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Q16

The Citizens' charter has been a landmark initiative in ensuring citizen-centric administration. But it is yet to reach its full potential. Identify the factors hindering the realisation of its promise and suggest measures to overcome them.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS II · 15 marks · Transparency and e-Governance

Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.

Core demand of the question

- State what the Citizens' Charter was meant to do for citizen-centric administration
- Identify the factors that have hindered its full potential
- Suggest measures to overcome those factors
- Keep the 1997 origin and **Sevottam** in the frame

Revision summary

Citizens' Charters, after the 1997 Chief Ministers' conference, promise standards, time, information and grievance.

They stall for want of legal force, measurable clocks, compensation, staff ownership and public awareness.

Sevottam tried quality certification; many charters remain posters.

State **Right to Service Acts** with penalties are the working Indian upgrade.

Dashboards, local-language co-drafting and third-party audit would close the gap.

RTI is about information; a charter is about the service clock - they stack.

Introduction

The Citizens' Charter was imported from John Major's Britain and adopted in India after the 1997 Chief Ministers' conference: a public promise of standards, time, grievance and information for each service. It was a landmark because it said the clerk exists for the citizen. It has not reached full potential because a promise without a remedy becomes a poster.

Body**What the charter promised**

A charter is the citizen's face of administrative law, not the whole of it.

- **Peg:** It lists what the department does, how long it should take, what the citizen must bring, and where to complain.

- **Peg:** **Sevottam** later tried to certify quality; together with the Right to Information and State public-service guarantee Acts, it was the language of citizen-centric administration.

Why the promise stalled

A poster is not a right.

- **Peg:** There is no uniform central statute making the charter a right; many remain departmental resolutions.
- **Peg:** Standards are vague - "expeditious" rather than seven working days - and there is often **no compensation** when the clock blows.
- **Peg:** Staff who did not write the charter do not own it; awareness is low; the poster is in English on a peeling wall.
- **Peg:** Charters are not rewritten when the scheme changes; outsourced centres add a vendor who is not in the charter; without audit, a 30-day promise is literature.

Measures

The 1997 conference needs a justiciable clock.

- **Peg:** State **Right to Service** Acts with named services, days, and a small penalty that actually pays.
- **Peg:** Live dashboards, co-drafting with users in the local language, a revision date, and third-party audit of **Sevottam** claims.
- **Peg:** Train the frontline, not only the Joint Secretary who launched the PDF; link the charter to **CPGRAMS** so the grievance code is the same as the clock.
- **Peg:** Copy SMS tracking from Passport Seva and India Post rather than printing another brochure.

Flow diagram

Charter 1997 -> Standards
 Standards -> Gap no remedy
 RTS Acts -> Time plus penalty
 Dashboard audit -> Time plus penalty
 Time plus penalty -> Citizen-centric
 Gap no remedy -> RTS Acts

Conclusion

The Citizens' Charter named a standard of service. It under-performs because it is rarely a right. Statutory time limits, compensation, language and audit would finish the job the 1997 conference started.

Facts & figures

1997 Chief Ministers' conference

Political origin of the Indian Citizens' Charter programme in Union and State departments.

Sevottam

Department of Administrative Reforms quality framework for service delivery and grievance, meant to operationalise charters.

Right to Service Acts (States)

State laws that convert some services into timed, penalised entitlements - stronger than a bare charter.

Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS)

The grievance code should match the charter clock, or the citizen is sent to two queues.

Right to Information Act, 2005

Stacks with charters: one is the file, the other is the service standard.

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