

Status of the Implementation of Citizen's Charter at Public Offices in Bangladesh: An Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Citizen's charter is one of the important and commendable governance tools in Public Administration of Bangladesh. In 2007, the Cabinet Division took the initiative to introduce citizen's charter in different public offices. This study was conducted to assess the implementation status of citizen's charter in ministry and field-level offices of Bangladesh with its challenges. To achieve the research objectives, this study followed both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Sample survey with semi-structured questionnaires was used for collecting primary data while secondary data were collected from all relevant sources. The study showed that the implementation status of the citizen's charter at public offices in Bangladesh is still in its infancy. The service providers are not strictly following their citizen's charter in their routine work. There are a number of drawbacks in the implementation of citizen's charter in the public offices. Lack of adequate public awareness is the leading cause of poor implementation of citizen's charter. In addition, lack of proper knowledge among the citizens or service recipients, lack of positive attitude of service providers, a communication gap between the service receivers and the service providers and lack of proper monitoring and feedback mechanism were other barriers. The study has come up with the conclusion that institutionalization of the awareness-building programme, capacity building of the service providers and strengthening monitoring mechanisms are essential to overcome these challenges.

Keywords: Citizen's charter, Grievance Redress System (GRS), governance tool, service provider, service recipient

INTRODUCTION

Citizen's charter is a written document through which an organization makes a

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commitment to its clients. The document mainly highlights the standards of service delivery, diversity of customer's choices, avenues for grievance redress, right to information and other citizen related issues (Shankar 2007).

Citizen's charter was developed under the paradigm of New Public Management (NPM) and is used as a tool for ensuring the accountability of service providers. Another objective of this tool is to behold the public as a customer in the service delivery system (Saguin 2013). Citizens charter was first formulated and implemented in the United Kingdom (UK) by the Government of John Major in 1991 with a view to continuing the improvement of quality of public services for the citizens (Sharma and Agnihotri 2001). Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a number of reform commissions have been constituted to bring about positive changes in service delivery system (Sarkar 2006).

The concept of citizen's charter is the direct outcome of the recommendations provided by the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) in 2000. To meet the citizens' expectation; the PARC recommended the introduction of a citizen's charter in different public offices (GOB 2000 and GOB 2010). In 2007, the Cabinet Division took the initiative to implement citizen's charter, and Ministry of Establishment (Presently known as Ministry of Public Administration) communicated the decision by issuing a circular to most of the government Ministries/Division/Departments and Subordinate Offices to implement it. Consequently, The Secretariat Instruction, 2008 and The Secretariat Instruction, 2014 of Bangladesh included a provision of publicizing citizen's charter. Cabinet Division issued an instruction for the formulation of citizen's charter for the Ministries, Divisions and Directorate in January 2017. Uniform format of citizen's charter for the Ministries, Divisions and Directorates (seven columns) was approved by the Cabinet Division in 2015, whereas, the uniform format of citizen's charter for field offices (eight columns) was approved in 2017 (GOB 2017).

Citizen's charter has been introduced in almost every sector of public administration, and it may be considered as one of the most effective tools for ensuring accountability. Being comparatively a new concept, it occupies a thin position in academic discussion. As a result, there exists a void in exploring this issue to improve its effectiveness in Bangladesh (Rahman 2017). Citizen's charter in Bangladesh is swinging between bright prospects and vibrant challenges. This study may reveal a new outlook for understanding the various aspects of this initiative.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Citizen's charter is an instrument of an organization through which the organization can improve its service on the basis of its service recipient's demands and expectation. Citizen's charter of an organization describes its services available to the citizens, service delivery procedure, grievance redress option that will be available in case of non-

deliverance, and obligations of citizens for getting the service (Sharma and Agnihotri 2001). Initially, there were six principles of the citizen's charter: (i)improving the quality of services (ii) choice, wherever possible (iii) standards, specify what to expect, how to act if standards are not met; (iv) value-for the taxpayers'-money (v) accountability to the service recipients and (vi) transparency, and grievances (Barron and Scott 1992). The main objectives of citizen's charter are to make administration more accountable, responsive, transparent and citizen-friendly. Its purpose is to empower citizen by exposing their rights, privileges and duties (Jahan 2006, GOB 2010).

The concept of citizen's charter was first pronounced and implemented in the United Kingdom by John Major in 1991. The programme was re-introduced in 1998 by the Labour Government of Tony Blaire titled as 'Service First'. Successful implementation of citizen's charter in the UK became the source of inspiration for many governments. It also became a reform strategy in different countries in the world. Many countries picked up the idea and initiated such tools in service delivery mechanism. In Europe, France introduced its "The Public Service Charter /La Charte des Services Publics" in 1992, followed by Belgium in 1992 by its "The Charter for Public Service Users (La Charte des Utilisateurs des Services Publics)". Italy initially launched its "Service Charter /Carta dei Servizi" in 1993, and it was re-launched in 1995, and Finland started its "Service Charter" in 1997. Outside Europe, Canada picked up the concept and introduced its "Service Standards Initiative" in 1995, while in Australia, it came up with the "Service Charter" in 1997. Among the Asian countries, Malaysia under the reform initiative of Mahathir Mohamad, came up with its "Client's Charter" as early as in 1993, while India, introduced "Citizen's Charter", in 1997. Many other countries also followed this trend and initiated similar tools (Sharma and Agnihotri 2001).

In Bangladesh, citizen's charter was introduced in 2007. Since then, many initiatives have been taken for making it effective. The journey of citizen's charter in Public Administration of Bangladesh is briefly described in Table 1.

JICA conducted a study on citizen's charter implementation in Bangladesh in the year 2012. It was stated that the citizen's charter had no impact on improvements in service delivery after its introduction by the government of Bangladesh (Razzaque 2012). Another study was conducted on the effectiveness of the implementation of citizen's charter in an Upazila Land Office in Bangladesh. It was reported that the Upazila Land Office has limited capacity to implement citizen's charter as the officials were not equipped with the training required to implement it successfully (Nayem 2010).

Some positive impacts of citizen's charter were found during a study in the Department of Immigration and Passports of Bangladesh. It was observed that the charter had had some positive impact on the demand side of public service delivery, but there was no effect on the supply side. Lack of sympathy of public servants towards clients' needs or demands and top-down' or rigid decision-making culture in the organization are the main reasons behind it (Razzaque 2012). Another study was conducted for assessing the performance of citizen's charter of Local Councils in Bangladesh and a top-down

approach during the formulation of charter identified as a cause of the ineffectiveness of it (Ahsan and Huque 2016).

Table 1: Citizen’s Charter Journey in Public Sector of Bangladesh

Year	Activities
2000	Recommendations made by the Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) for introducing citizen's charter in every public office
2007	Cabinet Division issued an order for formulating First generation citizen's charter in every public office
2008	Six principles of citizen’s charter were incorporated in Secretariat Instructions-2008 (Instruction No. 173).
2009	The government introduced the Right to Information Act: 2009 to ensure citizens right to getting information from public offices.
2010	Published citizen’s charter manual by Ministry of Establishment (Presently: Ministry of Public Administration)
2012	Governance Innovation Unit (GIU), Prime Minister’s Office started to work to make citizen’s charter more effective.
2013	Innovation Team formation in every public office to make Service Process Simplification (SPS) as well as proper implementation of the citizen's charter.
2014 -2015	Citizen's charter included in Annual Performance Agreement (APA)
2016	Citizen's charter concept included in the Annual Training Manual for the public servants by Career Planning and Training (CPT) Wing, Ministry of Public Administration.

Source: Compilation of government circulars

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this study:

1. To assess the level of implementation of citizen's charter in ministry and field-level offices of Bangladesh;
2. To find out the challenges for effective implementation of citizen's charter in Bangladesh; and
3. To bring forth some recommendations for making citizen's charter more effective and efficient in Bangladesh.

To achieve these objectives, the present study followed both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Survey methods were used for collecting primary

data from the relevant sources. The study employed a mixed-method approach for data collection because this method provides more comprehensive and reliable data. The strength from one method can be used to overcome the weakness of another method. A survey was conducted through two sets of semi-structured questionnaires. At the same time, a range of literature was reviewed to gather secondary data. Two types of data have been juxtaposed and cross-checked during analysis and presentation.

Out of 64 districts in Bangladesh, 10 districts (Gaibandha, Naogaon, Manikganj, Narsingdi, Hobiganj, Sylhet, Khagrachari, Chandpur, Magura, and Jamalpur) were selected randomly. To get representative data, 7 out of 8 administrative divisions of the country have been covered. Citizen's charters of 10 Deputy Commissioner's Offices and 19 Ministries/Divisions (Cabinet Division, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, Secondary and Higher Education Division, Technical And Madrasah Education Division, Ministry of Land, Ministry of Social welfare, Health Services Division, Local Government Division, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Road Transport and Highways Division, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Information) were examined for this study. During the selection process, Ministries or Divisions, those who have relatively more public services were given priority.

Simple questionnaire both for the service providers and service recipients were developed, and data were collected through interviews. A total of 229 service providers and 209 service recipients were interviewed. Purposive sampling method was followed for the selection of respondents. In selecting the respondents, the emphasis has been given to those who are directly involved in providing or receiving services in or from the public offices. Relevant information was collected from secondary sources. Published literature and websites were also consulted for information. The collected data were presented by using simple and suitable mathematical and statistical tools like tabulation, percentage, and arithmetic means.

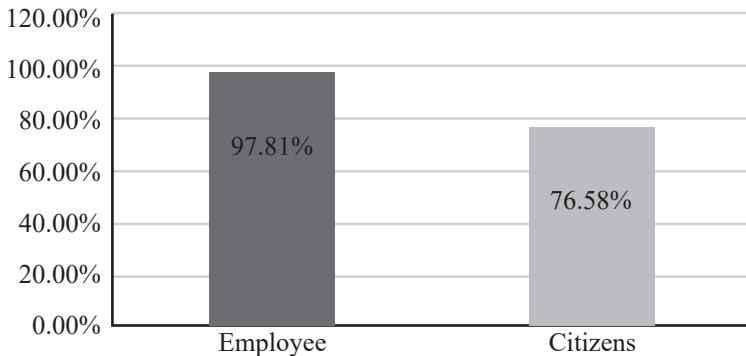
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have been summarized below:

Knowledge About Citizen's Charter

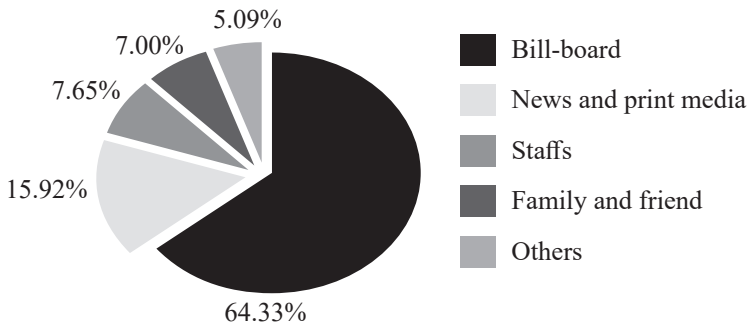
Regarding the knowledge about citizen's charter, 224 (97.81%) service providers out of 229, mentioned that they knew about citizen's charter. On the other hand, out of 205 service recipients, 157 informed (76.58%) that they knew about citizen's charter (Figure 1). Regarding the source of information about citizen's charter, 64.33% of respondents stated that they came to know about citizen's charter through the billboard. The display of citizen's charter has been made mandatory for all the field level public offices for its proper publicity. According to the instruction issued by the Cabinet Division and Citizen

Charter Handbook published by Governance Innovation Unit (GIU), every government office will take necessary steps in this regard. Citizen's charter must be uploaded in their official websites, and it must be hanged in a suitable place at every field-level office (GOB 2017). Among the total respondents (citizens), 76.58% knew about citizen's charter (figure 1), and 64.33% saw citizen's charter in the billboard (Figure 2). From these findings, it can be stated that there is a lack of publicity for citizen's charter.



Source: Field survey

Figure 1: Knowledge about Citizen’s Charter



Source: Field survey

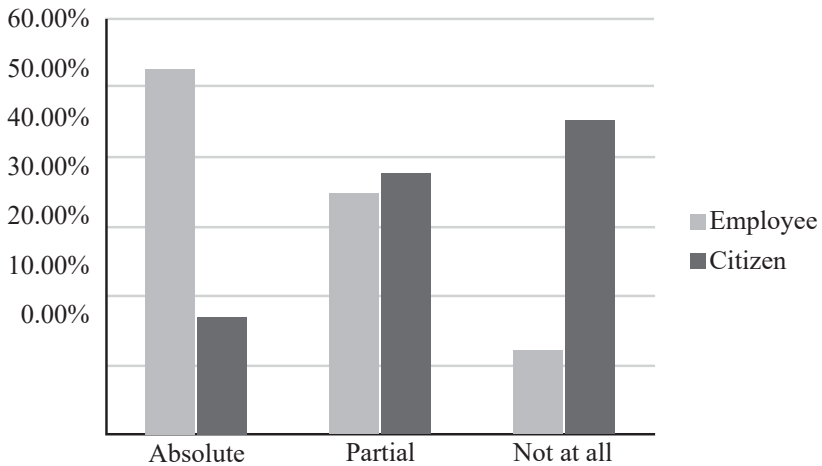
Figure 2: Source of information about Citizen’s Charter by citizens

Awareness of the Citizens and Employees Regarding Citizen’s Charter

The study revealed the awareness level of citizens and employees about citizen charter. Out of 157 citizens who knew about citizen's charter, 27 (17.20%) were fully, and 59 (37.80%) were partially aware of citizen's charter. Whereas, 71 (45.22 %) citizens did not have any idea about the contents of citizen's charter. On the other hand, among 224 (97.81%) employee who knew about citizen's charter, 118 (52.67%) were thoroughly,

and 78 (34.82%) were partially aware of citizen's charter. Whereas, 28 (12.50 %) of the total employee did not have any idea about the contents of citizen's charter (Figure 3).

Similarly, a study on citizen's charter in Union Parishad was conducted by Rab and Rahman in 2017, and it was found that about 20% of respondents did not know about citizen's charter. Among the remaining 80% of respondents who knew about citizen's charter, 50% said that they were somewhat aware, and the rest 25% said that they have just heard the term citizen's charter (Rab & Rahman 2017). So, it is evident that the existing situation is a bit better than before; still, it requires augmentation of awareness level among the service recipients.



Source: Field survey

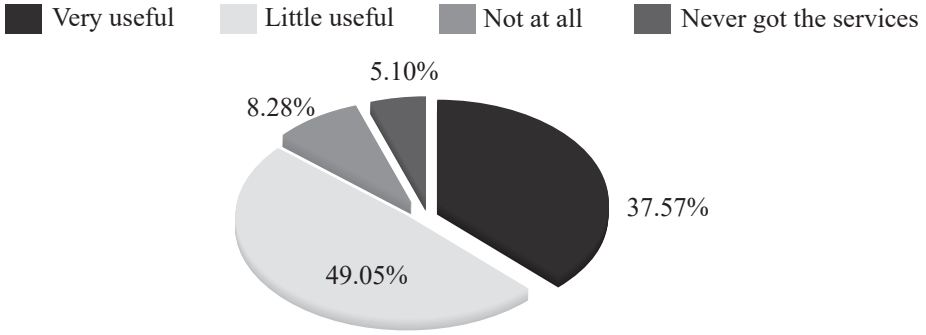
Figure 3: Awareness Level Regarding Citizen's Charter (Line Bar)

Usefulness of Citizen's Charter

Out of 205 respondents from the category of citizens, 157 (76.58%) knew about citizen's charter. Among them, 59 (37.57%) mentioned that the tool was very useful for getting public service from government offices. On the other hand, 49.05% termed it as little useful and 8.28% as not useful at all. Remarkably, 8 (5.10%) service recipients stated that they were not getting services from the government office according to the provision of citizen's charter (Figure 4). This result revealed that citizen's charter is not worthwhile enough for getting services from public offices in Bangladesh. This perception might be generated due to a lack of awareness regarding the citizen's charter among the service recipients.

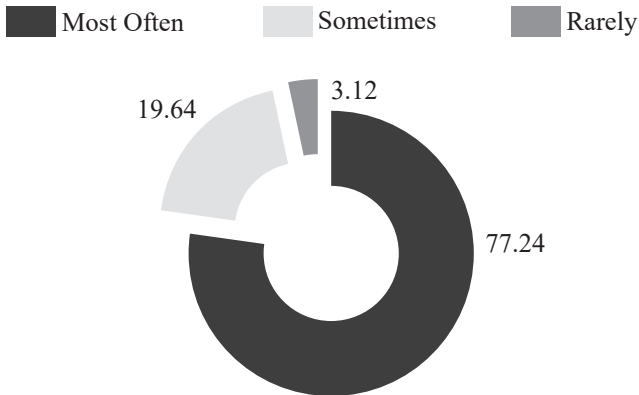
Regarding the usefulness of citizen's charter in their daily work, out of 224 officials, 173 (77.24%) expressed that most often they follow the citizen's charter guidelines and rest 19.64% mentioned that they sometimes follow the citizen's charter in their daily

work. 3.12 % of officials rarely use citizen's charter in their routine work (Figure 5). This finding indicates that the use of citizen's charter in routine work is still below the satisfactory level.



Source: Field survey

Figure 4: Usefulness of Citizen’s Charter (Citizen’s View)



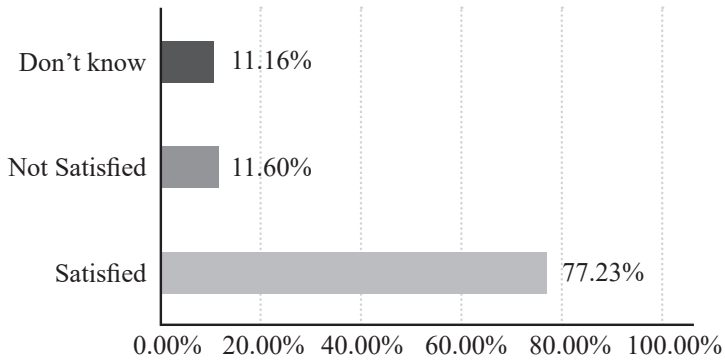
Source: Field survey

Figure 5: Usefulness of Citizen’s Charter in Daily Routine Work (Employee’s View)

Level of Satisfaction

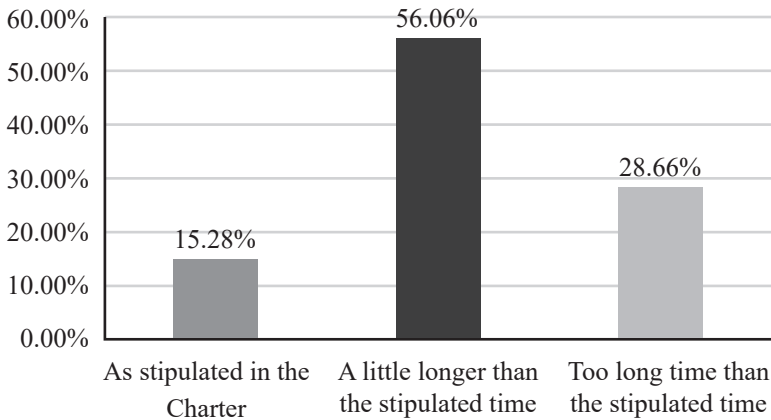
Level of satisfaction among the service recipients after introducing citizen's charter in government offices was evaluated in two ways: from service providers' view and service recipients' view. Out of 224 service provider, 173 (77.23%) thought that service recipients were satisfied in getting their services according to the charter whereas 26 (11.60%) respondents disagreed with them (Figure 6). But on the issue of the level of

satisfaction, the service recipients responded in different ways. Out of 157 respondents, 24 (15.28%) expressed their satisfaction. They were getting their services within the stipulated time. Whereas 88 (56.06%) respondents said that they were not getting their services in the stipulated time, as mentioned in the citizen's charter. While 45 (28.66%) respondents opined negatively as they mentioned that a long time was required for getting their services (Figure 7). This finding indicates that the public servants are not properly following citizen's charter.



Source: Field survey

Figure 6: Satisfaction of Citizen after Introducing Citizen's Charter (Employee's View)

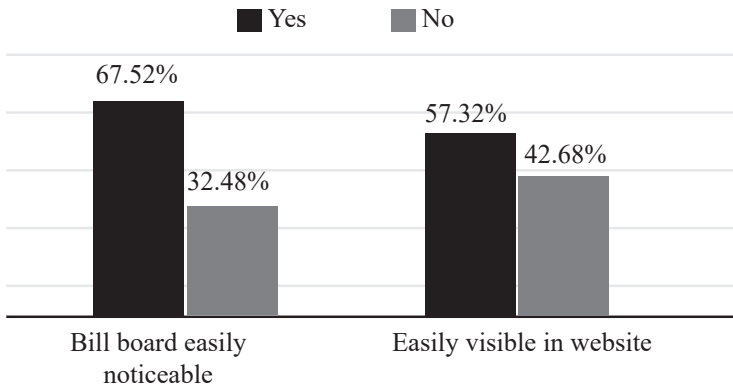


Source: Field survey

Figure 7: Level of Citizen's Satisfaction (Citizen's View)

Publicity of Citizen’s Charter

Raising public awareness is essential for effective implementation of citizen’s charter. Wide publicity can play an active role in this connection. According to the instruction of the Cabinet Division and Citizen Charter Handbook published by Governance Innovation Unit (GIU), for proper publicity, every government office would take necessary steps. Citizen’s charter must be uploaded in their webpage, and in every field level office, the charter must be hanged in a noticeable place (GOB 2017). There are many ways for the promotion of the citizen’s charter. On observation, it was found that most of the field level offices, citizen’s charter were displayed in billboards and uploaded on their official website. But sometimes these were not updated and easily visible. In this context, a question was asked to the citizens, whether the citizen’s charter of government offices was easily noticeable or not. Out of 205 respondents, only 157 respondents witnessed the citizen’s charter. Again, out of 157 respondents, 106 (67.52%) said that citizen’s charter billboard was easily noticeable, whereas 90 (57.32%) respondents mentioned that it was easily visible on the official website. Rest of the respondents gave negative responses (figure 8). This indicates citizen’s charters in public offices were not publicized properly.

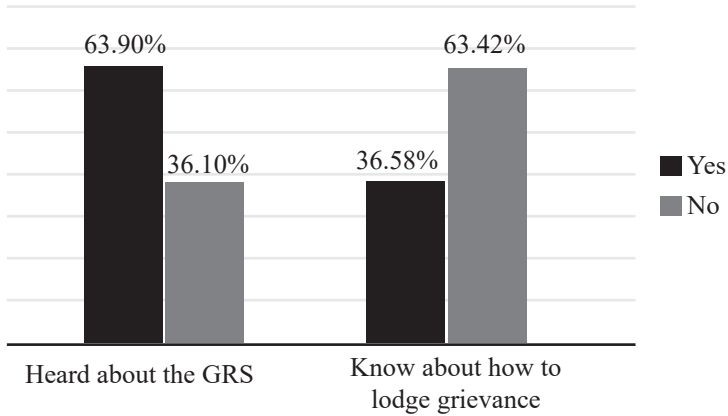


Source: Field survey

Figure 8: Publicity of Citizen’s Charter (Citizen’s View)

Scope of Grievance Redress

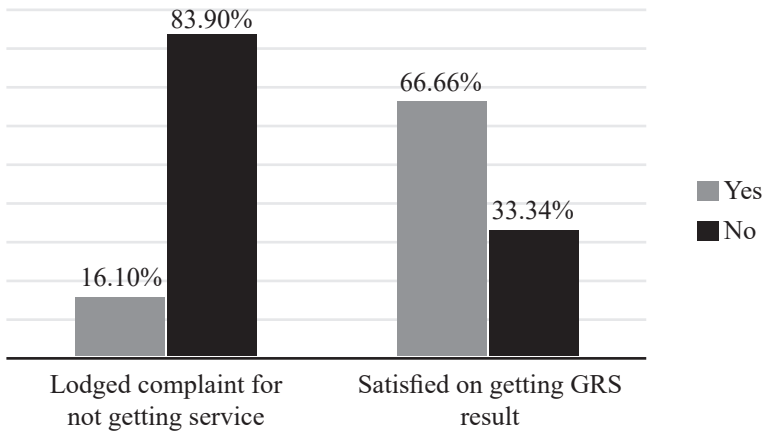
According to GRS guideline published by Cabinet Division, service recipients may complain to the competent authority against service providers regarding non-compliances of citizen’s charter. During this study, it was found that out of 205 citizens 130 (63.42%) did not know about how to lodge a grievance. Although 63.90% of service recipients heard about GRS, only 16.10% complained to the competent authority regarding non-compliance of citizen’s charter (Figure 09 and Figure 10).



Source: Field survey

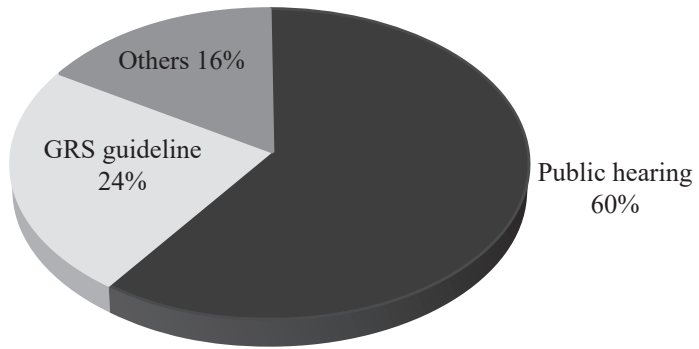
Figure 9: Scope of Grievance Redress System (Citizen’s View)

Regarding the satisfaction on the result of the Grievance Redress System, out of 33 respondents, 22 (66.66%) mentioned that they were satisfied with getting GRS result (Figure 10). On the other hand, out of 229 respondents, 208 mentioned that they had GRS in their offices. But during the study, it was found that most of the offices were not following GRS guideline for redressing the grievance. Only 24% of respondents said they are following GRS guideline for redressing the grievance (Figure 11). From this study, inference could be drawn that service providers are not familiar with the mission, vision and philosophy of the GRS. Furthermore, the service providers are not motivated to accept the new initiatives and service recipients are not aware of the system.



Source: Field survey

Figure 10: Satisfaction regarding Grievance Redress System (Citizen’s View)

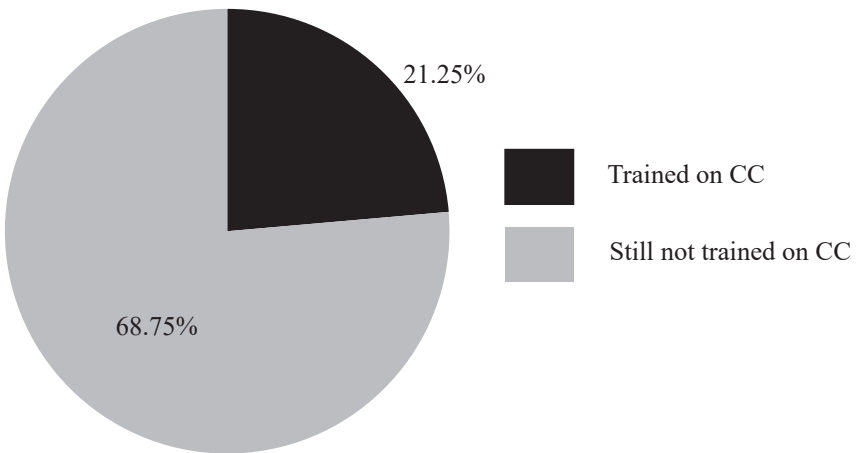


Source: Field survey

Figure 11: Mechanisms for Handling Grievance (Employee’s View)

Training on Citizen’s Charter

For the effective implementation of any new reform initiative tool, it is essential to train or educate the stakeholder about the philosophy and mechanism of the tool. But during this study, it was observed that most of the employees (68.75%) were not trained on citizen's charter initiative in Bangladesh (figure 12)

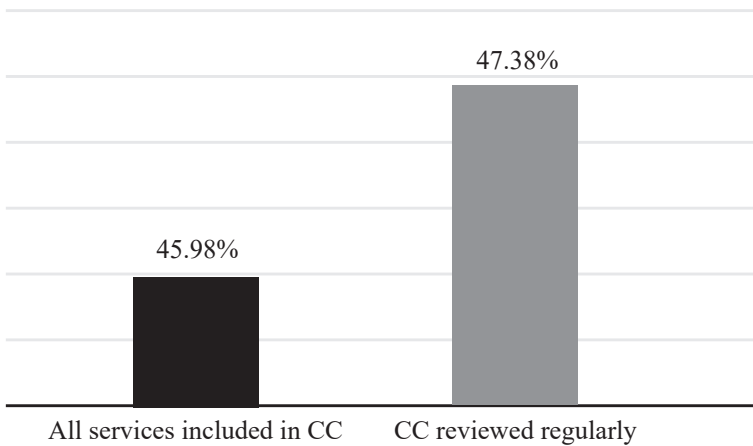


Source: Field survey

Figure 12: Training on Citizen’s Charter

Preparation and Monitoring of Citizen's Charter

Citizen's charter encompasses four cycles- formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which need to be revisited tuning with the time. Formulation and implementing of the citizen's charter is only the first step in improving service delivery through citizen's charter. But for the improvement, citizen's charter needs to be continuously reviewed on the basis of feedback it receives regularly (Post and Agarwal, 2008). During the study, service providers were asked regarding the regular reviewing of their charter. Out of 224 respondents, only 106 (47.38%) said that they reviewed their charter regularly. On the other hand, out of 224 respondents, 103(45.98%) said that they included all the services in their charter (Fig 13).



Source: Field survey

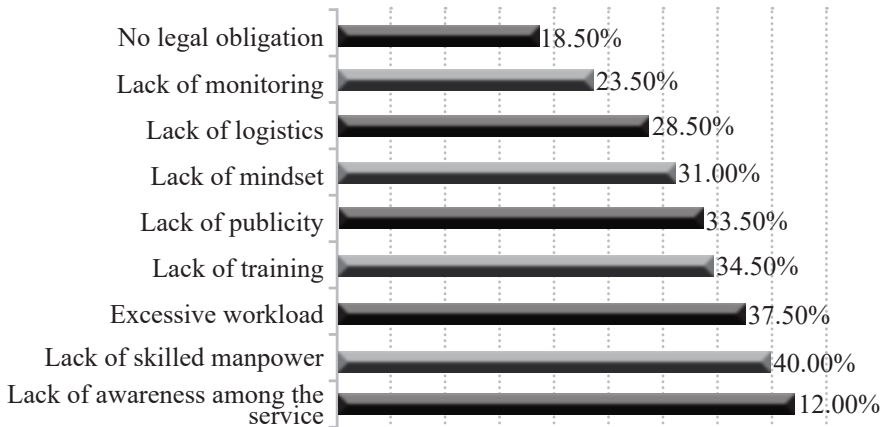
Figure 13: Preparation and Monitoring of Citizen's Charter (Employee's View)

Challenges for Implementing Citizen's Charter

The citizen's charter initiative started in public offices of Bangladesh in the year 2007. Familiarizing a new reform initiative is always difficult for any organization. For this reason, it faces many challenges in the development process. To find out the challenges, mainly the views were collected from the service providers. According to the present study, the major challenges for the implementation of citizen's charter were lack of awareness of service recipients (42.00%) lack of skilled manpower (40.00%), excessive workload (37.50%), lack of training (34.50%), lack of publicity (33.50%), and lack of positive mindset (31.00%) among the service provider. The main challenges for the implementation of citizen's charter in Bangladesh are shown in Figure 14.

Furthermore, during the study, citizen's charter published in websites of 19

Ministries/Division, and 10 Deputy Commissioner's Offices were analyzed. Citizen's charters handed by different field level offices were also observed. On observation and analysis, a number of limitations were noticed in comparison with the instruction written in the handbook and principles of citizen's charter (GOB 2017).



Source: Field survey

Figure 14: The Main Challenges for the Implementation of Citizen's Charter in Bangladesh

From the above findings and discussion, it can be said that the implementation status of citizen's charter in government offices were not satisfactory. There were so many drawbacks for implementation of citizen's charter in the government offices. In comparison with the findings of the previous study, regarding awareness among the citizens and service providers, it can be assumed that the existing situation was at least a bit better than before. However, the overall implementation status of citizen's charter was not satisfactory.

CONCLUSION

The practice of citizen's charter in public offices of Bangladesh is not very old, and its implementation is not satisfactory. The study has revealed that a lack of adequate public awareness is the leading cause that hinders its implementation. Other causes include lack of positive attitude among the service providers, weak monitoring system and lack of capacity of the service providers etc. The study also recommended some policy implications to overcome these limitations that include launching a massive awareness-building program for both service recipients and service providers, strengthening the monitoring mechanism and continuous capacity development of the service providers. The prime objective of the citizen's charter is to make public services available to the citizens without any miseries. In addition, citizen's charter is likely to have an impact

on standards of service delivery and open up avenues for grievance redress as well as the right to information for the citizens. So, for the improvement of the service delivery system, to reduce corruption and to make the public administration citizen-centric and accountable, it is imperative to implement citizen's charter effectively in Bangladesh.

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