somewhat aware, and from other 50%, only 25% somewhat aware and the rest 25% said they just heard the term CC but do not aware on it.

5.3 Analysis of the pre-post environment

5.3.1 Ease of access to information:

One question was asked: Do you think that CC helps citizens more to get access to information than before? Among the twenty respondents 20% were on behalf of the statements that CC helping citizens more than any time before in getting access to information to the citizens. Other 45% said slightly help and the rest 35% discharge their opinion that CC do not provide extra help to get access to information.

Figure 2: State of Access to information

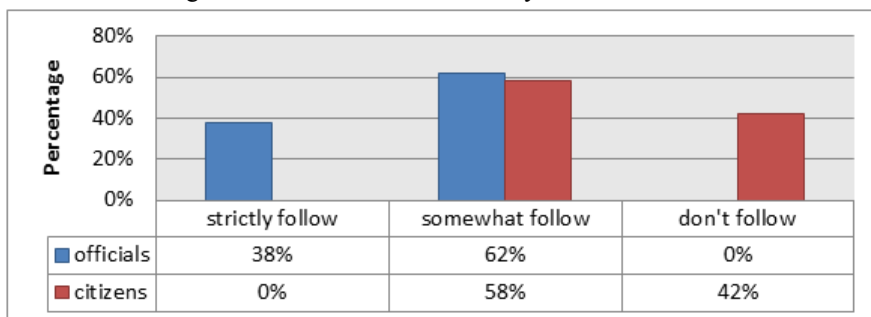


Source: Field survey

5.3.2 How frequently the officials follow rules

A question was asked to both parts of respondents that- Do you think officials of UP follow the rules mentioned in CC?

Figure 3: The official's conformity to the rule of CC



Source: Field survey

Almost 38% of the officials said they strictly follow the citizen charter guidelines. And rest 62% officials said they somewhat follow the CC. No officials agreed upon that they do not follow CC. But the opinion highly differs with the citizens. Where no citizen said the officials strictly follow the CC, 58% said UP officials somewhat follow and the rest 42% mention officials do not follow CC.

5.3.3 Problem faced before adopting CC

The respondents from the general citizens were asked to mention the most important problem they had faced before implementing CC. Almost 42% respondents mention the information related problem like who give what services in what conditions at what cost. The 17% respondents opined that they have faced delay in service delivery. Again, 25% posed response that they had to expend extra money due to gap of proper information. And the rest 16% faced the elite mentality and behavior of the UP officials.

Table 3: Problem faced before adopting CC

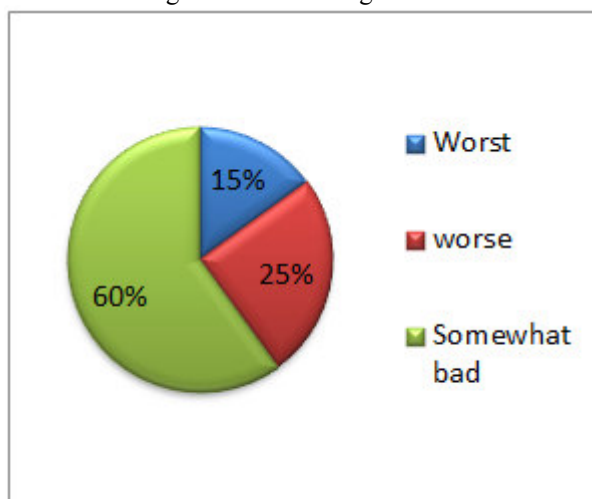
		N=36	Percentage
What was the most important problem you have faced before implementing CC?	Informational problem	15	42 %
	Service delay	6	17 %
	Extra cost	9	25 %
	Behavior of officials	6	16 %

Source: Field survey

5.3.4 Extent of grievances before CC

What are the peoples thinking about the extent of grievances before implementing CC? Under this question, from the 50 respondents 15% said the situation was worst, 25% said opine as worse, and more than half of the respondents (60%) said before it was somewhat bad. So it can be imagine that the existing situation is at least better than before.

Figure 4: Extent of grievances

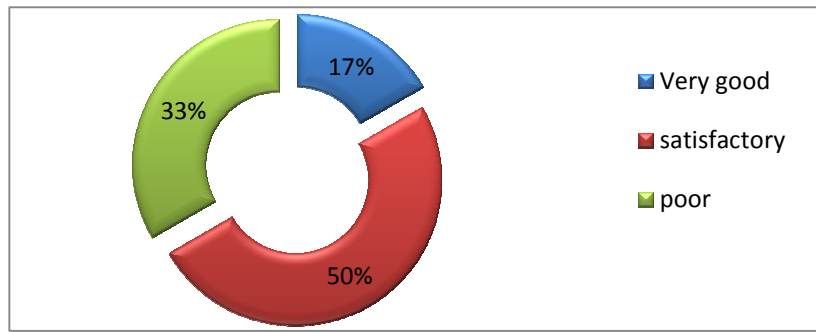


Source: Field survey

5.3.5 Level of satisfaction

One question was asked to the service recipients- what is the Level of satisfaction on problems solved after implementing CC. Among the 12 respondents only 17% gave their response as very good, 33% mention their satisfaction level as poor and the rest and half of the population mention their level as satisfactory. The half of the population think the positive change occurred in their union after implementing CC is satisfactory as

expected.

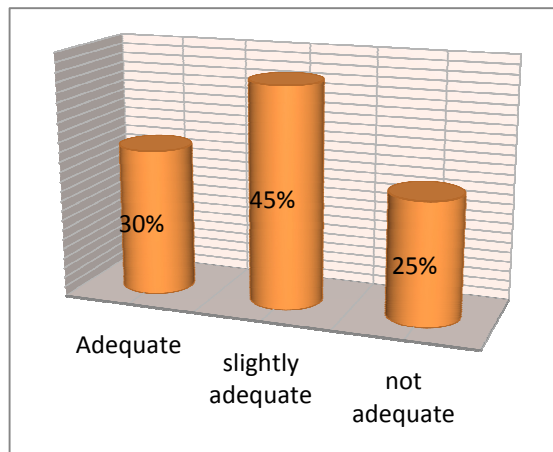


Source: Field survey

5.4 Adequacy of publicity of the CC:

Respondents were asked to mention their thinking about the Adequacy of publicity of the CC. 30% of the respondents think that the publicity is adequate, other 45% mention that the publicity is slightly adequate and the rest 25% believe that the publicity of the citizens charter is not adequate.

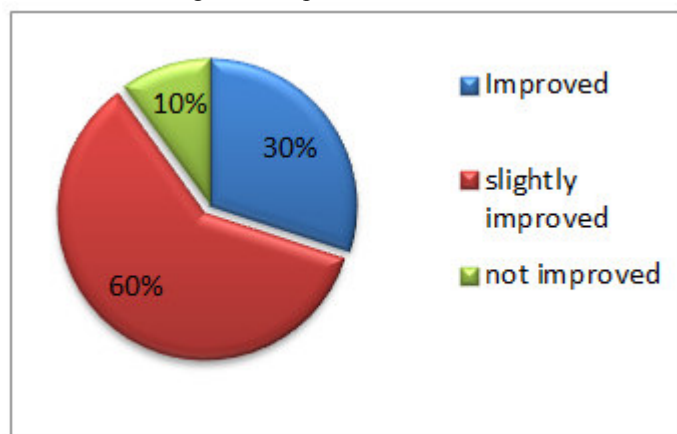
Figure 6: Adequacy of publicity



5.5 Improvement in Service delivery Both official and citizens were on this question.

Do you think service delivery is improved after implementing CC? 30% respondents said improved, 10% said not improved, and the rest 60% of the total respondent’s response that the service delivery is slightly improved in the UP.

Figure 7: Improvement in Service



Source: Field survey

5.6 Assessment of Citizen’s engagement in the decision making:

5.6.1 Participation: An informal question was asked to both the citizens and the union Parishad officials that-

Are the service recipients included in the formulation of the CC? Respondents gave the mixed response regarding this question- almost all the officials opine that it is very tough and costly to engage the unconscious citizens in this process. “Even though we are trying to include the village matobbor in this whole process” said the chairman of the Pathalia union Parishad. But the general service recipients are being in the dark side about the formulation of the CC, the study suggests.

5.6.2 Feedback:

Table 4: Feedback from the citizens

Does UP obtain feedback from you on the quality and effectiveness of service delivery?		No. of respondents	Percentage
	Regular	3	8%
	sometimes	12	34%
	no feedback	21	58%
Total		36	100%

Source: Field survey

This question also shows that more than half of the respondents from the service recipients believe UP receive no feedback. And 34% respondents think UP sometimes obtain feedback, but they don't know the feedback reflect in the decision making process and the rest only 8% respondents provide their opinion that UP receive feedback from general people.

5.6.3 Accessibility:

Table 5: Accessibility of Citizens to officials

Do you think that you have access to UP officials?		No. of respondents	Percentage
	Often	6	17%
	Sometimes	9	25%
	Rarely	21	58%
Total		36	100%

Source: Field survey

Citizens were participants for this question. Citizens revealed that the officials at the reception are not very friendly. They treat us crudely and hardly show any respect. Further, citizens emphasized that “at many times we sit for long time to get a response”. Even I waited for long time when I visited three times in the UP office. Moreover they did not attend in the office during countrywide strike or blockade period. Only a small portion of the participants gave positive response as Sometimes & Often they have access to the officials of the UP.

5.7 Major Changes after Implementing CC:

The respondents were asked to mention the specific sectors where the positive changes occurred after implementing CC. The study found that after implementation of the CC, changes occurred in the following sectors: delay in service delivery reduced, ease access to information, officials being more accountable cum active, consciousness of both- officials & citizens increased, cost reduced, easy contact over phone, mailing, etc. At the time of questionnaire survey, the respondents were asked to tell the minimum days needed for getting birth certificates before and after the implementation of Citizen charter in the surveyed UP.

Table 6: Time (day) needed for getting a birth certificate

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Before CC	36	4.00	13.00	8.2500
After CC	36	1.00	6.00	3.1667
Valid N	36			

Source: Field survey

The above SPSS output of 12 respondents show that before implementing CC the average time needed for birth certificates was about 8 days, with minimum 4 and maximum 13 days. The situation has significantly changed after the implementation of CC when the average time required is about 3 days. The minimum time to get a birth certificate has drastically reduced to 1 day while the maximum time is 6 days. This is positive change in service delivery of surveyed Union Parishad.

6. Complexities and Challenges of Implementing Citizen Charter:

The citizen's charter initiative in Bangladesh has only started recently in Union Parishad. Introduction of a new concept is always difficult in any organization. So it faces many problems in the development process. The major factors that potentially affect the successful implementation of Citizens Charter in UPs are:

6.1 Lack of awareness: This study found that almost half of the population & some of the officials totally do not know about the introduction of the citizen charter.

6.2 No Involvement: The people who were supposed to implement CC were not involved in the process, and there was no effort to build their capacity regarding CC. (Khan, 2008).

6.3 Shortage of Manpower: The shortage of clerical and technical manpower is visible in UPs.

6.4 Corruption: The trend of corruption of the UP officials is not changed yet. To get a birth certificate, for example, the UP official charges 300-500 taka unlawfully.

6.5 Incomplete CC: UP office directed to hang a list of services they provide with, time duration needed for the specific service, cost of service, name of responsible person, penalty if failed to provide service or provide wrong service. But the UP does not follow the full direction.

6.6 Power Distance: The huge gap of power within the top to bottom line officials hampers the proper implementation of CC. Moreover, such attitude leads to limited participation by both subordinates as well as citizens. High power distance hampers transfer views and opinion.

6.7 Disposition of Implementers: Union Parishad lack proper training and orientation program on the service delivery program. Moreover there is no fixed post in UP excluding secretary, the chairman and members who are the main implementers of CC, changing every five years.

6.8 Bureaucratic and Political Resistance: Both the secretary and the chairman-members of the UP do not want any initiatives that make them more transparent and accountable to the people. On the other hand, lack of willingness & carefulness in oversee, control, motivation from the government hampers the successful implementation of CC.

7. Some Recommendations

The experience from the prior implementers of Citizen Charter (CC) especially from UK and the understanding from the survey and formal- informal discussion with the respondents, the following initiative must be taken for the successful implementation of CC in the UP.

- An effective awareness campaign amongst all the stakeholders should be arranged to foster the better use of CC in Union Parishad. The CC should be simple, clear, and easily accessible.
- An accountability measure and regular monitoring system should be established where officials will be questioned in case of any irregularity in maintaining citizen charter.
- Have to listen and care for citizens, understanding the real needs of the general people.
- A post of assistant secretary should be created to help in giving service as per the CC. Because the secretary (only selected permanent official) face huge burden of works in UP
- Proper and consistent training program for the officials of the Union Parishad on the citizen charter should be arranged for its proper implementation in the UP (Khan, 2008).
- Need of an active, vigilant and regular oversight by citizens, media, NGOs & researchers.

8. Conclusion

Introduction of Citizen Charter at Union Parishad has aggrandized its governance process at grass root level in Bangladesh though it plays an efficient role to occupy it more time conveying the intended fruitful result. Throughout the study it has been clear that there are variety of challenges and opportunities of Citizen's Charter initiatives at Union Parishad. Having few positive sides of Citizen Charter, the Charter has made the process a little easier for the clients to get their own applications and it is evident that the information provided in Citizen's Charter on cost, delivery time of service, and necessary information for a specific service, makes the delivery system more transparent and accountable. It is hoped that the introduction and proper implementation and monitoring of Charter will contribute towards more effective service delivery in public offices which will induce welfare of general people and ultimately make a representative and successful Bangladesh in the competitive world.

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