

Citizen's Charter and Implementation Failure: Performance of Local Councils in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Citizen's charters are tools of empowerment and governments of developing countries are increasingly moving towards adopting them. This article presents an analysis of the implementation of charters in local councils in Bangladesh and reveals useful insight on the challenges faced by developing countries in such initiatives. Data obtained from the field indicate that the introduction of citizen's charter in Bangladesh had minimal impact due to poor publicity campaign that resulted in low awareness among the citizens, a person-centered approach to service delivery in local councils, and apathy and lack of interest among stakeholders. A top-down approach adopted in formulating the charter further contributed to the ineffectiveness of the charter. The study also revealed that citizens found it difficult to access services and were dissatisfied with their quality. While some of the problems were attributed to the performance of public officials, implementation failures made the initiative ineffective. The paper concludes that poor implementation strategies and practices in developing countries impede empowerment of citizens and do not allow local councils to perform effectively.

Keywords: Citizen's charter, local councils, Bangladesh, awareness, empowerment, access

Introduction

The emergence of public management attracted attention to a number of values that are expected to result in improvements in the public services. Market orientation, competition, economy, efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, accountability and transparency constitute a cluster of features that accentuated the transition from the traditional to a modern and updated approach to management in the public sector. One of the challenges in achieving these changes involved the availability of relevant information and access to the services. Without these facilities, citizens are unable to take advantage of public services. In developing countries, arrangements for making citizens aware of the availability of services and methods for access and providing them with channels to express their preferences and feedback have remained neglected. This has resulted in a negative impact on the quality and usage of public services.

In order to improve the quality of public management, the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh introduced a "citizen's charter" at the local council level to empower the citizens and assist them with obtaining better, equitable and accountable delivery of public services. To be specific, citizen's charter specifies all necessary information about their available services to the people. This was also expected to result in improved performance of public officials and enhance trust in local government institutions (LGIs) among the citizens. Drawing upon a review of existing studies on the citizen's charter, this article explores the progress and potentials of this new initiative in two local government units in Bangladesh. The study is based on review of the relevant literature, public documents and media reports, a small scale survey, and discussions with service users in the localities. The key objective is to identify the challenges involved in implementing the citizen's charter effectively, and present insight for toward developing strategies for effective implementation of the charter at the local level in developing countries.

Citizen's Charter

Charters have existed for a long time (James, Murphy and Reinhart, 2005, p. 2), and it became popular as democratization progressed and the expectations and rights of citizens to obtain information were recognized. In the contemporary world, however, it gained prominence with British Prime Minister John Major's initiative that expected the charter programme to find better ways of converting money into improved services (Pollitt, 1994). Soon afterwards, the number of charters proliferated in the United Kingdom, and the United Nations proposed model guidelines for designing citizen's charters. This prompted a number of initiatives in many countries to ensure the rights of clients of public services and address their demands and grievances (Drewry, 2003; Torres, 2003). Sharma and Agnihotri (2001) noted that citizen's charters have been introduced in Canada, Australia, Belgium, France, Argentina, Italy and India.

The citizen's charter informs the public about the availability of public services. It 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.

Nikos described citizen's charters as "public documents setting out standards of service to which the customers are entitled" (2000, p. 41). Some studies suggest that they represent a contract between the citizens and the state based on a new approach to their relationship and indicates a paradigm shift in service delivery. It is guided by the needs and demands of citizens, with emphasis on service quality (Nikos, 2000; Torres, 2003). The charter aims to improve public services by making administration accountable and citizen-friendly through transparency and the right to information. Public services were required to inform the public about the mandate of the agencies,

clear targets of the operations and expectations from them, methods and channels of communication with officials, and methods and mechanisms for redress of grievances.

However, the citizen's charter has also been criticized for representing an ideological overtone that is derived from a consumerist approach to public services (Nikos, 2000, p. 41). It is also argued that the charter, in practice, reflects the standards determined by providers of the services rather than citizens, thus reducing broad public discontent into a narrow perspective of customer's choice, and overemphasizes the principle of consumer sovereignty to present the political problem as an administrative crisis (McGuire, 2002, Van de Walle, et al, 2003). Therefore, Haque (1999) argues that the citizen's charter appears to have a political agenda to overcome the problem of diminishing public trust in governance, and seeks to resolve the legitimacy crisis of the state by redefining citizens as customers or consumers, and offering greater choices and options to them. The problem of effective empowerment of citizens becomes more acute in societies that are deeply divided or polarized (Haque, 2005, p. 393). In spite of reservations, the introduction of citizen's charter in Bangladesh can be viewed as an important first step toward the establishment of the rights of citizens in obtaining public services and opening up opportunities for them to participate in the process of governing. An overview of the context in which Citizen's Charter was introduced in Bangladesh will help understand the nature of challenges to be encountered in this experiment.

Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh

The context of the introduction of the charter in Bangladesh is worth considering. The country does not have a particularly notable record of success in implementing reforms, and innovations and experiments for improving the quality of governance is rare. Governments in Bangladesh have remained extremely conservative in introducing reforms, and seem to have been forced by circumstances to announce reform programs. Political considerations prevented them from implementing most of the recommendations formulated by the reform bodies. Therefore, it is not surprising that the concept of citizen's charter was not considered by a political party-led government. The initiative came from an unelected and temporary caretaker government that was responsible solely for holding elections to facilitate transfer of power from one government to the next.

In order to deal with steep divisions and acute distrust between political parties, Bangladesh adopted an innovative practice of holding parliamentary elections under caretaker governments. This was done with the objective of ensuring a free and fair electoral process where the incumbent regime does not take advantage by using state power and facilities. Interim non-partisan caretaker governments take over the charge of governing the country for a period of ninety days to conduct and supervise free and fair elections. During their tenure, caretaker governments are expected to perform routine tasks of administration, and not initiate major policy initiatives.

The fourth caretaker government in Bangladesh was formed under unusual circumstances in 2007. It was backed by the armed forces and extended its tenure to remain in charge for 18 months, far beyond the mandate of ninety days. In order to compensate for its inability to return the reign of government to an elected regime, the caretaker government took upon itself, in addition to its mandated function of conducting elections, the task of several reforms to improve public governance. The Citizen's Charter for local government was one such measure introduced by the caretaker government to improve the mode of delivering quality services, and transparency and accountability at the local level. In this respect, Jamil notes that determinants of quality services include low level of cost, delivery of services on time, effective complaint mechanism, building a close ties between service producers, i.e. LGIs and consumers, i.e. citizens (2010, p. 1). It should be noted that Citizen's Charters in most countries have evolved following a participatory process with contribution from stakeholders including those who are handicapped, elderly, children and physically or mentally challenged (United Nations, 2010, p. 19). Conversely, the adoption of Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh resulted from a top-down initiative. This could have had an impact on the haphazard implementation and limited success of the initiative.

In spite of the top-down approach adopted in Bangladesh, the Citizen's Charter constitutes an important framework of local level administration and service delivery. Therefore, it is important that the charter is effectively implemented to ensure improved service delivery, poverty alleviation and an accountable and transparent public administration. It is necessary to review the strategies adopted to introduce and integrate the citizen's charter to disseminate information and empower citizens. An examination of the current state of implementation of citizen's charter at the local government level will help ascertain the extent of citizen's access to public services and the level of quality and equity in delivery of public services.

The traditional approach to governing in Bangladesh did not take into account citizen's expectation for quality services, and it was necessary to introduce changes in the way the government conducted its business. A citizen's charter was introduced for all levels of local government in 2008 with the objective of satisfying and empowering citizens in terms of improved access to services provided by the LGIs. This was probably inspired by similar developments across the world, and could be an effective tool for improving performance of local government officials and institutions in Bangladesh. Moreover, it was expected to help enhance citizen's trust and faith in LGIs. This emphasizes the need to investigate the extent to which the citizen's charter has been implemented and determine its effect on the level of satisfaction among the public.

Currently, the main task of LGIs in Bangladesh is implementing development projects, along with some tasks oriented toward providing service to the residents. These include three distinct categories of (a) providing public services, (b) information, and (c) a number of electronic and banking services. Citizen's charters are expected to make people aware of the types and level of services they can expect from LGIs. A

participatory approach to citizen's charter could also help them understand the requirement for, and outcome of resources, that are allocated to various activities. Thus, the citizen's charter is designed to meet the twin objectives of citizen's expectation and the commitment of service providers.

One of the main functions of Union Parishads (union councils) is to issue certificates to the public after registering births and deaths in the union. A survey conducted by the daily *Prothom Alo* found that citizens did not receive the certificates because they were unable to meet the Chairman or Secretary of Union Parishads even after long waiting periods. The report revealed that residents of the union were not aware of the existence of information centres, and officials were not available at their post (The Daily *Prothom Alo*, 22 March 2011). Even three years after the introduction of the citizen's charter, there was no improvement in the quality of services. The report suggested that service delivery was severely affected by corruption, delays, complexities in the process of service delivery, and inadequate number of employees (The Daily *Prothom Alo*, 8 August 2010).

A public administration sector review published by JICA revealed similar findings and reported that the citizen's charter had not resulted in improvements in service delivery after its introduction in 2008 (JICA, 2009). In spite of the existence of a charter on the types of services and timetable, residents alleged that they are not delivered on time, if at all. This article seeks to explore the issue one more time to determine if there have been any improvement in service delivery since those studies were published and also to collect views of residents on the performance of LGIs.

Studies on Citizen's Charter

There has been a global surge of interest in citizen's charters since the 1990s and several studies are available in the context of western liberal democratic countries. Since citizen's charter pledges to deliver services through a transparent process in a timely manner and hold public servants accountable to their customers, it is logical to argue that successful implementation will improve the quality and level of customer's satisfaction. Clear, well-defined, and agreed-upon published standards for service delivery, choice and consultation with the users helps clients to obtain quality services. McEldowney (1996, p. 77) states that charter is intended to encourage quality in services. According to Pollitt, citizen's charter is the most comprehensive programme ever to raise quality, increase choice, secure better value and extend accountability (1994). McGuire describes citizen's charter as simply a quality assurance strategy that offers a type of consumer guarantee, and points out that Service Charters Programmes have incorporated a range of quality assurance techniques including setting service standards, consultative mechanisms, providing information to citizens and clients, complaints and redress mechanisms and quality awards (2001, p. 494). The basic idea is that charters set quality standards against which performance can be measured, and standards will rise as a result of the pressure that users can put on the service providers (Torres, 2006, p.159).

The citizen's charter inspires public officials to deliver services according to preset standards and it facilitates customer satisfaction. McEldowney thinks that the charter is an attempt to empower citizens through rights (1996, p. 77). The principal focus of the citizen's charter is to improve public services through courtesy and helpfulness; timely delivered service and complaint mechanism; openness and information; and choice and consultation that make users or customers of public service satisfied with the quality of the public service. Therefore, successful implementation of citizen's charter enhances the quality of services provided by the organizations concerned, which in turn leads to customer satisfaction.

There are only a few studies that report on the implementation of citizen's charter in South Asia. These studies have sought to ascertain the level of customer's satisfaction towards service quality after the introduction of the charter, explore challenges and success after its introduction, and assess the impact of citizen's charter on the quality public services.

Jamil and Dhakal (2010) examined the implementation of citizen's charter in municipalities in Nepal with reference to citizen's satisfaction and service quality. They found that citizens do not have much knowledge of the charter, and this indicates that efforts to inform the public about the charter were not effective. The study found that although officials are accessible easily or with some difficulty, citizens need to be persuaded to participate for implementing the charter effectively. They go on to report that the introduction of citizen's charter has enhanced the trust of the public in municipal government, and also confirmed the belief that these institutions are more appropriate for delivering public services than private and voluntary organizations. Therefore, the introduction of citizen's charter in Nepal has offered scope for improvement in municipal services which, in turn, has enhanced satisfaction among the public towards the quality of services provided by municipalities.

Acharay (2010) examined the implementation of citizen's charter and improving municipal services in Nepal and explored the linkages among socio-economic background, institutional performance and institutional trust. The results did not expose a significant relationship between the citizen's level of satisfaction with municipal services in Nepal and their socio-economic background. However, there was a significant correlation between institutional performance and institutional trust in determining citizen's level of satisfaction with municipal services. This study, too, argued that implementation of citizen's charter has contributed to the improvements in the quality of municipal services and the level of satisfaction among residents.

The citizen's charter has been in effect in Bangladesh for seven years, but only a handful of studies have been conducted on it. Razzaque (2012) examined the effectiveness of citizen's charter program in the Department of Immigration and Passport in Bangladesh. The study used organizational culture, and political factors and their role in the implementation of the charter and identified a number of factors that influenced its implementation. They include the mindset of implementers, lack of

competence and training of personnel, insufficient financial support, unfavorable organizational culture, uneven distribution of power, the tendency of risk avoidance among officials, lack of awareness of residents, and an absence of political will as the main impediments to successful implementation. Consequently, the study found that there was no improvement in service quality that could lead to customer satisfaction with public service quality.

Nayem (2010) analyzed the implementation of citizen's charter in an Upazila Land Office in Bangladesh. The study begins with the assumption that the introduction of citizen's charter has created an opportunity for local people to participate and identify their needs and preferences. Ideally, it was expected to enhance the extent of democratization which, in turn, would strengthen accountability to citizens. It was found that the Upazila Land Office has limited capacity to implement citizen's charter because the officials were not equipped with the training required to implement it successfully. The problem was exacerbated by two other factors: lack of access to public officials and the absence of political will to implement the citizen's charter. Other problems associated with citizen's charters identified by residents of Bangladesh include the issue of awareness, lack of involvement of the public, inadequate number of employees, corruption, and bureaucratic and political resistance.

Implementation of Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh

Citizens of Bangladesh seek services from local institutions for various purposes, and the level of their satisfaction with the performance of these agencies can be used to determine strategies for making them effective. Previously, no information was available to indicate the types of services that were to be delivered in a given time frame by the local councils, and citizens had to approach various sources for finding them. The introduction of citizen's charter opened up avenues for getting informed on public services and their delivery. Therefore, successful implementation of citizen's charter may ensure the commitment of service provider (public officials) to the citizens, which, in turn, may contribute toward a responsive, efficient and people friendly public service.

This article is based on a survey of residents of the Katakhalī Pourashava (Municipality) and Horiyan union in the district of Rajshahi in Bangladesh. Katakhalī Municipality extends over an area of 24.50 square kilometers and has a population of 36,785. The union of Horiyan has a population of 28,042, and is spread over an area of 48 square kilometers. The respondents were selected from various groups such as businessmen, office employees, students, retired government officials, farmers and teachers. Their level of education varied from secondary school to postgraduate levels, and the results of this research are presented in the following sections. The comparison between an urban and rural unit is expected to help understand the differences between them in terms of awareness about citizen's charter, access to public services, experiences in using the services and, consequently, their assessment of the competence and performance of public officials. A number of factors contributed to the extremely

limited success of the citizen's charter initiative, and they are discussed below.

a. Low Awareness of the Charter

Most of the respondents in both the urban and rural jurisdictions had not heard of the Citizen's Charter. A small number of people who were aware of its existence did not have adequate information about it. In most of the cases, their knowledge about the charter came from other residents or from reports published in newspapers. This confirms that family, friends, and the mass media are the most significant sources for Bangladeshi people that help them become aware of the introduction of citizen's charter (Jamil, 2011, p. 182). Consequently, the information is presented with diverse connotations, and affects the understanding of the concept to such an extent that it does not allow citizens to play a meaningful role in the implementation of the charter. None of the respondents had any opportunity to participate in the preparation and implementation of the charter.

On further exploration, a number of causes contributing to the lack of awareness could be determined. They included inadequate information campaign, a person-centered approach for obtaining public services, apathy and lack of interest among stakeholders, and difficulties in accessing services.

- i. *Inadequate Information Campaign:* Although the charter was introduced in 2008, there was no systematic campaign to inform residents of the intent, scope and operation of the opportunity to obtain services even in 2014, six years after the arrangement was put into place. Nayem (2010) noted that although public service officials claimed to have undertaken wide publicity campaigns to disseminate information, the public were found to be generally ignorant of the existence of the citizen's charter (2010, p. 89). Moreover, there was no effort at the union level to inform citizens about the charter except a few cases where union councils have posted the charter in the premises of councils with a list of services available, terms and conditions, and waiting period for receiving them. This is especially true for those councils where projects intended to strengthen local governance have been initiated in association with national and international NGOs (Chowdhury, 2015, p. 191). Gomostapur Union Council in Nawabgonj district of Rajshahi division (with HELVETAS- Swiss Inter-cooperation) and Karimpur Union Council in Sunamgonj district of Sylhet division (with BRAC and The Hunger Project) are two examples to substantiate this point. It should be noted that local institutions at the municipal level display information about the nature of services that are available, the procedures and fees and charges for receiving them. Unfortunately, no effort was made to inform the citizens about the introduction of citizen's charter. Most of the citizens interviewed by Jamil for his study used a variety of municipal services, but were completely unaware about the citizen's charter (2011, p. 182). The only efforts made in this regard were aimed at informing citizens about initiatives to update the voter list through public

announcements in the locality and sending letters of request to mosques and educational institutions.

- ii. Person-Centered Approach:* Our research revealed that two types of customers visit the local institutions. One group goes to the local council, particularly the Union Council, for the purpose of receiving benefits from programs of assistance from the government such as Test Relief (TR), Food for Work Program (FWP), Vulnerable Group Fund (VGF) and Vulnerable Group Development (VGD). They approach the leaders of the council directly for their needs and receive benefits. So far, they have made no effort to find out about the other kinds of services that are offered and those they are entitled to receive. Neither the leaders of the council nor the secretary of the council, who is appointed by the government, demonstrated any interest in informing the residents of the services. This supports the observations made by Chowdhury (2015) and Baroi (2013) that government officials do not have the willingness to let citizens know about the provisions under the framework of citizen's charter and right to information aimed at empowerment. Another group of citizens visit local councils occasionally when they need certificates and testimonials of birth, death, and residency status. They, too, obtain these services by approaching the leaders directly. Therefore, a person-centred - instead of an institution-centered approach - combined with the reluctance and lack of interest in knowing about the services contribute to low awareness about the charter.
- iii. Apathy and Lack of Interest among Stakeholders:* The rate of literacy has steadily increased over the years in Bangladesh. This is expected to contribute to a higher level of awareness about the charter and its use. However, residents with post-secondary level of education, especially the younger group, leave the rural area in search of higher education and employment in urban centres. Thus, this younger and educated group of people does not visit the local councils for services on a regular basis. Elderly members of the family who remain in the area and their dependents visit the council if services are needed. Most of them are intimidated by prominent local leaders. They do not make efforts to find out about the standards and time line for delivering services, and remain content with the quality of assistance received from the council.
- iv. Top-Down Approach:* Citizen's charter was intended to be formulated with active participation of all groups of citizens, including the marginalized, and physically or mentally challenged as they have right to be part of decision that affects their lives. Public service providers are also expected to participate in the process because they are aware of the agency's strengths and limitations, and assist with determining the scope of their operation. It was found that the low level of awareness among citizens and lack of enthusiasm among service providers resulted from the exclusion of these groups in the formulation of the

charter. It is obvious that the citizen's charter was formulated and adopted by the central government without consulting the stakeholders. Chowdhury (2015, p. 166) reported that no consultation was held with citizens at the time of formulating the charter for union councils, while another study found that 98% of the respondents expressed their willingness to get involved in the development of the citizen's charter (2011, p. 183). Thus, there is a gap between pledges and practice, and most of the citizens remain unaware of their rights ensured in the charter.

b. Difficulty in Accessing Service

Information on services provided by the local council can help to ensure access. Residents at the union level had no idea about the kinds of services that they can receive. One reason could be that they never went to the union council to enquire about the kinds of services that are available under the framework of Citizen's Charter. Other residents accessed traditionally established services such as registration of birth/death and citizenship certificate as well as recently introduced e-services, which include information related to agriculture, word processing and printing, photocopying, and internet usage. In contrast, residents of the Municipality demonstrated awareness of the fact that they were entitled to better services and facilities than those offered previously, although they did not have complete information on standards and method of access. Another reason could be their lack of willingness to visit the Municipality for seeking information about the services that have been made available following the introduction of the charter. The councils displayed on their premises a list of the services available under the framework of Citizen's Charter. Unfortunately, the residents who have access to information about the type of available services, too, are dependent on the elected representatives who provide them.

It appears that, irrespective of urban and non-urban jurisdiction, citizens of both urban and non-urban areas prefer to approach a locally elected representative whenever they need information or services from the councils, probably because a direct approach to the council office bears the risk of being unsuccessful. Accessibility to public officials has a direct correlation to the socio-economic status of citizens. Public officials are easily accessible to those who are educated, and have social status and higher level of income (Razzaque, 2011, p. 68). Elected representatives act as mediators in their interaction with the institution, and these include access to basic services, improvements to local infrastructure, complaints and local dispute resolution. Another interesting finding is that interaction of the elected representative with people is more political in nature in the urban area while political identity does not matter that much in getting things done in the rural area. The process of electing representatives to the local councils may have contributed to this pattern of interaction. Local government elections were, by law, non-partisan in Bangladesh. However in practice, elections have always been influenced by political identity of the candidates. The most recent municipal elections held in December 2015 witnessed a major shift and candidates were allowed

to run with party identity. This is not a major factor in union council elections, but candidates are identified by their political affiliations in municipal elections. Municipal leaders elected through this process are more likely to be influenced by party consideration.

c. Dissatisfaction with Service Delivery

Residents expressed satisfaction with the basic service provided by the union council which is related to the issue of birth and citizenship certificates. These are provided at nominal cost and are easily obtained. But citizens were not satisfied with other services such as selection of beneficiaries for Test Relief, Food for Work Program, Vulnerable Group Fund, Vulnerable Group Development, Old Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, and resolution of dispute through the village court. However, they stated that no task other than basic services is expected to be accomplished in the union council without offering additional money to the officials. Citizens are dissatisfied over the services provided by LGI, particularly since they have no idea about the activities. They do not know "what the institutions are doing for whom and how"; instead they know that corruption is the best method for getting things done in the local government institutions (Rahman and Karim, 2014, pp. 22-24). This is similar to the findings of a survey conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) found that out of 47.6% households who received services from local institutions, 12.4 % received services under Social Safety Net Programs (SSNP) including Test Relief and Food for Work Program, Vulnerable Group Fund, Vulnerable Group Development, old age allowance, widow allowance. Out of 12.4 % service recipient households under SSNP, 50.4% had to pay bribe or unauthorized money, whereas 22.9% and 4% households suffered due to influence exercised by political actors and local powerholders respectively. Interestingly, women were found to be more vulnerable than men in getting access to SSNP. Women constituted only 45% out of 12.4% service receivers of SSNP. Among them, 42.7% women and 29.8% men were victims of corruption (TIB, 2012). Moreover, evidence shows that judgments of village courts can easily be manipulated by paying bribe, and this appears to be the only way for winning selection as beneficiaries of the various programmes and funds at the disposal of the union council.

The situation in the Municipality was, to some extent, different from the union. The Municipality provides more services than the union council. These services include certificates for birth and death, citizenship, award of trade licenses, vaccination campaigns, water line connection and supply, street light installation and maintenance, garbage removal, basic health care facilities, construction and reconstruction of drains and link roads. Almost all the residents expressed dissatisfaction with the services of the Municipality with the exception of the provision of birth, death, and citizenship certificates. Jamil found that citizens were satisfied with some municipal services known as "vital registrations (birth, marriage, death)" (2011, p. 190).

However, the issue can be understood by referring to the following points.

First, the quality and volume of service varies from community to community within the jurisdiction of the Municipality. Communities where relatively affluent citizens reside are given more attention than the areas where the poor reside. A respondent complained:

None of the street lights in Katakhal Bazar (an affluent area of Katakhal Municipality) appear to be switched off. On the other hand, street lights remain switched off day after day in my community due to lack of supply of lightbulbs, and a bulb is replaced only after repeated petitions and requests. There are garbage bins around Katakhal Bazar and employees of Katakhal Pourashava clean them regularly. There is no garbage collection arrangement in my community.

Secondly, citizen's contacts and acquaintance with the local leaders play an important role in obtaining services at the Municipality. Residents who do not have close ties with local leaders, particularly poor people, encounter difficulties when they visit the Municipality on business. Therefore, a person-centered approach is critical.

Thirdly, the Municipality is perceived as an institution pervaded by corruption in all areas of its operation. People are required to pay bribes when they try to obtain services from the institution. Thus, it is not surprising that 86% respondents identified municipal officials/employees as corrupt (Jamil, 2011, p. 187). At the same time, a summary of national household survey of 14 service sectors conducted by TIB indicates that out of the total number of households surveyed, 47.6% households received services from local government institutions of which 30.9% were affected by corruption and irregularities. Out of this 30.9%, 25.5% service recipient households paid bribe or unauthorized money for obtaining services (The *Prothom Alo* and The *Daily Star*, 29 December 2012). A respondent stated:

The officials work in exchange for money, people who are able to pay get things done easily. Those with no money, have no success with the officials. For example, it is the responsibility of the Pourashava to ensure water supply to all households in its area of operation and accordingly, construction of water line is an essential part of its service. Although Katakhal Pourashava is a relatively new institution, evidence shows that no initiative has been taken to establish water line in many communities including one where I live, even after making repeated applications. Interestingly, application made by residents of another community to include it under the network of water by the Pourashava was given approval quickly as a substantial amount of money was handed over to the officials in charge of this operation.

Another respondent said:

I went to the Pourashava several times with a written application containing more than 300 signatures of people for constructing a drain in my community.

Along with visiting the relevant officials, I also met the Mayor of the Pourashava, but nothing was done in this regard.

d. Performance of Officials

Citizens had mixed responses about the performance of public officials in commenting on their duties. Most of the residents were not satisfied with the ability of the officials to accomplish assigned tasks. In fact, the general perception was that the officials are not efficient in performing their jobs. A resident stated:

The certificates and licenses issued by the Pourashava contain many errors and inaccuracies. This is a clear evidence of their lack of capability. Therefore, citizens have to make multiple trips to the Pourashava to have them corrected. This is a waste of time for them.

In response to the question on the reasons for the inefficiency of the officials in the local council, the residents of Katakhalī Municipality identified a biased appointment system and lack of training as the main causes. They pointed out that the existing system of recruitment ignores skills and capabilities obtained through education and training by the applicants, and appoints people based on connections and also through corrupt practices. Subsequently, the recruits are not oriented and trained to enhance their skills, and this affects the ability to perform on the job. It was observed that citizens not only suffer from the biased attitude of public officials, but also seldom receive services from the Municipality within the stipulated timeframe. A substantial 41 % of respondents indicated that service delivery takes "too long" and another 41% found it took is "a little longer" (Jamil, 2011, pp. 184-187). However, a small number of respondents expressed satisfaction with the capability and efficiency of the officials. One respondent said:

Officials are more efficient now than they were in the past. Earlier, officials lacked knowledge about the requirements for completing a task, and asked for help from their colleagues. Therefore, there were delays in completing the tasks assigned to them. But the situation has changed now and they can fulfill their responsibility without seeking help from other officials.

Implementation Challenges

Why was implementation of the Citizen's Charter ineffective in the two units, and possibly, in many more local councils in Bangladesh? We turn to the literature on implementation for explanations.

Hogwood and Gunn (1984) begin with a scenario of "perfect implementation" where there are no constraints from the external environment and a direct relationship exists between the cause of the policy and its effect. Adequate time and resources are available to implement the program through a single agency that is not dependent upon other agencies. In the context of perfect implementation, there is

complete understanding of, and agreement upon, the objectives and specified tasks to be performed by each participant. In addition, there is perfect communication among, and coordination of, various elements in the program, and those in authority can demand and obtain complete obedience.

A number of factors have been identified for the successful implementation of public policy. They include clear and consistent policy objectives (van Meter and van Horn, 1975), a sound causal theory, and a well-structured implementation process (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Lipsky (1971) highlighted the commitment of skillful implementing officials, and Downs (1967) emphasized support for the program in the community. A stable social and economic climate is important for optimum implementation. However, Sabatier pointed out that very few programs have clear and consistent policy objectives (1986, p. 29).

The conditions for perfect implementation are impossible to attain, and they do not exist in Bangladesh. The local councils operate under numerous constraints of financial and personnel resources and neither officials nor the public have adequate information and understanding of the use of citizen's charters. It was impossible to demand and obtain obedience from officials in remote local councils with somewhat fluid structures. A study on street level bureaucracy found that "local actors often deflect centrally-mandated programs toward their own ends" (Lipsky, 1971). The objectives of the citizen's charter in Bangladesh did not appear to be clear to stakeholders and the level of skills for implementing it was not available.

A combination of these factors reflects "implementation deficiency" in Bangladesh. Policies are subject to change and are sometimes changeable in the hands of implementers. The interaction structure is immensely complex, and outside interference - from the central government or higher levels of local government, influential citizens and interest groups, and bureaucratic and political leadership - takes place frequently. In other words, there is no mechanism for controlling the behavior of actors and coordinate their contribution to ensure successful implementation of the citizen's charter in Bangladesh.

Conclusions and Observations

The successful implementation of a policy depends, to a large extent, on the degree of awareness of stakeholders about it. The extent of their participation in the formulation of a policy is as important as it is in the implementation process. In Bangladesh, the context and operation of local councils are markedly different in urban and rural areas. In the former, LGIs are designated as city corporations or municipalities (Pourashava). Union councils are rural local bodies and they differ from their urban counterparts in terms of financial strength and capability. Urban local councils have the authority to impose and collect taxes, whereas rural local councils have limited authority and are largely dependent on grants and subsidies from the central government. This study reveals that the degree of difference is not as high as it was

expected to be between urban and rural areas, with the caveat that Katakhalī is a small urban centre and the degree could be much higher if compared with large urban centres.

It is obvious that the level of awareness among citizens about the charter is considerably low in Bangladesh. This problem is more acute in the rural areas because citizens interacting with the councils are either not interested in, or do not have opportunities to enhance their awareness or become informed of the services available. Another reason of lack awareness can be attributed to the absence of opportunities for engagement and participation of citizens in formulation and implementation of the charter. This is consistent with United Nations view that most decisions, instead of being made by the people, is made for the people (2010, p.20). The charter has not really made a difference in the level of awareness and satisfaction among citizens and this indicates a failure in implementation.

However, a number of observations are in order about the implementation of initiatives such as a citizen's charter in developing countries. Our research, however small in scope, confirms most of the findings in other studies reviewed in this paper. It was found that the charter could not be successfully implemented due to lack of publicity, incompetence of officials, faulty plan and design, and lack of political will. The context in which the charter was introduced has changed drastically. The caretaker government is no longer in charge and was replaced by a democratically elected regime. Bangladesh has a history of interrupting or scrapping policies with a change of regime, and this may explain the lack of vigour in taking the initiative of citizen's charter forward.

Local councils at the union and municipal levels in Bangladesh are not organized in the most efficient manner. The union is usually run by one Chairman with the assistance of a Secretary. Pourashavas, too, are often understaffed because the structure of local councils has not been updated to deal with the new sets of tasks and responsibilities that came with the introduction of the charter. Union members and ward commissioners at the Municipality level are mostly engaged in other occupations and do not treat their council membership as a full-time responsibility. This allows the Chairmen to operate the local councils as a one-person operation, and residents are unable to get the service they are entitled to receive unless they develop personal linkage with them.

The experiment with the charter in Bangladesh indicates small progress in terms of the recognition of the entitlement of citizens to public services with clear indication of time, cost and a commitment to courteous service. This is a positive beginning, but the government in power has to take ownership of the process and move it forward. Policy continuation is essential in developing countries for building on initiatives by successive regimes. Frequent reforms in local government to update their structures, operations and competency in performance to fulfill the needs of the communities should be considered. In addition, the government of Bangladesh needs to improve the mode and mechanisms for communication with the localities to understand their needs better and act to respond to the voice of the citizens.

If implemented in an appropriate manner, the citizen's charter has the potential to enhance the level and quality of services to residents and make the process more accountable and transparent. Citizens will be informed of their rights and entitlements, and the problems of corruption, dependence on leaders, and avoidance of responsibilities minimized. A fresh initiative by a legitimate government and genuine political will to implement the program holds the key to the success of citizen's charter in Bangladesh.

Lessons can be drawn from the experiment with Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh that could help with successful implementation of programs in developing countries. First, programs and policies must be developed by legitimate regimes that can continue to govern under a stable political system. Second, new programs require substantial investments in terms of planning, dissemination of information, training and awareness enhancing activities, a realistic assessment of the needs of communities, and skilled workforce to implement the plans. Finally, policies and programs imitated from successful examples in other countries without considering the context will not contribute to improvements.

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