



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Despite the emphasis on the Citizen Charter in day-to-day administration, there are many shortcomings attached to it. Discuss. **(250 Words)**

22 Sep, 2022 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

### Approach

- Start your answer by giving a brief about the Citizen Charter.
- Discuss the shortcomings of the Citizen Charter.
- Discuss the reforms to be brought into the Citizen Charter (CC).
- Conclude your answer by giving a way forward.

### Introduction

A Citizen Charter is a **document which represents a systematic effort to focus on the commitment of the Organisation towards its Citizens** in respect of Standard of Services, Information, Choice and Consultation, Non-discrimination and Accessibility, Grievance Redress, Courtesy, and Value for Money.

### Principles of Service Delivery

The concept of Citizens' Charter enshrines the trust between the service provider and its users. Six principles of the Citizens Charter movement as originally framed were:

- **Quality** - improving the quality of services
- **Choice** - for the users wherever possible
- **Standards** - specifying what to expect within a time frame
- **Value** - for the taxpayers' money
- **Accountability** - of the service provider (individual as well as Organization)
- **Transparency** - in rules, procedures, schemes and grievance redressal
- **Participative**- Consult and involve

### Main Body

#### Shortcomings of CC in India

- **Devoid of Participative Mechanisms:** In most cases, CC is not formulated through a consultative process with cutting-edge staff who will finally implement it.
- **Poor Design and Content:** There is a lack of meaningful and succinct CC and an absence of critical information that end-users need to hold agencies accountable.
- **Lack of Public Awareness:** Only a small percentage of end-users are aware of the commitments made in the CC since effective efforts to communicate and educate the public about the standards of delivery promise have not been undertaken.
- **Charters are Rarely Updated:** Making it a one-time exercise, frozen in time.
- **No Proper Consultation:** End-users, civil society organizations and NGOs are not consulted when CCs are drafted. Since a CC's primary purpose is to make public service delivery more citizen-

centric, consultation with stakeholders is a must.

- **Measurable Standards of Delivery are Rarely Defined:** Making it difficult to assess whether the desired level of service has been achieved or not.
- **Lack of Interest:** Little interest is shown by the organizations in adhering to their CC since there is no citizen-friendly mechanism to compensate the citizen if the organization defaults.
- **Uniformity in CC:** Tendency to have a uniform CC for all offices under the parent organization. CCs have still not been adopted by all Ministries/Departments. This overlooks local issues.

## Reforms to be Brought in Citizen Charter (CC)

- **One Size Does Not Fit All:** Formulation of CC should be a decentralized activity with the head office providing only broad guidelines.
- **Wide Consultation Process:** CC be formulated after extensive consultations within the organization followed by a meaningful dialogue with civil society.
- **Firm Commitments to be Made:** CC must be precise and make firm commitments of service delivery standards to the citizens/consumers in quantifiable terms wherever possible.
- **Redressal Mechanism in Case of Default:** Clearly lay down the relief which the organization is bound to provide if it has defaulted on the promised standards of delivery.
- **Periodic Evaluation of CC:** Preferably through an external agency.
- **Hold Officers Accountable for Results:** Fix specific responsibility in cases where there is a default in adhering to the CC.
- **Include Civil Society in the Process:** To assist in improvement in the contents of the Charter, its adherence as well as educating the citizens about the importance of this vital mechanism.

## Way Forward

- A Citizens' Charter cannot be an end in itself, it is rather a means to an end - a tool to ensure that the citizen is always at the heart of any service delivery mechanism.
- Drawing from best practice models such as the Sevottam Model (a Service Delivery Excellence Model) can help CC in becoming more citizen-centric.

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