

Impact of Citizen Charter on Service Delivery: A Case Study of District Administration Office, Dolakha

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Abstract

The Citizen Charter, introduced in Nepal through the Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2007, aims to make public service delivery more transparent, accountable, and citizen-focused. Rooted in the ideas of New Public Management and Principal–agent theory, it emphasizes efficiency, responsiveness, and better engagement with the public. This study evaluates how the Citizen Charter is being implemented at the District Administration Office, Dolakha, focusing on its influence on service delivery, public awareness, and grievance handling. The results show that the Charter has helped improve access to information and shaped citizens' perceptions positively. However, service delivery performance remains weak, with only 26% of services provided within the promised timeframe. Interestingly, 74% of respondents still expressed satisfaction, indicating that people tend to accept minor delays if the services are dependable. Awareness levels, however, were low—only 43% of citizens knew about the Charter, and just 27% fully understood its provisions. While many citizens felt adequately informed, grievance and complaint systems were not used effectively. Only 37% had filed complaints, and of those, just 32% received responses.

Keywords: Citizen Charter, Service Delivery, Transparency, Accountability, Governance

1. Introduction

The Citizen's Charter was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1991 as a public sector reform initiative aimed at promoting transparency, enhancing accountability, and improving the responsiveness of service delivery (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Using the Guidelines for Effectiveness of Government Services (1998) as a model, Nepal adopted the Citizen Charter in the late 1990s. The Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act of 2007 further strengthened this model by requiring all public offices to display charters outlining services, deadlines, and accountable officials (Acharya, 2018). Providing citizens with clear information, reducing bureaucratic burdens, and fostering effective and responsible governance were the main goals of this reform (Dhakal, 2019).

Empirical research shows that Citizen Charters in Nepal have raised public awareness and clarified procedures, but issues including poor execution, inadequate oversight, and low levels of citizen participation still exist (Khadka, 2020; Adhikari, 2022). Research conducted in district administration offices such as Dhading and Ilam, for example, revealed that while the charter improved service transparency, its grievance procedures and enforcement capabilities were not fully utilized (Shrestha, 2017; Adhikari, 2022). Similar to this, individuals were frequently unaware of the requirements of their Citizen Charters and they were frequently poorly exhibited in rural health and administrative facilities (Gurung et al., 2018). Examining the District Administration Office (DAO) Dolakha in light of this provides a crucial opportunity to determine if the Citizen Charter has actually enhanced service delivery or if structural flaws still restrict its efficacy.

In Nepal, the Citizen Charter was implemented as a mechanism for governance reform with the goal of improving public service delivery's accountability, transparency, and citizen satisfaction (Acharya, 2018; Khadka, 2020). All government agencies, including District Administration Offices (DAOs), are required by the Good Governance Act of 2007 to display charters that clearly outline their services, protocols, and accountable personnel (Dhakal, 2019). Theoretically, this project should ensure prompt service delivery, lessen bureaucratic red tape, and empower citizens with awareness of their rights (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

Multiple research, however, show a contradicting reality in practice. Even with their widespread adoption, Citizen Charters frequently continue to be symbolic documents rather than useful instruments for accountability (Shrestha, 2017; Adhikari, 2022). Many residents are either unaware of the charter or find the material unavailable since it is unclear and poorly disseminated, according to research (Gurung et al., 2018). Furthermore, service providers usually fall short of the standards stated, even when citizens are aware of them, which results in ongoing delays, corruption, and discontent (Khadka, 2020). Thus, while the Citizen Charter in Nepalese DAOs, including Dolakha, is intended to strengthen governance and improve service delivery, the gap between its policy intentions and

implementation realities raises critical concerns that necessitate empirical investigation. In light of this, the study's goals are to evaluate the Citizen Charter's overall effect on service delivery in the District Administration Office, Dolakha, determine whether services are provided within the timeframes outlined in the charter, and determine whether it can be used to improve service delivery through more efficient grievance redress procedures and procedural clarity.

2. Literature Review

The New Public Management (NPM) tenets of efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness in the provision of public services serve as the conceptual foundation for the Citizen Charter. (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In essence, it is a public document that clearly tells citizens about the services provided, the amount of time needed, the accountable officials, and the procedures for resolving grievances. (Khadka, 2020). By increasing openness and decreasing information asymmetry, it is intended to empower citizens and, in theory, constitute a social contract between the people and the government. (Joshi & Moore, 2004) By guaranteeing citizens' right to information and establishing performance standards for service providers, scholars contend that Citizen Charters also promote administrative responsibility (Acharya, 2018; Dwivedi, 2006). Therefore, fundamentally speaking, the Citizen Charter is seen as a governance reform tool meant to improve citizen-state relations rather than only an informational tool.

The usefulness of the Citizen Charter is frequently questioned in light of its actual implementation, notwithstanding these theoretical assurances. According to certain research, the Charter increases citizen trust in government institutions, decreases bureaucratic delays, and improves procedural clarity (Shrestha, 2017; Adhikari, 2022). Others point out that because of inadequate execution, a lack of oversight, and low public awareness, Citizen Charters in many developing nations including Nepal tend to remain more symbolic than practical. (Gurung et al., 2018; World Bank, 2012). Conceptually, this disparity highlights the conflict between the facts of public administration's inadequate institutional capability and the normative aspirations of effective governance (Hood, 1991; Dhakal, 2019). The effectiveness of the Citizen Charter ultimately rests on efficient enforcement, public participation, and administrative responsibility, even though it reflects the principles of contemporary administration, according to a conceptual examination of the document.

The idea of a citizen charter includes a number of important elements that work together to enhance the provision of public services. First and foremost, the existence of a Citizen Charter is essential because it guarantees that residents have official records regarding the services provided, accountable officials, and grievance procedures—all of which

are vital for accountability and transparency (Khadka, 2020; Acharya, 2018; Shrestha, 2017). Citizens cannot effectively use their rights in the absence of an accessible charter, making the initiative essentially symbolic. Second, the charter's explicit service standards are essential for eliminating uncertainty and guaranteeing that the public is aware of service protocols, deadlines, and quality requirements. Clearly defined standards enhance administrative accountability by allowing citizens to evaluate whether service providers adhere to the promised norms (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Dhakal, 2019; Hood, 1991). Thirdly, information accessibility is necessary to guarantee that all people, including those from under-represented groups, can access and understand the charter's contents. Language, format, and placement are all aspects of accessibility that have a direct impact on citizen empowerment and the charter's efficacy as a tool for governance. (Gurung et al., 2018; World Bank, 2012; Joshi & Moore, 2004). Fourthly, timely and accurate information is essential because it fosters citizen trust and makes service delivery more effective. Confusion, discontent, and a decline in the legitimacy of public institutions can result from outdated or inaccurate information. (Adhikari, 2022; Dwivedi, 2006; Khadka, 2020). Campaigns to raise public knowledge of the Citizen Charter's existence and contents are also required. Workshops, press releases, and public notifications are examples of awareness campaigns that assist close the gap between the creation of policies and citizen participation, guaranteeing that the charter serves as a useful instrument rather than merely a symbolic declaration. (Shrestha, 2017; Khadka, 2020). The Citizen Charter's conceptual underpinnings are formed by these elements taken together, emphasising that its efficacy is contingent upon not only formal acceptance but also on accurate communication, accessibility, and proactive citizen engagement.

A Citizen Charter's efficacy is frequently assessed using a number of important criteria that represent the calibre of public service provision. Efficiency is the ability of administrative offices to provide services within the allotted time periods while making the most use of available resources, reducing delays and unnecessary steps in the process (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Responsiveness highlights how promptly and suitably service providers address the needs and grievances of the public, demonstrating the flexibility and client-focused nature of public administration. (Hood, 1991; Khadka, 2020). A crucial result is citizen satisfaction, which gauges how well services satisfy the requirements and expectations of the general public and is impacted by elements including accessibility, punctuality, and service quality (Gurung et al., 2018; Shrestha, 2017). Transparency empowers citizens and fosters trust in public institutions by ensuring that administrative procedures are open, service standards are communicated clearly, and information is readily available (Acharya, 2018; Dwivedi, 2006). Lastly, the efficiency of the grievance redress procedures outlined in the Citizen Charter is demonstrated by the

decline in complaints; effective complaint handling not only fixes specific problems but also raises the standard and accountability of services generally (Adhikari, 2022; World Bank, 2012). When combined, these elements offer a thorough conceptual framework for evaluating how Citizen Charters affect public service delivery and government.

In public administration, the New Public Management (NPM) theory places a strong emphasis on effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability, and citizen-centric service delivery.(Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). This idea states that administrative reforms, such enacting a Citizen Charter, function as independent variables with the goal of enhancing service delivery. Efficiency, responsiveness, citizen happiness, transparency, and the decrease in complaints are the dependent variables in this situation. According to NPM, public institutions can improve service results by implementing clear service standards, easily available information, and grievance resolution procedures (as outlined in a Citizen Charter)(Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Khadka, 2020).The establishment of a Citizen Charter also improves public confidence and accountability, according to empirical research conducted in Nepalese District Administration Offices, confirming the theoretical relationship between independent and dependent variables(Shrestha, 2017; Gurung et al., 2018).The interaction between the government (principal) and its administrative personnel (agents) in providing public services is explained by the principal-agent theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Bardhan, 2002). The independent variable in this concept is a public Charter, which serves as an institutional mechanism to match agent incentives with public expectations. Reduction of administrative delays, management of grievances, timely service delivery, and improved citizen satisfaction are examples of outcomes that are dependent variables. Agents are more likely to execute in line with public expectations when they are given clear instructions, performance criteria, and accountability procedures, according to the notion. (Hood, 1991; Adhikari, 2022). According to research, Citizen Charters in Nepal reduce agency issues by outlining roles and performance expectations, which enhances the quality of services. (Khadka, 2020; Shrestha, 2017).

3. Methodology

This study employs a **case study approach** to examine the impact of the Citizen Charter on service delivery at the **District Administration Office, Dolakha**. A **quantitative research design** will be adopted, and data will be collected from citizens who have utilized the services of the office using **structured questionnaires**. **purposive sample of 45 respondents**, including 35 service seekers from passport, citizenship, and new organization registration departments, and 10 service providers (4 gazette and 6 non-gazette officers).

Table 1: Time taken to get services from DAO

Time taken	No. of Respondents	Percentage
As specified in CC	9	26
A little longer time than specified	21	60
Too long time than the specified time	5	14
Total	35	100

The table shows that only 26% of services were delivered within the time specified in the Citizen Charter, while 60% took slightly longer and 14% took significantly longer than the specified time. This indicates that most services experienced delays, although the majority were delivered within a reasonable timeframe.

Table 2. Satisfaction with time taken

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	26	74
Dissatisfied	9	26
Total	35	100

The table indicates that 74% of respondents were satisfied with the services provided, while 26% expressed dissatisfaction. This suggests that despite some delays in service delivery, overall citizen satisfaction remained high.

Table 3. Knowledge about CC

Knowledge	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	43
No	20	57
Total	35	100

The table shows that 43% of respondents were aware of the Citizen Charter, whereas 57% were not. This indicates a need for improved outreach to increase citizen awareness of the Charter.

Table 4. Knowledge about content of CC

Level of knowledge	Frequency	Percent
Absolutely	4	27
Partly	11	73
Total	15	100

The table shows that among those aware of the Citizen Charter, only 27% had full Knowledge of its contents, while 73% had partial knowledge. This highlights the need For more comprehensive information dissemination to ensure citizens fully understand the Charter.

Table 5: Adequate Information to Citizens

Statements	No. of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	7	70
Partly Agree	3	30
Total	10	100

The table indicates that 70% of respondents strongly agreed and 30% partly agreed that they were adequately informed about the services. This suggests that most citizens who were aware of the Citizen Charter felt reasonably well-informed.

Table 6. Lodge a Complaint for Not Delivering Service

Lodge Complaint	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	13	37
No	22	63

The table shows that only 37% of respondents lodged complaints, while 63% did not. This indicates that the majority of citizens did not use the grievance mechanism, Suggesting underutilization or possible barriers in the complaint process.

Table 7. Outcome of Complaint

Statements	No. of respondent	Percentage
Yes, I got service	9	32
No, I did not	19	68
Total	28	100

The table shows that only 32% of respondents who lodged complaints received the requested services, while 68% did not. This highlights inefficiencies in the grievance redressal system and the need for improved responsiveness.

Table 8. Checking Grievance Box Regularly

Statements	Percentage
Strongly agree	20
Partly agree	70
Partly disagree	10

The table indicates that 20% of respondents strongly agreed, 70% partly agreed, and 10% partly disagreed with the statement. This suggests that while most respondents held a positive view, a small proportion expressed some disagreement.

Table 9. *Grievance-System is Just for Formality*

Statements	Percent
strongly agree	20
partly agree	10
partly disagree	10
strongly disagree	60

The table shows that 20% of respondents strongly agreed, 10% partly agreed, 10% partly disagreed, and 60% strongly disagreed with the statement. This indicates that a majority of respondents expressed strong disagreement, highlighting a significant negative perception.

Finding

The statistical findings from DAO, Dolakha indicate that while the Citizen Charter has improved information provision and citizen perceptions, gaps remain in service delivery and awareness. Only 26% of services were delivered within the specified time, yet 74% of respondents were satisfied, suggesting that citizens may tolerate minor delays if services are generally reliable. Awareness of the Charter was limited (43%), and only 27% had full knowledge of its content, highlighting the need for better outreach. Although most citizens felt adequately informed (70% strongly agreed), only 37% lodged complaints, and just 32% of those received services, showing inefficiencies in the grievance system. The logic here is that while the Citizen Charter increases transparency and guides expectations, its effectiveness depends on both citizen awareness and the responsiveness of administrative mechanisms.

Discussion

Grounded in New Public Management (Hood, 1991; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), Principal-Agent theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Bardhan, 2002), and Good Governance perspectives (Dwivedi, 2006; Dhakal, 2019), the Dolakha DAO study shows that Citizen Charters (CCs) enhance *procedural clarity* and perceived transparency but remain weak in *accountability enforcement*. Although only 26% of respondents received services within the stipulated time, 74% still expressed satisfaction, reflecting the NPM notion that predictability and process clarity can offset minor delays (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). From a PA lens, while CCs reduce information asymmetry, weak grievance uptake (37% complaints lodged) and low resolution rates (68% unresolved) reveal symbolic compliance and soft sanctions, echoing findings of Shrestha (2017), Adhikari (2022), and Khadka (2020). Similarly, though staff view grievance systems as active, citizens perceive them as ineffective an accountability perception gap. The GG framework stresses that transparency without awareness is inadequate, and Dolakha's low CC knowledge (57% unaware, only 27%

fully understood contents) undermines equitable access (Gurung et al., 2018; World Bank, 2012). Therefore, even though CCs in Dolakha show that NPM can increase transparency, they don't live up to PA's contractual accountability or GG's participatory inclusivity. This suggests that in order to turn CCs from symbolic displays into useful accountability tools, there is a need for more robust enforcement mechanisms, multi-channel grievance systems, and proactive awareness campaigns.

Conclusion and Implication

The study emphasizes that while Citizen Charters contribute significantly to enhancing transparency, procedural clarity, and predictability in public service delivery, their overall impact is constrained by weak enforcement, low public awareness, and inadequate grievance redress systems. Although citizens benefit from clearer processes, the lack of strong accountability measures and minimal public engagement hinder the charters from realizing their full potential. As a result, they often serve a symbolic purpose rather than driving real institutional change. To make Citizen Charters truly effective, the study suggests that policymakers and administrators must focus on meaningful implementation rather than just their display. This involves launching accessible and multilingual awareness campaigns, ensuring grievance mechanisms are functional and responsive, and introducing strong monitoring and evaluation systems to hold officials accountable. By prioritizing these reforms, Citizen Charters can evolve from symbolic tools into powerful instruments for accountability, trust-building, and better public service delivery.

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Ethical Concern or Conflict of Interest

Regarding the publication of this study, the author states that there is no conflict of interest. This study was carried out only for scholarly reasons.

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