

PANCHAYAT CITIZEN CHARTER (*MERI PANCHAYAT, MERA ADHIKAAR - JAN SEVAAYEIN HAMAARE DWAAR CAMPAIGN*)

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Abstract

Panchayats implement many development programmes and provide basic public services to the citizens in their respective areas. All public services are paid for by individual citizens, either directly or indirectly through taxes. Therefore, the question arises - How to make Panchayats appreciate the needs of the citizens and improve the quality of public services? The answer probably lies in the 'Citizen Charter.' The citizens have the right to expect a particular quality of service that is responsive to their needs and Panchayats are obliged to provide the required services efficiently at a reasonable cost. Thus, the Citizen Charter is a practical proposition in terms of involving and motivating the elected representatives, Panchayat officials and the citizens to work out and adopt a more responsive Panchayat set-up with increased transparency and efficient service delivery as per citizens' needs. Panchayat Citizens' Charter preserves the trust between the citizens and Panchayats, helps to make the citizens aware of their rights and also makes Panchayats accountable to citizens.

Keywords: Panchayat Citizen Charter, Right to Public Services, Grievance Redressal.

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Panchayat Citizen Charter

The document entitled 'Model Citizen Charter for Panchayats' published by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) in June 2021 states that the purpose of a Citizen Charter is to empower the citizens in relation to public services and improve service quality along the lines of citizens' expectations. The Citizen Charter brings professionalism to the Panchayat's functioning and helps to reach out to all sections of the community without any discrimination.

- The key objectives of the Panchayat Citizen Charter are as follows:
- To make the citizens aware of the standards of public services provided by Panchayats in terms of quantity, quality and timeframe.
- To provide citizens equal access to the services to which they are entitled.
- To ensure transparency in the rules/procedures/operations of Panchayats.
- To make Panchayats accountable to the citizens.

To provide for grievance redressal mechanism when expected standards in service delivery are not met.

Citizen Charter Campaign

There have been missing institutionalised standards for the delivery of public services at the grassroots level. Therefore, there always appears to be an unending struggle between the governmental systems, its capability to deliver, and the actual needs of the citizens. Though having recognised the need to govern and place the common requirements and aspirations of the people on the highest priority for service delivery, progressive governments have found that the governing process itself comes in the way of their attempts to establish a positive relationship with its citizens. With the advent of the information age and the emerging knowledge regime, the citizen is no longer satisfied with services that can be delivered

only by frequent visits to government offices, standing for hours in long queues, or after time-consuming lengthy processes.

In order to establish a service quality paradigm, with an intent to standardise the delivery of Services across the Panchayats, setting service standards, the time limit that the people can expect to be served, mechanisms for redressing grievances, and a provision for unbiased scrutiny by citizens, a Model Citizen charter was released by Hon'ble Minister, Panchayati Raj, Rural Development & Agriculture and Farmer Welfare, on 04th June 2021.



This will, on one hand, help to standardise the delivery of services across the Panchayats, setting service standards, the time limit that the people can expect to be served, mechanisms for redressing grievances, and a provision for unbiased scrutiny by citizens, making the Panchayats and their elected representatives directly accountable to the people, on the other hand.

Subsequently, the Citizen Charter campaign under the aegis of *Meri Panchayat, Mera Adhikaar-Jan Sevaayein Hamare Dwaar* was carried out from 01st July to 30th September 2021 with the intent of making the role of Panchayats in service delivery meaningful and fulfilling.

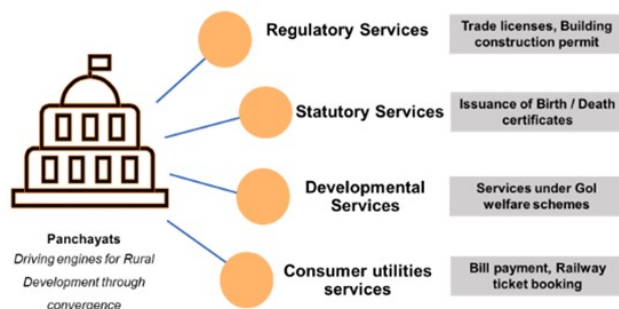
Across 27 States/UTs, 2,15,628 Gram Panchayats have now finalised their Citizen Charter, offering over 900 Services spanning various sectors, viz. health and family welfare, drinking water & sanitation, public welfare, employment, etc.



Service Delivery by Panchayats

Ultimate aim to provide Ease of Living and quality of life at grassroots

- Panchayats to act as centre of delivery of services
- Panchayat Bhawans, computer and connectivity as enablers



>900 Services already being offered across the Panchayats in 30 States/UTs; Role of Panchayats to be mainstreamed in Online Service Delivery

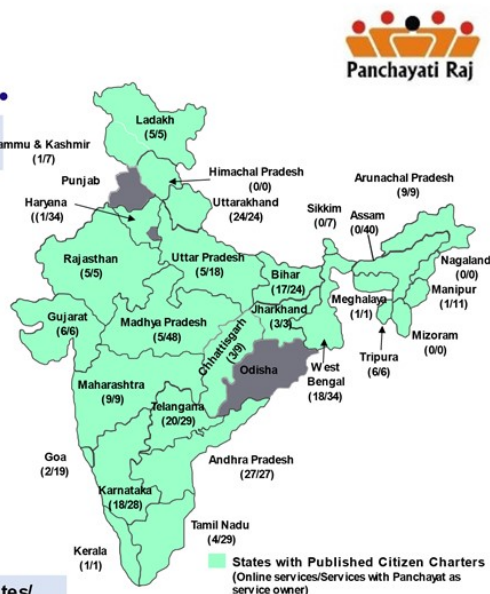


Table 1

Details of Services Offered by Gram Panchayats

S. No.	State/UT	Gram Panchayats (incl. TLBs)	No. GPs with Citizen Charter Approved	Percentage	Services being delivered	Services delivered online
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	70	70	100%	24	0
2	Andhra Pradesh	13325	10386	78%	45	27
3	Arunachal Pradesh	2108	410	19%	38	9
4	Assam	2662	2197	83%	42	0
5	Bihar	8181	7011	86%	23	9
6	Chhattisgarh	11656	11340	97%	33	3
7	Goa	191	181	95%	19	2
8	Gujarat	14552	11914	82%	56	56
9	Haryana	6223	6211	100%	34	1
10	Himachal Pradesh	3615	3615	100%	8	5
11	Jammu & Kashmir	4291	2361	55%	23	1

Contd...

S. No.	State/UT	Gram Panchayats (incl. TLBs)	No. GPs with Citizen Charter Approved	Percentage	Services being delivered	Services delivered online
12	Jharkhand	4345	4318	99%	40	19
13	Karnataka	5953	5820	98%	36	18
14	Kerala	941	941	100%	1	1
15	Ladakh	193	70	36%	47	5
16	Lakshadweep	10	0	0%	0	0
17	Madhya Pradesh	23017	17296	75%	121	5
18	Maharashtra	27900	24438	88%	9	9
19	Manipur	3812	2433	64%	31	1
20	Meghalaya	6814	276	4%	13	1
21	Mizoram	840	713	85%	10	0
22	Nagaland	1292	1240	96%	12	0
23	Odisha	6794	0	0%	0	0
24	Puducherry	108	0	0%	0	0
25	Punjab	13241	0	0%	0	0
26	Rajasthan	11250	11247	100%	5	5
27	Sikkim	199	184	92%	7	0
28	Tamil Nadu	12525	10643	85%	44	4
29	Telangana	12769	12769	100%	45	22
30	The Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu	38	23	61%	25	2
31	Tripura	1178	1126	96%	6	6
32	Uttar Pradesh	57712	54782	95%	33	5
33	Uttarakhand	7795	7772	100%	48	28
34	West Bengal	3339	3212	96%	75	18
TOTAL		268939	214999	80%	953	262

States have already undertaken various initiatives towards service delivery at the Gram Panchayat level. The details are provided in the table in the following pages.

West Bengal	Yes (Through janma-mrityutathya.wb.gov.in)		Yes (Through janma-mrityutathya.wb.gov.in)		Yes (Through edistrict)		Yes (Through wbprdgms.in/onlinebuildingplan.php)		Yes (Through rgmb.gov.in/MARREG_Portal/MARREG_Home.aspx)	
Uttarakhand	Yes (Through Apur Sarkar)		Yes (Through Apur Sarkar)							
Uttar Pradesh	Yes (Through CRS)		Yes (Through CRS)		Yes (Through edistrict)				Yes (Through edistrict)	
Tamil Nadu			By Revenue Dept.				Yes (Through onlineppa.tn.gov.in)		Yes (Through edistrict portal)	
Rajasthan	Yes		Yes						Yes	
Odisha		By Health Dept.			By Revenue Dept.		By Development Authority			By BDO
Manipur	Yes (only at 161 GPs in the valley)		Yes (only at 161 GPs in the valley)			Yes		Yes		Yes
Maharashtra	Yes (Through CRS)		Yes (Through CRS)		Yes (Through Maha e-Gram)		Through T&CP dept.		Yes (Through Maha e-Gram)	
Madhya Pradesh	Yes (Through MPOnline)		Yes (Through MPOnline)		Yes (Through MPOnline)		Yes (Through Panchayat Darpan)	Yes	Yes (Through MPOnline)	
Karnataka		Yes (By Planning Dept.)		Yes (By Planning Dept.)			Yes (Through Bapuji Sewa Kendra)			Yes (By Revenue Dept.)
Jharkhand	Yes (JharSeva)		Yes (JharSeva)						Yes (Through JharSeva)	
Himachal Pradesh	Yes (Through edistrict)	Yes	Yes (Through edistrict)	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes (Through edistrict)	Yes
Haryana										
Chhattisgarh	Yes		Yes			Yes		Yes		Yes
Bihar	Yes (By Planning Depart)		Yes (By Planning Dept.)		Yes (By GA Dept.)					
Assam								Yes		
Mode of Delivery	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline
Services	Birth Certificate		Death Certificate		Residence Certificate		Construction Permit		Marriage Certificate	

Contd...

West Bengal		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes (Through prdgriev- ance.in/)			Yes		Yes (Through prdgriev- ance.in/)	
Uttarakhand													
Uttar Pradesh		Yes	Yes			Yes		Yes		Yes			Yes
Tamil Nadu	Yes (Through vptax.tnrd .tn.gov.in)			Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes (Through tnrd.tn.go v.in)	Yes (Through tnrd.tn.go v.in)		Yes (Through tnrd.tn.go v.in)	
Rajasthan					Yes								
Odisha				Yes	Yes			Yes		Yes			Yes
Manipur				Yes	Yes			Yes		Yes			Yes
Maharashtra	Yes (Through Maha e- Gram)		Yes (Through Grievance Redressal system)				Yes (Through Grievance Redressal system)		Yes (Through Grievance Redressal system)	Yes (Through Grievance Redressal system)		Yes (Through Grievance Redressal system)	
Madhya Pradesh	Yes (Through Panchayat Darpan)		Yes		Yes			Yes		Yes			Yes
Karnataka	Yes (Through Bapuji Sewa Kendra)			Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes (Through Bapuji Sewa Kendra)	Yes		Yes	Yes
Jharkhand													
Himachal Pradesh		Yes		Yes	Yes (Through edistrict)	Yes		Yes					
Haryana			Yes					Yes					Yes
Chhattisgarh		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes
Bihar					Yes (By RD Dept.)					Yes			Yes
Assam			Yes		Yes								
Mode of Delivery	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online	Offline	Online
Services	Assessment of Property Tax		Application for sanction of IHHL		Issue of MGNREGA job card		Individual Household waste collec- tion & trans- portation		Maintenance of drinking water (Minor Repairs)		Repair of Handpumps		Repair/ Maintenance of community toilets

Other services offered at Gram Panchayat Level

State	Service Details
Himachal Pradesh	1. Life certificate-Offline 2. Single Woman Certificate-Offline 3. Widow Certificate-Offline 4. Parivar Register-Online (Through edistrict) 5. BPL Certificate-Online (Through edistrict) 6. Character Certificate-Offline 7. Single Girl Child Certificate-Offline
Karnataka	1. Trade Licence- Online (Through Bapuji Sewa Kendra) 2. Occupancy Certificate- Online (Through Bapuji Sewa Kendra) 3. New Water Connection- Online (Through Bapuji Sewa Kendra)
Maharashtra	1. No Dues Certificate- Online (Through Maha e-Gram) 2. Old Age Certificate for Pension- Online (Through Maha e-Gram)
Manipur	No Objection Certificate- Offline
Uttarakhand	Family Register- Online (Through Apuni Sarkar)
West Bengal	Trade Registration New & renewal- Online (Through silpasathi.wb.gov.in)

The Process of Formulating Panchayat Citizen Charter

Each Panchayat has to prepare its Citizen Charter separately. Before preparing the Charter, the Panchayat needs to list out various services provided to the citizens and the criteria or conditions to be fulfilled for getting a service. In this regard, the Panchayat needs to obtain the views of the Panchayat Secretary and other officers of the line departments concerned. Citizen Charter encompasses only those services which are delivered by the Panchayat regularly. Simultaneously, the Panchayat also needs to decide the fee leviable for particular services and the timeframe within which the service will be delivered. The Citizen Charter has to include the following information:

- Preamble of the Citizen Charter
- Vision and Mission Statements of the Panchayat
- List of Public Services provided by the Panchayat

- The service delivery standards – persons responsible for providing the service, quality and timeframe
- Manner of Approval & validity period of Citizen Charter
- The procedure for obtaining service
- Accountability and transparency measures
- Mechanism for grievance redressal if the promised service is not provided in a specified time.

Preamble of the Panchayat Citizen Charter

The Citizen Charter of a Panchayat starts with a preamble giving commitment to the citizens through a resolution of the Panchayats about the quality of services. The MoPR, in the document 'Model Citizen Charter for Panchayats' published in June 2021, has suggested the following model preamble for the Panchayat Citizen Charter.

"We, the Elected Representatives and Officials of Gram Panchayat, realizing the importance of transparent and effective delivery of public services for sustainable development as well as the need for continuous innovation, solemnly resolve to

Recognize the relevance of inclusive and accountable Local Self-Governments in delivery of services.

Incorporate diverse views when designing and delivering services

Ensure timely delivery and quality delivery of services; enhancing citizen service experiences.

Improve public service delivery by embracing innovation, leveraging e- Governance & ICT tools.

In furtherance of our resolve, we adopt and give to ourselves this Citizen's Charter".

Vision and Mission of Panchayats

Once the Panchayat determines to prepare its Citizen Charter, the first priority would be to articulate clear statements of the 'Vision and Mission' of the Panchayat. The vision implies ultimate direction in which the Panchayat seeks to move. Clarity of vision enables the Panchayat to plan and prepare itself for achieving specific outcomes, for instance, timely delivery of services for empowering citizens and promoting the inclusive and sustainable growth of rural India.

The mission statement provides the specific objectives which drive the Panchayat in tune with the vision. Mission defines the fundamental purpose of Panchayat describing WHAT it does; WHO it serves and HOW it delivers services to achieve its vision. For instance, improving quality of life through efficient and effective service delivery mechanisms for Panchayat residents, specifically for the vulnerable and marginalised sections of society.

Public Services Provided by Panchayats

The second step in formulating the Citizen Charter is to identify the list of services provided by the Panchayat. The elected representatives and staff need to be involved extensively in deciding the services to be included in the Citizen Charter to help ensure their ownership and support for the results. The public services are usually associated with the government and offered to people living within its region. At the local government level, public services support socio-economic

development, including environmental sustainability. The Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution lists 29 functions to be delivered by the Panchayats. The services delivered by the Gram Panchayats can be classified into the following categories.

- a. **Issue of Certificates/Licences and Permissions:** These are regulatory services that include the issue of trade licences, permissions and other certificates.
- b. **Administrative & Governance-related services:** Conducting Gram Sabha, Assessment, levy and collection of taxes and non-taxes.
- c. **Development-related Services:** Creating infrastructure such as roads, and buildings, and provision of services related to health, education and nutrition.
- d. **Civic Services:** Provision of drinking water supply, sanitation, street lighting, community assets, etc.
- e. **Public Health Related Services:** Sanitation and making Panchayats ODF.
- f. **Welfare-related Services:** Selection of beneficiaries for sanction of benefits under various social security schemes.

Panchayat Service Standards

The service standards may cover the entire range of service provision. The important aspect of Panchayat Service Standards is the element of

'time for responding.' This may be the waiting time for the citizens before getting the service, or the period within which the citizens can expect a reply to a service request/application, etc. Therefore, the time aspect has to be included at the time of drafting the service standards. The standards must be concrete and where possible measurable. For example, a complaint about street lighting has to be resolved within two workdays. The citizens must be able to verify whether standards are met or not when actual service is provided. The following information is provided under service standards:

- a. Name of the service
- b. Details of the service (including beneficiaries and eligible persons)
- c. Timeframe to deliver the service
- d. Name and contact details of the persons in the Panchayat responsible for providing the service.

A model format of service standards of Gram Panchayats is shown below.

S. No.	Name of Service	Documents to be Furnished	Fee Payable for the Service (Rs.)	Time Limit for the Service Provision	Name of Designated Officer to Provide the Service	Name of Appellant Authority for Grievance Redressal
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
n						

Approval & Validity Period of Citizen Charter

A Gram Panchayat, after formulating its Citizen Charter, has to give it wide publicity by mentioning where and within how many days the objections or any corrections can be submitted. Considering the objections and suggestions of the people, the final Charter is approved in the meeting of the Gram Sabha through a resolution and then published. The approved Charter is displayed in the local language at all prominent places. The Gram Panchayat is expected to update the Citizen Charter once every year to bring in suitable changes based on the experience during the previous year and also to include more services and reduce the time limit in rendering the services. A Citizen Charter prepared and published by a Gram Panchayat remains in force till the expiry of the term of the present elected body, and thereafter, till a Citizen Charter is prepared and published by the newly constituted body.

Procedure for Service Delivery

To obtain a service listed in the Charter, the eligible citizens may apply to the designated officer along with the essential documents and also pay the prescribed fee, if any. The designated officer, upon receipt of the request, will record the details in a register, assign a serial number and issue an acknowledgement to the applicant indicating the probable date by which the service will be rendered. If there is any deficit in the application and the attached documents, the same needs to be mentioned clearly in the acknowledgement. The formats of prescribed applications may be made available at the Panchayat office and also uploaded in the citizen sections of e-GramSwaraj portal.

The designated officer of the Panchayat has an obligation to render a service to the eligible applicant within the given time. On receipt of an application, the designated officer will either provide service or reject the application within the

stipulated period. In case of rejection, the reasons for not providing the service are to be intimated in writing. If a service cannot be rendered within the time limit, the reasons for delay and the revised time limit have to be intimated to the applicant. If an applicant does not get the promised service in the stipulated time, he/she may prefer an appeal with the appellant authority who shall personally examine and arrange for the disposal of the request.

Right to Public Service Delivery Act

The Right to Public Service Delivery Act (RTPS) is an important legislation for the purpose of improving the quality of public service delivery to citizens. So far, about 21 States have passed such Acts which provide for the establishment of an efficient, transparent, and accountable public service delivery system. The RTPS Act has specific provisions that if the government agency fails to provide specified public services to the citizens within the given time, the officer concerned would be liable to pay penalty to the citizens. By ensuring time-bound service delivery, the Act envisages improving the overall quality of life (QoL) for citizens. The following are the key features of the Right to Public Service Delivery Act:

- a. **To define the services provided by Panchayats:** The Right to Public Service Delivery Act lists out the public services that are provided by Government agencies such as issuing of certificates, licences, permits, and delivery of social welfare schemes.

- b. **Timely delivery of Public Service:** The Act mandates that all public services covered under it must be delivered within a specified time limit. The time for service delivery varies from service to service, but it should be within 15 to 30 days.
- c. **Provision for Penalty:** For delay in services, the Act provides for penalties to be imposed on the designated officer who is responsible for providing service. The penalty, though it may be a nominal amount, varies from State to State. The penalty amount is usually recovered from the salary of the officer concerned.
- d. **Accountability & Transparency:** The RTPS Act emphasises transparency and accountability in public service delivery. It mandates all government agencies to maintain records of the services provided and make them accessible to the public.
- e. **Redressal of Grievances:** The Act also provides for a grievance redressal mechanism. If any citizen files a complaint owing to delay or denial of services, the designated officer concerned would be responsible for the redressal of grievances.

Panchayat Citizens Charter vs. Right to Public Service Delivery Act

The Right to Public Service Delivery Act and the Panchayat Citizens Charter have similar objectives for improving the quality of public service delivery. The key differences between these areas are follows.

S. No.	Dimension	Panchayat Citizens Charter	Right to Public Service Delivery Act
1	Scope	The Panchayat Citizens Charter outlines the services provided by the Panchayats and the time limit within which the services will be rendered.	The RTPS Act mandates timely delivery of public services across all government departments, including Panchayats.
2	Legal Framework	Panchayat Citizen Charter is prepared voluntarily to ensure transparent & accountable public service delivery. It does not have any legal backing.	This Act is a legally binding legislation that provides citizens with a legal right to demand timely and efficient delivery of public services.
3	Penal Provision	Generally, there is no penal provision in the Panchayat Citizen Charter.	There is a provision for penal action on the officer concerned in case the service is delayed or denied.

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S. No.	Dimension	Panchayat Citizens Charter	Right to Public Service Delivery Act
4	Grievance Redressal	Compulsorily, the Citizen Charter has provision for grievance redressal.	The RTPS Act has a more comprehensive provision for mechanism for addressing the grievances within a given time.
5	Service Coverage	Panchayat Citizen Charter covers only the services provided by the Panchayat.	The RTPS Act covers a range of public services provided by all government departments.

Aligning the Panchayat Citizen Charters with State Public Service Delivery Act

It is desirable to align the Panchayat Citizen Charters with the Right to Public Service Delivery Act of the respective State. This will give clarity to the citizens about the services the Panchayat will provide within a timeframe, subject to fulfilling the eligibility and entitlement. The charters should identify the designated officer responsible for delivering each service and the consequences for not delivering the service within the specified timeframe. The charters should have provisions to collect feedback from the citizens on the quality of services provided by the Panchayat for further improvements. An effective grievance redressal mechanism should be put in place in the Panchayats to allow citizens to file complaints and grievances for redressal. This mechanism should be transparent, accessible, and responsive to the needs of the citizens.

Effectiveness of Citizen Charter

The office of Gram Panchayat is a place where the elected body takes decisions for the delivery of basic services as enshrined under Article 243G of the Constitution of India. Residents come to Gram Panchayat to get licences, permissions and certificates, to ask for work under MGNREGA and other entitlements. Therefore, the functionaries of the Panchayats should be prompt while dealing with the service requests of citizens. The effectiveness of the Citizen Charter can be examined from three perspectives.

1. Standards of Services
2. Citizen Empowerment
3. Accountability and Transparency

Standards of Services: As a consequence of publishing the Citizen Charter by the Panchayat, the citizens expect efficient delivery of services which are:

1. Properly evolved and explicitly adopted with a commitment to implement it.
2. The standards should invariably include
 - a. Courtesy and helpfulness from staff.
 - b. Accuracy in accordance with statutory entitlements.
 - c. A commitment to prompt action in terms of target response time.
 - d. A clear presumption that standards will be progressively improved as services become more routine-based.

Citizen Empowerment: A citizen feels empowered when he realises that there is an elected Panchayat, which is for the people in which he can play his part as a member of Gram Sabha. Therefore, the Panchayat should:

- a. Build the confidence of the citizens that they will get the required services promptly.
- b. Inform the citizens what to do and whom to approach, for redressal of grievances.

Accountability and Transparency: Public accountability includes responsive public service delivery to the satisfaction of the citizens. The Gram Panchayats, as elected bodies, are trustees in the eyes of the public and nothing infuses confidence in the citizens as prompt service

delivery. The quality of service delivery depends on motivation, knowledge, skill, and availability of resources. The Panchayats can ensure satisfactory quality of services when accountability and transparency are built into its functioning. There should be no secrecy about how public services are run. As part of accountability and transparency, the citizens should know:

- a. What rules and procedures does the Panchayat follow in making available such services?
- b. Charges levied, if any, should be made known clearly and unambiguously.
- c. Names, designations, telephone numbers, etc., of those who are in charge of service provision should be clearly indicated.
- d. The availability of the services should suit the convenience of the citizen and not that of the Panchayat staff.
- e. Non-discrimination in service provision regardless of caste or sex.

Common Service Centre (CSC)

The MoPR has launched a Common Service Centre (CSC) scheme across the country for the establishment of ICT-enabled front-end service delivery outlets, which are to be co-located in Gram Panchayat Bhawans. The services offered through CSCs would give a major fillip to the service delivery ecosystem at local levels. The broad portfolio of services provided by CSCs includes a range of Panchayat services. The Panchayat should utilise the CSCs to create a digital Panchayat for delivering online citizen services.

Evaluating the implementation of Panchayat Citizen Charter

The implementation of Panchayat Citizen Charter needs to be evaluated from time to time to

check whether the charter is achieving the purpose for which it was prepared. This will ensure transparency and accountability in public service delivery. The following are a few measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the Panchayat Citizens Charter:

Citizen Feedback: The Panchayat needs to seek citizens' feedback to determine the effectiveness of the Citizen Charter. The tools for evaluation include Gram Sabha meetings, focus group discussions, online surveys, etc. The feedback provides insights into the quality and efficiency of public service delivery by the Panchayat and the satisfaction level of citizens.

Service Delivery Data: The Panchayat has to collect service delivery data from the citizens to analyse service effectiveness, such as the number and type of citizen services provided, the timelines in service provision, the percentage of service requests rejected and the average delays in meeting the service. This exercise will help the Panchayat to identify areas where improvement is required.

Performance Indicators: The Panchayat Citizen Charter should have clear targets and indicators to measure the performance in service delivery in terms of quality and timeliness and the level of satisfaction among citizens about the service provision. The performance indicators help the Panchayats to track the progress of service requests resolved.

Cost-effectiveness: One of the key factors to measure effective implementation of Panchayat Citizen Charter is to assess the cost-effectiveness of service delivery. For this, data is required about the service requests received and the services provided cost-effectively. Analysis of the cost of service delivery will help the Panchayat to locate the areas of economy measures that need to be adopted.

An example of how the 'Citizen Charter' should work:

If a citizen wants to obtain permission for the construction of a building from a Gram Panchayat.

- The Citizen Charter should indicate clearly the forms to be filled up, the documents to be furnished, the fee to be paid for issue of permission and the like.
- The names of officials responsible for providing the service should be clearly indicated.
- The Panchayat officials should be courteous when the applicant visits the Panchayat office to submit the application or enquires about the progress of the disposal.
- The Panchayat should have clearly laid out standards and procedures for processing the building permission application.
- A clear indication should be given as to whom to approach in case of difficulties or for getting grievances redressed.

Grievance Redressal

Despite the best efforts of a Panchayat, there may be discontent and complaints regarding the provision of public services. Hence, the Sarpanch and the designated officer responsible must be accessible to listen to the grievances and take prompt action to address the complaints. Timely grievance redressal reduces the discontent and also helps a Gram Panchayat to improve its functioning. The following are some of the mechanisms for grievance redressal at the Gram Panchayat level:

- a. Every Gram Panchayat should maintain a complaint register. Anyone who wants to register a complaint must have easy access to that register.
- b. Every complaint registered must be assigned a registration number and a dated acknowledgement of the complaint must be given to the complainant.
- c. A complaint-cum-suggestion box can also be installed outside the Panchayat office. This box must be opened on a weekly basis and complaints that are not anonymous have to be entered in the complaint register.
- d. The designated officer must inform the complainant of the action taken within 15 days of the date of registration of the complaint.

- e. The designated officer/appellant authority must review the progress of redressal of all complaints and take prompt remedial action.
- f. If a grievance registered cannot be redressed, then the Gram Panchayat shall forward the same to the higher level under intimation to the complainant.

Disposal of Complaints

If an applicant has a reason to believe that the designated officer of the Panchayat has not provided the services enlisted in the Citizen Charter, he/she has the right to file an appeal before the appellant authority within the stipulated time limit for redressal of grievance. In cases where a complainant is unable to make an appeal in writing, the Panchayat Secretary should render all reasonable assistance to the person by making an oral request to reduce the same in writing. The appellate officer may order the designated officer to provide the service within the specified period or may reject the appeal. An aggrieved appellant may prefer a second appeal against the decision of the appellate officer before the Reviewing Officer.

Case Studies - State-level Initiatives

A. Service delivery by Gram Panchayat, Karnataka - Bapuji Seva Kendra 2.0

Bapuji Seva Kendra is a unique initiative that was launched on 1st July 2016 by the Government of Karnataka under the RDPR department. Bapuji Seva Kendras were set up across all the Gram Panchayats in Karnataka offering different services largely from RD&PR, Revenue and other departments. In October 2020, services were also made available online through the Bapuji Seva Kendra web portal and the new BSK 2.0 portal aims to further smoothen the citizen interface and experience while availing the services.

Bapuji Seva Kendra 2.0 is, therefore, being launched with a lean application form and standardised processes with an aim to further smoothen the citizen interface and experience while availing the services and enabling decentralisation of Citizen Service Delivery at Gram Panchayats, making it more accessible, leading to reduced travel time, waiting time and hence cost-effective.

i. Citizens can easily access the government



service delivery facility online.

- ii. Citizens can download the certificates/ approvals required without visiting the Panchayat office.
- iii. Citizens can easily find the status of his/her application on the online portal.

BSK offers the following services where the department of RD&PR is the sole authority in provisioning these services from start to end. The MGNREGA-related services are currently facilitated through the Kayaka Mitra Application, which will be transitioned into BSK 2.0 in the next phase.

Property	Utilities	Business
1. Property Tax- 7,05,741	6. New Water Supply Connection- 6,874	11. Trade License- 2,25,746
2. Building Construction License- 2,69,559	7. Disconnection of Water Supply- 552	12. Permission for Establishment of Industrial/Agricultural Based production Unit- 984
3. Occupancy Certificate- 34,281	8. Maintenance of Drinking Water Supply- 25,12,139	13. Road Cutting Permission-155
4. Property Record (Form 9/11A)- 23,13,616	9. Maintenance of Street Lights- 25,38,552	14. No Objection Certificate- 3,86,556
5. Property Record (Form 11B)- 6,32,138	10. Maintenance of Village Sanitation- 17,50,413	

B. Integrated Local Government Management Information System (ILGMIS), Kerala

ILGMIS platform is designed to facilitate efficient and transparent governance in local self-government institutions (LSGIs). Key features and components of the ILGMIS platform in Kerala include:

- Citizen Services such as property tax payment, birth and death certificate issuance, etc.
- Finance and Accounting: financial management, budgeting, accounting, and revenue collection.
- Property Tax Management by efficiently property tax collection, assessment, and calculation
- Building Permit and Planning: Online building permit applications, scrutiny of plans, etc.
- E-Procurement: Online tendering, vendor registration, bid evaluation and contract management
- HR and Payroll Management: Employee data management, attendance tracking, etc.
- Grievance Redressal for timely resolution and feedback to the complainants.
- Management Information and Reporting for monitoring service delivery and financial performance.



Gram Panchayat Office in Aithirapally and Eraviperoor GPs in Kerala

C. Service Delivery by Village Secretariats, Andhra Pradesh

- The office of Gram Panchayat is termed as 'Village Secretariat.' Each Village Secretariat is provided with a Panchayat Secretary who functions as the Secretary/Convenor of the Village Secretariat.
- The Village Secretariats shall have a number of functional assistants working under the supervision of the Gram Panchayat and shall be responsible for aiding and assisting Gram Panchayat(s) in performing its functions.
- The Panchayat Secretary of the Village Secretariat acts as DDO (Drawing and

Disbursing Officer). The pay and allowances of all the staff of the Village Secretariat will be disbursed by her/him. The honorarium of Village Volunteers also will be paid by the Panchayat Secretary.

- Village Secretariats shall assist in the preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans for five years on the subjects delegated to them from time to time, as per the prescribed procedure.

The functionaries of the Village Secretariat shall prepare integrated annual plans using the PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques, duly capturing the felt needs and aspirations of the people, as per the prescribed procedure.



D. Smart Gram Sachivalaya, Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh only had 33,572 Gram Panchayats with dedicated Panchayat Bhawan buildings. 24,617 new Panchayat Bhawans have been constructed in the past two years, converging funds from the Central Finance Commission, State Finance Commission, RGSA and MGNREGA.



- All Panchayat Bhawans have been equipped with basic amenities like computers, internet, furniture, electricity, etc.
- These Panchayat Bhawans now act as Gram Sachivalayas/ Panchayat secretariat.
- With the CSCs collocated in the Panchayat Bhawans, they cater to the various requirements of the villagers
- Provided a dedicated resource in every Panchayat as Accountant cum Data Entry Operator called Panchayat Sahayak.
- High-speed internet connectivity has been envisaged to be provided to the village secretariats and a free high-speed Wi-Fi internet facility will be provided to the villagers



within a radius of 50 meters of the Gram Sachivalaya building.

- The Panchayat Sahayak is the designated Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE) in the Gram Sachivalaya (GS) performing the following duties:
 - ◆ To keep Gram Sachivalaya functional
 - ◆ To establish GS as a gateway to service delivery to citizens
 - ◆ To propel financial inclusion by providing services of BC Sakhi
 - ◆ To strengthen the documentation process including Online entry of eGS & GPDP
 - ◆ Execute all official works from Gram Sachivalaya
 - ◆ Geotagging of assets under SBM/Finance Commission
 - ◆ Provide all Social Services to the villagers



There are 216 specific services listed as the key role for VLE. CSCs offer services like issuing Birth Certificate, Death Certificate, Income certificate, etc., via VLEs (Panchayat Sahayak).

Conclusion & Recommendations

Since the establishment of Panchayati Raj system in the country, the Central and State Governments have taken several measures to make Gram Panchayats, a responsible administrative unit. The Panchayati Raj Institutes should now aspire to provide ease of Living and quality of life at the grassroots. Therefore, it becomes essential that the Panchayats now move into the role of service provider-cum-facilitator and start to foster better partnerships with the line departments, civil society and other service delivery stakeholders. Panchayats can play an important role by providing the services at the doorsteps of citizens, who otherwise would have to travel to the block or the nearest town to get the services. Hence, Panchayats would act as the centre of delivery of service and Panchayat Bhawans, manpower, computer and connectivity would function as enablers for effective service delivery in Panchayats.

In this vision, the Citizen Charter empowers citizens by providing them with clear information about the services to be provided by the Panchayat, the expected standards of service delivery and the procedures for accessing these services. The Citizen Charter is an important tool for promoting transparency and accountability in the Panchayats. These charters are like a formal agreement between the citizens and the Panchayat, outlining the standards of services provided by the Panchayats to the citizens. A Citizen Charter of Panchayats is seen as a

- a. Partnership between the citizens and the Gram Panchayat,
- b. Programme of action,
- c. Part of democratic reforms for better service delivery,
- d. Tool to improve responsiveness on the part of Panchayat, and
- e. Proactive approach to good governance.

Obviously, there would be certain challenges that need to be addressed to make the Panchayat

Citizens Chapter more effective. By adopting the following measures, Panchayats can effectively implement the Citizen Charter and promote transparency, accountability, and citizen-centric governance:

- a. **To develop a Comprehensive Citizen Charter:** The Panchayat should develop a comprehensive Citizen Charter that outlines the services it provides, the standards it adheres to, and the procedures for accessing these services. As per the guidelines issued by the MoPR, the Panchayat Citizen Charter should be developed in consultation with Gram Sabha, Panchayat functionaries and the officials of the line departments.
- b. **To Establish Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** The Panchayat should establish effective grievance redressal mechanisms to address complaints and grievances from citizens. The Panchayat should establish a complaint-handling system with a designated officer responsible for receiving, tracking and resolving grievances.
- c. **To Ensure Transparency and Accountability:** The Panchayat should ensure transparency and accountability in its operations by making information about its functioning easily accessible to citizens. The tools for achieving transparency in the functioning of Panchayat include timely publication of documents such as Gram Panchayat Development Plans, annual budget, annual accounts, administrative reports and other relevant information.
- d. **To Conduct Awareness Campaigns:** The Panchayat should conduct awareness campaigns to inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities under the Citizen Charter. The IEC materials for awareness creation include posters, leaflets, wall writings, cultural programmes, etc., and community meetings.
- e. **Performance Monitoring Systems:** The Panchayat should establish performance monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of the Citizen Charter. This

- can be achieved through regular surveys and feedback mechanisms to understand citizens' satisfaction levels and identify areas for improvement.
- f. **Strengthening Gram Sabha:** The Panchayat should strengthen participatory governance by involving citizens in the decision-making process. This can be achieved through mobilising the community, including women and SC & ST members, to attend Gram Sabha.
 - g. **To build the Capacity of Panchayat Functionaries:** The Panchayat should build the capacity of its functionaries, including elected representatives and officials, with a focus on attitudinal development, to effectively implement the Citizen Charter. This can be achieved through face-to-face training programmes, e-learning-based training, video films, snippets, etc.
 - h. **Enactment of Citizens Charters by GPs in Letter & Spirit:** While most of the Panchayats have prepared the Citizen Charters, they are yet to be implemented in letter & spirit; therefore, there is a need to widely publicise the Citizen Charters among the citizens and also create awareness among them.
- Under the Panchayat Charter campaign, the States have already identified the Services with the Panchayats as service owners that are currently available offline at the Gram Panchayat level. It becomes essential that the State participates in full earnest to make these services available to the Panchayats online, ensuring ease of living and well-being of the rural populace.
 - There is a wide chasm between the powers given and the powers exercised. The GPs are yet to be given any powers regarding the formulation and implementation of programmes/schemes under agriculture, animal husbandry, small-scale industries, PDS, etc. All these are still under the purview of line departments.
 - States may undertake gap identification in the devolution of functions through activity mapping at all three levels of PRIs, including sector-wise Service delivery benchmarks. Accordingly, amendments in the State PR Act/Rules/Regulations devolving service delivery to the Gram Panchayats may be introduced.
 - Finally, incentive mechanisms for the Panchayats vis-à-vis linking of funds/grants to the quality and efficiency of service delivery may be devised.

Action item	Expected Action with timeline			Remarks
	Short Term (within 1 year)	Medium Term (1-2 years)	Long term (2-5 years)	
Manpower shortage	1. Compilation of GP-wise information on availability of manpower along with qualification and experience; Work to be assigned as per need & availability of resources	1. PRI-SHG Convergence 2. Convergence with corporate for CSR-driven initiatives 3. Constitution of Standing/ Functional Committees in supervisory roles 4. Convergence with educational institutes 5. Harnessing technology to offset the impact of manpower shortages	1. Dedicated resources per Panchayat in partnership with different line departments 2. Engagement of Ward members as 'Agents of Social & Economic Change'	1. Minimum mandatory requirement of at least one Data Entry Operator to support Panchayat Secretary 2. For pop. Size 0 – 2500; resources to be ensured in cluster mode
Non-availability of infrastructure (viz. Panchayat Bhawans, Internet connectivity, computers)	1. Preparation of cost-effective standard design Panchayat Bhawans in collaboration with architectural/ academic institutions	1. Co-location of CSCs in Gram Panchayat Bhawans (wherever feasible)	1. 100% Internet connectivity in GPs, including hilly regions 2. Uninterrupted power supply and necessary backup systems utilizing renewable energy sources at Panchayat Bhawans	1. Cluster-based approach to address issues pertaining to limitation of resources available 2. Alternate means of Internet - Utilisation of 4G services provided by ISP
Capacity Building & Training on ICT tools & e-Governance	1. Capacity Building & Training of functionaries and staff on ICT tools 2. Affiliation of SIRDs with premier engineering institutions for development of training modules 3. Incentivising excellence in e-Governance by Panchayats at the State level through awards	1. Conceptualization & rolling out an e-Learning Management System 2. Positioning of Centre for Panchayat Governance, e-Governance and Service Delivery at the Central level overseeing the requisite modalities for strengthening e-Governance 3. Rollout of Mobile applications	1. Refresher training to functionaries on ICT & e-Governance, including thematic areas 2. ICT & e-Governance skill standards/ certification for functionaries & staff 3. Models for monetizing ICT & e-Governance skills of Panchayat functionaries, through cross-learning, content creation, etc.	
Effective service delivery in PRIs	1. Implementing Citizens Charters in Letter & Spirit- bringing offline service available to the Panchayats online 2. Gap identification in the devolution of functions through activity mapping at all three levels of PRIs by all States including sector-wise Service delivery benchmarks	1. Amendments in State PR Act/ Rules/Regulations devolving service delivery to the Gram Panchayats 2. Strengthen Grievance redressal mechanisms	1. Incentivising PRIs, by linking their funds/grants to the quality and efficiency of service delivery	1. Effective service delivery in PRIs

References:

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (June 2021): Model Citizen Charter for Panchayats

Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad (2008) - Citizen Charters – A Handbook

Gol Citizen Charter Portal <https://goicharters.nic.in/public/website/home>

The MoPR's Citizen Charter Portal <https://panchayatcharter.nic.in>