

The Service Delivery Lens: A Study of Citizen's Charter Implementation from Service Provider's Perspective

Md. Asaduzzaman Mondol Asad¹

Abstract: Citizen Charter is a crucial framework in public organisations, highlighting the importance of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in providing citizens with high-quality services. This qualitative research study investigates the implementation of the Citizen's Charter in public organizations within Chandpur and Rangpur District of Bangladesh, from service provider's perspective. Using structured questionnaires for in-depth interviews, data were collected from 40 key stakeholders, including Chairman/Mayors, members, and service providers, selected through purposive sampling techniques. The findings reveal a notable improvement in the quality of services provided by both municipalities and union parishads following the Citizen's Charter's implementation. However, the study also uncovers several challenges in the implementation process, such as a lack of expertise, limited awareness, resource constraints, budget limitations, inadequate monitoring, and issues related to politicization. The research concludes with recommendations to address these challenges and enhance the Citizen's Charter's effectiveness, ultimately aiming to encourage more participatory, equitable, and accountable practices among stakeholders and prompt authorities to take necessary steps for improvement.

Keywords: Citizen Charter, Local government, Public service delivery, Service Providers, Challenges, Bangladesh.

Introduction

Governments across the globe have endeavoured to use inventive strategies in order to boost transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to meet the demands and expectations of their citizens, thereby achieving effective governance and enhanced public service delivery (Mbecke, 2015). An increasingly prominent strategy is the adoption of Citizen Charters, which serve as a formalized commitment by the government to its citizens. These charters delineate the rights, entitlements, and expected levels of service delivery for citizens. These charters have been strategically formulated with the aim of bestowing authority upon citizens, cultivating an environment of responsibility, and advocating for governance that prioritizes the needs and interests of residents (Clifton et al., 2005).

The importance of accountability as well as transparency in fostering effective governance and cultivating public trust in governmental institutions has been widely acknowledged by scholars and policymakers (Grindle, 2011; Hood, 2010). Citizen Charters serves as a concrete embodiment of these concepts, offering citizens an in-depth understanding of the entitlements they could expect from their government officials. The introduction of Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh is considered as the first step towards the establishment of

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur, Parkmoor, Modern Bypass, Rangpur 5404. Email: asad.pad@brur.ac.bd.

the rights of citizens in obtaining public services and ensuring transparency in the service delivery process (Huque & Ahsan, 2016). In Bangladesh, in May 2007, the then Caretaker Government took the initiative to introduce Citizen's Charter in all government offices (Huque & Ahsan, 2016). Later, according to the direction of both Cabinet division and Ministry of Establishment all offices of the Deputy Commissioner in sixty-four districts of Bangladesh had implemented Citizen's Charter in February 2008. The Citizen's Charter was introduced in municipalities in 2007 (Jamil, et al., 2011) and Union Parishad (UP) in 2009 in Bangladesh (Rab & Rahaman, 2018).

The successful execution of Citizen Charters is contingent upon various crucial elements, such as the prominence of the charters, the training of employees, the adherence to service standards, the implementation of publicity campaigns, the establishment of mechanisms for addressing grievances, and the capacity to surmount the obstacles encountered by service providers (Beniwal, 2005; Saguin, 2013; Rab & Rahaman, 2018).

This research article aims to shed light on the dynamics of implementing Citizen Charters in local government offices in Bangladesh. The alignment of public Charters with concepts of transparency and public empowerment is evident, however, the implementation of these charters inside local government institutions poses distinct obstacles and opportunities. Through empirical analysis, this study explores the successes and limitations of Citizen Charters in the context of local government offices in Bangladesh, offering insights into areas for improvement and the potential for strengthening citizen-centric governance.

Literature Review

Meaning and Definition of Citizen Charter

Defining the Citizen's Charter is a multifaceted task, as scholars and practitioners have approached this public management reform tool from diverse perspectives, resulting in a lack of a universally accepted definition (Ohemeng, 2010). At its core, the Citizen's Charter represents a shift from traditional service provider-centred approaches to a focus on individual citizens' rights and expectations (Falconer & Ross, 1999; Tritter, 1994). It operates as a "social contract" between the government and its citizens, empowering individuals as consumers to make service demands based on the information provided in the charters and to raise grievances (Drewry, 2005; Tritter, 1994).

Various scholars have used different descriptors to characterize the Citizen's Charter. For instance, it has been referred to as the "complainers' charter" (Rhodes, 1994), a "managerial tool for the delivery of citizen-centred services" (Falconer & Ross, 1999), a means to "reconstruct relations between the state and the citizens" (Clark, 2000), a tool to "enhance citizen trust in governance" (Torres, 2005), and a method of governance (Lewis, 1993). This concept signifies a shift in management styles from traditional bureaucratic models to customer-responsive approaches (Lovell, 1992).

Moreover, the Citizen's Charter aligns with the principles of New Public Management, emphasizing private sector management styles and promoting efficiency, transparency, and accountability in public service delivery (Drewry, 2005; Schiavo, 2000). It also resonates

with the New Public Service ethos, calling for public servants to be responsive to citizens rather than treating them merely as customers (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Nigussa, 2014).

In summary, the Citizen's Charter can be defined as a comprehensive reform initiative encompassing quality assurance techniques such as service standards, consultative mechanisms, citizen information dissemination, complaints and redress mechanisms, and quality awards (Torres, 2005). Its primary objective is to place citizens at the centre of public administration efforts, fostering greater accountability, responsiveness, and transparency in government operations.

Objectives of Citizen Charter:

The introduction of the Citizen's Charter in numerous countries serves several key objectives aimed at improving public service delivery and enhancing the relationship between the state and its citizens. Scholars and practitioners alike recognize its significance as a tool for making service providers more responsible and transparent (Drewry, 2005; Falconer & Ross, 1999; Nigussa, 2014; Ohemeng, 2010; Schiavo, 2000). It empowers civil society organizations and contributes to the reciprocal relationship between the state and civil society (Nikos, 2001). By promoting "de-bureaucratization," it envisions equal access to public services, particularly for marginalized citizens (Clark, 2000).

One primary objective of the Citizen's Charter is to enhance accountability by empowering citizens through consultation, performance monitoring, and fostering relative openness within bureaucracies (Mendoza, 2011; Torres, 2005). It pressures governments to prioritize the allocation of resources and enhance accountability for critical services, ultimately contributing to poverty alleviation and human development (Mendoza, 2011). This approach, termed "social accountability," emphasizes direct administrative and answerability of service providers to service recipients, strengthening the principal-agent relationship between citizens and service providers (Iftekhharuzzaman, 2012).

However, despite its many merits, the Citizen's Charter is not without criticisms, as some countries have implemented it without considering contextual factors, leading to limited benefits (James et al., 2005). Issues such as cultural specificity and misinterpretations of the concept of "citizen" have been raised (Falconer & Ross, 1999), and the Charter's effectiveness in empowering citizens, especially marginalized groups, has been questioned (Huque & Ahsan, 2016). Some argue that its non-legal character may hinder its ability to protect citizens' rights effectively (Taylor, 1999). Nonetheless, the introduction of the Citizen's Charter remains a critical step in the pursuit of improved governance and public service delivery worldwide.

Historical Background of Citizen Charter:

The origins of the Citizen's Charter may be traced back to the early 1990s in the United Kingdom, where it was first introduced as a crucial instrument for improving public service performance and government accountability (Rab & Rahaman, 2018). It was first introduced by Prime Minister John Major in 1991 and was characterized by a set of core principles aimed at enhancing the quality of services, giving citizens more say in how those

services are delivered when possible, establishing transparent standards for those services, getting the most out of public funds, being more accountable to those who receive those services, and facilitating the resolution of complaints (Nigussa, 2014). The ultimate objective was to educate people about their legal entitlements and civic duties to increase their sense of agency.

In 1998, the Labour Government led by Prime Minister Tony Blair resurrected the idea of a Citizen's Charter under the name 'Service First.' This reintroduction brought the idea to a wider audience. In an effort to improve public administration and citizen engagement, governments around the world have looked to the United Kingdom's Citizen's Charter as a model (Falconer & Ross, 1999). The governments of many European countries adopted similar programs because they agreed with the charter's guiding ideas. Italy introduced its "Service Charter" (Carta dei Servizi) in 1993 (Schiavo, 2000), Belgium established its "Charter for Public Service Users" (La Charte des Utilisateurs des Services Publics) in 1992 (Van de Walle et al., 2005), and Finland introduced its "Service Charter" in 1997 (Clifton et al., 2005).

Outside of Europe, the potential of the Citizen's Charter to enhance public services was also recognized. Based on the success of the UK's "Service Standards Initiative," Canada launched its own "Service Standards Initiative" in 1995, and Australia created its own "Service Charter" in 1997 (McGuire, 2001). Malaysia, a country in Southeast Asia, enacted its "Client's Charter" in 1993 as part of reforms initiated by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (Siddiquee, 2006). Following the global trend toward employing such tools to improve public service delivery and government accountability, India adopted its "Citizen's Charter" in 1997 (Nigussa, 2014).

Citizen Charter in Bangladesh:

In Bangladesh, the Citizen's Charter initiative represents a significant step towards enhancing service delivery, transparency, and accountability within the public sector, influenced by constitutional mandates and external pressures. Article 21(2) of the Bangladeshi Constitution underscores the duty of individuals in the service of the Republic to strive continuously in serving the people, aligning with the principles of good governance (Jahan, 2006). Moreover, external pressures from development partners have prompted Bangladesh to adopt market-led approaches to improve service delivery, with the Citizen's Charter resembling a tool replicated from the UK model. This adoption can be seen as a form of policy transfer, reflecting both coercive and mimetic elements.

The introduction of the Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh can be traced back to 2008, stemming from recommendations made by the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) in 2000 (Khan, 2010). This initiative, led by the Cabinet Division and the Ministry of Public Administration, aimed to instil greater accountability, transparency, and responsiveness within government offices (Razzaque, 2012). The first-generation Citizen's Charter primarily focused on outlining service standards and commitments to the public, embodying the government's commitment to becoming more accountable and citizen oriented (Huque & Ahsan, 2016).

Despite its promising intentions, the first-generation charter encountered various procedural and structural limitations, such as the absence of service recipients' participation in the formulation process, a lack of clear definitions, and insufficient mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. These limitations, coupled with bureaucratic obstacles and a centralized administrative culture, hindered its effectiveness (Khan, 2010; Rab & Rahaman, 2018; Razzaque, 2012).

In response to these challenges, the government introduced a "second generation" Citizen's Charter, emphasizing greater citizen participation in its formulation and implementation. This initiative aimed to transform the charter into a platform for discussing service delivery, monitoring progress, and assessing organizational performance, thus focusing on the process side of service delivery (Iftekharuzzaman, 2012). However, the success of this supply-side initiative in improving service delivery and accountability among front line bureaucrats remains a question, given the complex challenges and systemic issues facing its implementation.

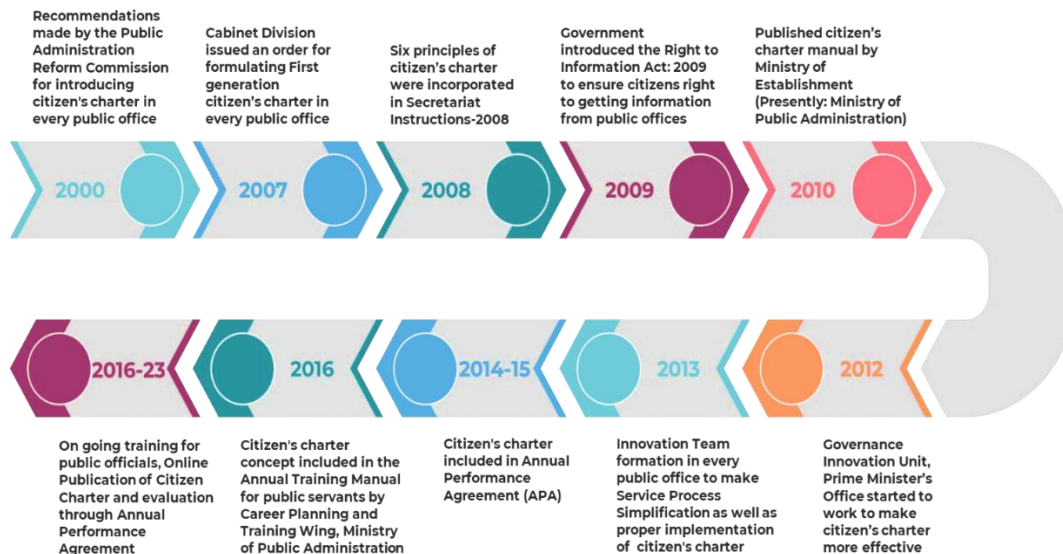


Figure 1: Citizen's Charter Implementation Journey in Bangladesh

Methodology

The main objective of this study was to explore the implementation status and challenges of implementing Citizen's Charter from service provider's perspective. To explore this, the researcher chose qualitative design for this study as qualitative study captures the lived experiences, perceptions, and viewpoints of individuals, which can be valuable for understanding complex social phenomena from the ground up (Creswell, 2009). For collecting data for this study, researcher employed in-depth interview method with researcher administrated structured questionnaire. For collecting secondary data, researcher used document analysis techniques and published research articles and books were searched on Google scholar and DOAJ using "Citizen Charter", "Citizen Charter AND Bangladesh", "Implementation, Citizen Charter AND Bangladesh" keywords. All

the collected primary and secondary data were analysed using thematic analysis of text techniques.

For primary source of data, the respondents of this study were the Chairman/Mayor, Councillor/Members, service providers related to this field. The researcher chose Chandpur and Rangpur district randomly and among them four municipality and four union parishad was chosen purposively for this study.

Table 1: Sample size

	City corporation/Paurashava				Union Parishads			
	Chandpur		Rangpur		Chandpur		Rangpur	
	Sadar	Shahrasti	Haragach	Badarganj	Ashikati	Kalyanpur	Darshana	Mominpur
Chairman/Mayor	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Councillor/Member	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Officials	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
	20				20			
Grand Total	40							

Results, Findings and Discussions

Implementation of Citizen Charter

Visibility of Citizen Charter:

The successful implementation of the Citizen Charter program hinges on its visibility to the public. To ensure citizens are aware of their rights and expectations, the charter should be prominently displayed in government offices, service centres, and accessible public spaces. This enhances transparency by making the charter's content readily available to all. The research found that citizen's charter of all paurashava and union parishad was printed and placed in visible area except Badarganj Paurashava. The citizen charter of Badarganj Paurashava was not digitally printed rather printed in normal paper and was hanged on notice board. On the other hand, the service charge and designated authority of each service was not mentioned on the citizen's charter of the Mominpur union parishad rather it just mentioned the services and required time.

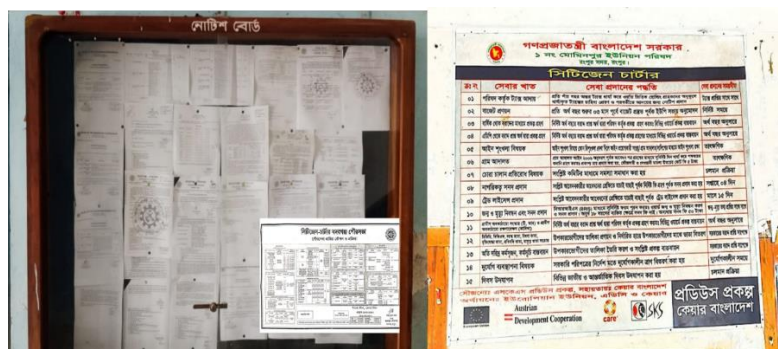


Figure 2: Citizen's Charter of Badarganj Paurashava and Mominpur Union Parishad

Researcher tried to find out the online version of citizen charter of these local government institutions but unfortunately none of them were available on internet. Regarding these one of the respondents from Haragach Union Parishad described,

I acknowledge that nowadays people rely on internet and try to gather information before visiting anyplace and in this regard online version of the citizen charter would help them a lot and this will be more citizen centric. Unfortunately, most of the union parishad still don't have detailed website where they could upload their citizen charter, but from our own initiative we have launched our website where we haven't uploaded the charter yet but hope soon, we will be able to do this (IDI 38, August 10, 2023).

Training of Employees:

Employee training is pivotal for the effective implementation of the Citizen Charter. Government officials and service providers should receive comprehensive training on the charter's principles, service standards, and the importance of citizen-centric service delivery. This training equips employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the commitments outlined in the charter. Bangladesh government emphasis on providing these training for all government offices. This study revealed that, among 40 respondents 29 received training or attended meeting, seminar, or workshop on citizen's charter, while rest 11 were relatively newly joined employee and haven't received any formal training yet but have received general ideas and instructions from their colleagues. One of them opined,

It has been nearly six month I have joined the union parishad but didn't receive the training yet. Our chairman has got this training twice and he has described me about the citizen charter's goal, objectives, and our commitments. I am trying to follow his guidelines and hope to attend a training program soon for detail understanding of it (IDI 13, July 31, 2023).

This study also reveals that these training are provided from different sources which have presented in figure 3:

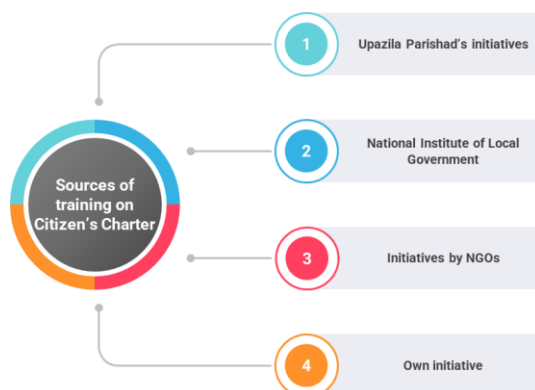


Figure 3: Sources of Training on Citizen's Charter

Providing Services According to the Charter:

A core objective of the Citizen Charter is to ensure that services are provided in alignment with the standards and commitments outlined in the charter. This involves adhering to specified timelines, quality benchmarks, and procedures detailed in the charter. Monitoring mechanisms should be in place to track and assess service delivery against these standards. Most of the respondents claimed that they try to provide services according to the commitment mentioned in the citizen's charter. One of the respondents of Kalyanpur union mentioned,

"We have come a long way from where we were. I believe citizens are happier with the service because we do our best to adhere to the specified time and cost, and in more than 75% of cases, we are able to provide services accordingly (IDI 9, July 15, 2023)."

Publicity of the Citizen Charter:

Publicity serves as a crucial mechanism for disseminating information to citizens on the Citizen Charter program. Publicity campaigns have the potential to enhance public knowledge and foster active citizen participation in relation to the charter. However, researchers have identified certain limits pertaining to the union parishad and pourashava in this context. The citizen's charter was discussed in some monthly meetings of Chandpur Sadar Pourashava and Mominpur Union Parishad, whereas the others did not undertake notable initiatives to raise awareness among the general people. One of the respondents from Shahrasti paurashava opined that,

"The citizen's charter of this paurashava introduced many years back and it is visible to public for many years. Aware and educated people already know the details of it and elder and illiterate people are less interested in that type of awareness programs. For this reason, I have not experienced any specific awareness programs regarding citizen's charter in my work life of 4 years. But in meetings or discussions we occasionally mention about its usage (IDI 4, July 8, 2023)."

Scope of Grievance Redress:

The Citizen Charter should clearly define the scope and mechanisms for grievance redress. It should specify how citizens can report grievances related to service delivery and the channels through which these complaints will be addressed. Grievance redress mechanisms should be accessible, impartial, and capable of providing timely resolutions to citizen concerns. According to the data collected for this study, services providers in Union and Paurashava try to address the grievances of the public but some limitations like lack of enough human resources, technical disruption make them unable to address all the grievances of the public. A respondent of Ashikati union parishad described as,

“Currently, the union parishad is providing a lot of services, and the population is increasing day by day, but the structure of the union has been more or less the same for many years. That's why the workload has been increased on us, making it difficult for us to resolve all the grievances timely. In addition, we encounter technical issues such as a downed server and load shedding that are beyond our control (IDI 19, August 3, 2023).”

Challenges faced by the service providers

Implementing a Citizen's Charter at local government offices in Bangladesh presents several unique challenges. Figure 4 shows some of the key obstacles that service providers are facing in implementing citizen's charter at local government offices:

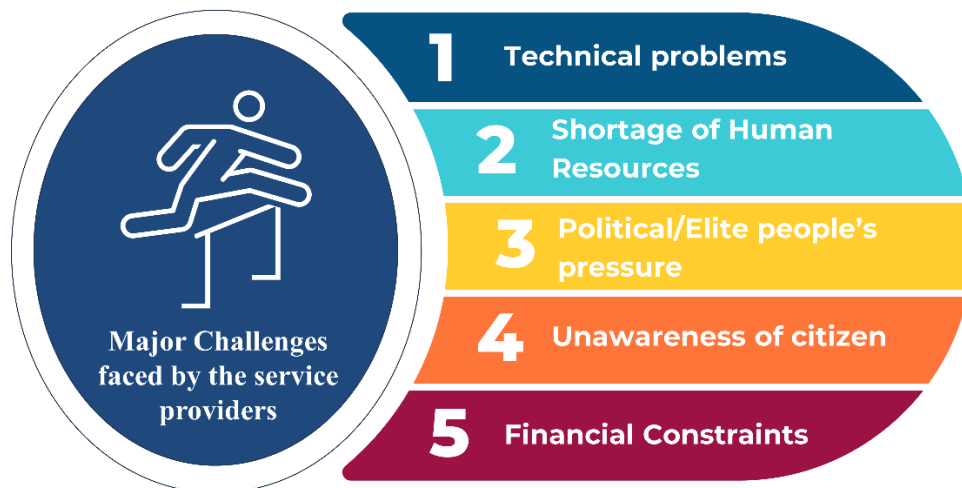


Figure 4: Major Challenges of implementing Citizen's Charter faced by the service providers

Technical problems:

This study revealed that the service providers encounter technical issues like server downtime, which disrupts the efficient delivery of services outlined in the Citizen's Charter. Frequent power cuts or load shedding also hamper the availability of online services and

digital resources, impacting the Charter's implementation. A respondent of Mominpur Union Parishad described that,

“The primary difficulty we face is the server issue. It's difficult to explain the problem to the public when the server is down, and we can't get in to give any services. It also affects us on a more personal level. Because the server is functional at night, we must complete pending tasks then. Power outages are a problem during the summer and interfere with our daily activities (IDI 39, August 12, 2023).”

Shortage of Human Resources:

According to the field data, local government offices often grapple with a shortage of human resources, which lead to delays in service provision and hinder the effective implementation of the Charter. Also, existing officials must overwork due to the shortage of personnel, making it challenging to allocate time and resources for Charter-related tasks.

Unawareness of Citizens:

Most of the respondents mentioned some citizens are unaware of the time required to provide each service and expect instant service delivery. This creates dissatisfaction and unrealistic demands. Continuous efforts are needed to educate citizens about the Charter's provisions, including realistic service timelines, to manage their expectations effectively. One of the respondents of Darshana union parishad illustrates as,

“Everyone, at some point, requires the services immediately. They don't care that the required for each service is mentioned on the citizens' charter. Suppose one citizen requires a service that will take 2/3 days, while another one's needs may be met in 3/4 hours. The first citizen begins to blame us when we provide services to the second citizen. Then it becomes difficult to convince him that his service requires more time than other services (IDI 27, August 2, 2023).”

Political/Elite People's Pressure:

Local government service providers often face political pressure from influential individuals or groups, which disrupt the equitable delivery of services as outlined in the Citizen's Charter. Pressure from political or elite groups lead to favouritism, where certain individuals receive preferential treatment over others, contradicting the principles of fairness. One of the respondents of Chandpur Sadar Paurashava expressed,

“Certain powerful and influential individuals frequent this establishment with the expectation of expedited service, thereby exerting pressure upon us to prioritize their needs promptly. During that period, we are required to pause all ongoing tasks until the delivery of their services, resulting in an infraction of other's service promises outlined in the citizen charter (IDI 18, July 27, 2023).”

Financial Constraints:

According to the respondents, implementing and maintaining the Citizen's Charter requires financial resources for training, awareness campaigns, technology upgrades, and monitoring. For our limited budget they are unable to do these programs. Though some national or upazila level initiatives are taken but they focused on their own initiatives which could be more effective in this regard. A respondent of Mominpur Union Parishad described,

Due to financial constraints, we are currently unable to effectively implement the citizen charter. It is imperative to ensure consistent updates on the website and offer comprehensive training to citizens to enhance the efficacy of its implementation. In the past, our region experienced significant hardships. However, we have lately received assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in the form of support for the Northern Bangladesh Integrated Development Project (NOBIDEP). However, what will be the future implications once the project is ended? The government should also prioritize these programs (IDI 40, August 13, 2023).

Conclusion:

Bangladesh has taken a major step toward a more transparent, accountable, and people-focused administration with the introduction of Citizen Charters in their local government offices. According to the findings, public Charters have the ability to improve service delivery and boost public satisfaction. These advantages can be realized more fully with the help of a thorough set of recommendations. The start of digitizing Citizen Charters is crucial because of how dependent modern society is on the internet for information dissemination. In addition to meeting the demands of today's tech-savvy populace, this would also increase accessibility. Government employees and service providers should be required to complete mandatory training courses to ensure they are familiar with the concepts behind Citizen Charters and can effectively implement them. To ensure that staff remains current with best practices, it is important to provide them with regular opportunities to refresh their knowledge. Since people in rural areas may have less access to information, it is crucial to have a strong and multi-channel publicity effort. As Fox et al., (2016) point out, this method can help get more people involved in the Charter program.

Redress mechanisms for citizens' complaints should be easily accessible, impartial, and able to find effective answers in a timely manner; hence, investments in both human and technological resources are necessary. Maintaining online services in the face of technical difficulties like server crashes and power outages requires investments in infrastructure. The current administration needs more people to be hired and trained in order to meet the service requirements stipulated in Citizen Charters without breaking a sweat. Another important step in lowering customer frustration is informing the public about expected wait times for certain services. To prevent bias and guarantee that all citizens receive equal service, maintaining political neutrality is essential. As a final point, it's important to push for more government funding of Citizen Charter projects. These programs need to remain sustainable and productive after their respective project lifespans have ended, so it is

important to investigate potential external financing sources and collaborations. Government agencies at the local level can pave the way for Citizen Charters to flourish by proactively addressing these obstacles and adopting the suggested approaches.

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