

Subject Matter

Revamping Delivery of Public Services in India: A case Study of Indian State of Punjab with special reference to Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011

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Executive Summary

Many policy initiatives have been undertaken across the globe including India to make administration more responsive, transparent and accountable especially in the field of delivery of public services. The study traces the first attempt in this regard through the introduction of Citizen Charters. The initiative of Citizen Charters introduced by John Major's government in UK in 1991 was adopted by many countries including India to improve the quality and delivery of public services. In India, however, the state governments took lead in making citizen charters obligatory by enacting respective right to service acts in the states. Based on the philosophy of citizen charters these right to service acts aimed at ensuring time-bound delivery of public services to the citizens and in case of administration failing to do so, these acts provide the provision of penalties. Punjab is the 9th State to enact The *Punjab Right to Service Act (PRTSA)* 2011 on October 20, 2011. The study has found that the various initiatives particularly PRTSA have ensured the timely delivery of public services notified under the Act and has enhanced citizens' satisfaction. But mediocre e-readiness of the Administrative Department, lack of awareness among citizens, illiteracy and rural-urban digital divide have played as spoilsports. The success of these initiatives largely depends on overcoming these challenges and it is high time that the government should initiate some efforts in this regard.

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Introduction

The bureaucratic institutions are aimed at providing various services to the citizens. However the rules and regulation embedded in the working of bureaucracy and administration made it fragile, full of formalism and delays, less transparent, less responsive and accountable. Good governance is one of the latest and foremost important developments in the field of public administration resulted in the wake of above-mentioned challenges in administration. The aim of the good governance is to promote transparency in the administration, to make the administration more responsive and to make the administrative officials accountable to the citizen. To make the interaction between the administration and citizen smoother, the first attempt that came into being is Citizen Charters. The initiative of Citizen Charters introduced by John Major's government in UK in 1991 has set an example and later on many countries have adopted the same as the initiative improved the quality and delivery of public services (Centre for Good Governance, 2008; Ghuman, B.S. and Mehta Akshat (2007); Public Affair Centre 2007; Ghuman, B.S. (2000); Government of India (a); Government of India (b))

Objective

The objective of the subject matter is to analyze particularly the effect of the Punjab Right to Service Act (PRTSA), 2011 on delivery of public services in the state while stating other various policy initiatives undertaken by the Government of India and the Indian State of Punjab to improve the delivery of public services.

Methodology

For analyzing the effect of particularly the Punjab Right to Service Act (PRTSA), 2011 on delivery of public services in the Indian State of Punjab, secondary data have been used. As the subject matter focuses on Indian State of Punjab and Punjab Right to Service Act, data have been collected from the Punjab Right to Service Commission, Punjab Governance Reforms Commission, Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration (MGSIPA), Punjab and other sources.

Revamping Delivery of Public Services: A Case of India

India also adopted the UK model of citizen charter. The effort was voluntary in nature. The experience of citizen charters in administration brought out significant results (Centre for Good Governance, 2008; Government of India (a); Government of India (b)). In India, however, the state governments took lead in making citizen charters obligatory by enacting respective right to service acts in the states. Based on the philosophy of citizen charters these right to service acts are aimed at ensuring time-bound delivery of public services to the citizens and in case of administration failing to do so, these acts provide the provision of penalties. The right to service acts empowered the citizens by providing them necessary arrangement through which they can ensure themselves the timely delivery of services they seek from the administration. Till now around 15 Indian states have enacted the Right to Service Acts. Madhya Pradesh was the first Indian state to enact the same on 18 August 2010 followed by other states. Government of India has also tabled a Bill in Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament) titled, 'The Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of Their Grievances Bill, 2011 (MGSIPA, 2013; Sahoo and Kapoor 2012; Mathur, 2012; Government of India-UNDP, 2011).

Even before right to service acts, the various states through different programmes have also initiated reforms to improve the delivery of public services. For example, Karnataka's Friends Programme and Bhoomi Project (Computerization of Land Records); Andhra Pradesh E-Seva Model, E-Procurement and AP Online (Information and Transactional Portal for about 200 Departments); The Registration Department in Maharashtra; Gujarat's e-Dhara (Digitalization of Land Records) and e-GRAM (Issuance of documents at Village Level); Madhya Pradesh's Gyandoot (for online services); and the experience of Tamil Nadu Medical Supplies Corporation are some of the worth mentioning cases of these initiatives (World Bank, 2006; Ghuman et al. 2009,).

Revamping Delivery of Public Services in Punjab with Special Reference to Punjab Right to Service Act: Major Findings

1. Salient Features of Punjab Right to Service Act

Punjab is the 9th State to enact The *Punjab Right to Service Act (PRTSA)* 2011 on October 20, 2011. Initially the Act covered 69 services. The Punjab government in September 2013 has decided to include 80 more services under the ambit of Right to Service Act, taking the total number of services to 149. Punjab is the first State which has brought 20 police services under the purview of the Act (The Hindustan times, 2013; The Daily Post, 2013; MGSIPA, 2013).

The major services comprise certified copies of all documents at village level—record of land rights, Girdawri (record of land cultivation), mutation, demarcation of land; sanction of water supply/sewerage connection; certified copies of birth/death certificates; issue of tax clearance certificate; registration certificate of vehicles; issue of route permit or national permit; transfer of vehicle; issue of driving license; sanction of building plans; copy of First Information Report

(FIR); passport verification; issue of various certificates such as caste, income, residence; registration of all kinds of documents and sanction of all social security benefits for old age/handicapped/widow.

The PRTSA has provided the time limit for the delivery of notified services and also has a provision of penalty between Rs. 500 to Rs. 5000 to the errant officials for not adhering to the time limit provided in the Act.

Another important feature of the PRTSA is that the Act has provision of appellate authority for appeal against designated officer. The first appellate authority has to take decision within stipulated time and convey to the service provider for the time bound compliance. The first appellate authority has the right to reject the appeal. The aggrieved citizen can make appeal to the second appellate authority which takes decision within stipulated time. The second appellate authority gives order to the service provider to deliver service within stipulated time; the second appellate authority can also reject the appeal.

For monitoring the implementation of the Act, Punjab has constituted the Punjab Right to Service Commission in November 2011. Punjab was the first state in the country to constitute the Punjab Right to Service Commission after implementing the Punjab Right to Service Act, 2011.

2. Other Initiatives in Punjab

Before enacting the Punjab Right to Service Act in 2011, Punjab has also attempted various other successful initiatives to improve the delivery of public services. Most of these experiences came as pilot projects and have particularly used information and communication technology in delivery of services. Most prominent among these are- Suwidha (Single User-friendly Window Help Line for Applicants) Kendras/Centers, Community Policing Resource Centers (CRPC)

Sukhmani, Computerization of Old Age Pensions, Computerization of Value Added Tax Information System Project, Multi Service Card, Computerization of Registration of Property Project, Computerization of Land Records Project, Computerization of Markfed, Computerization of the Transport Department and Computerization of Municipal Corporations. Most of these initiatives initially were implemented on pilot basis in the districts and specified areas. The other notable initiatives of Punjab government are Punjab State Wide Area Network ((PAWAN), Property Registration Information System Model (PRISM), Vahan (Vehicle Registration System) and Sarthi (Driving License Issuance System (Singla and Aggarwal 2012).

3. Institutional Mechanisms for Delivery of Services in Punjab

In Punjab, in the implementation of Punjab Right to Service Act, three institutional mechanisms are involved. These are Suwidha Centers, Saanjh Centers and Fard Centers. The Suwidha Centers provide various services that have been notified under the Punjab Right to Service Act. These Centers have been set up at district, sub-divisional and block level. Saanjh Centers are the extension of the concept of Community Policing Centers and provide services relating to policing (Mittal and Kaur 2013a). The third institutional mechanism, namely, FARD Kendras provide service relating to land record under the Department of Revenue. The use of ICT is very explicit in these centers for delivering time bound services. At present, Punjab has 123 Suwidha Centers, 153 Fard Centers and 83 Saanjh Centers across the state (MGSIPA, 2013).

4. Delivery of Services Notified under the Act: Some Data

Recently MGSIPA has concluded a survey covering three district of Punjab namely Kapurthala, Mohali and Muktsar Sahib analyzing or assessing the implementation of PRTSA and the delivery of notified services. As data suggests around 6060078 applications were received

between August 2012 and March 31, 2013, out of which 5804747 services constituting 94.2 % of the total were delivered as per the provisions of the Act (MGSIPA, 2013).

5. Improvement in the Working of Administrative Department

The enactment of Right to Service Act in the state of Punjab has resulted in improving the working of the Departments through Suwidha, Saanjh and Fard Centres thereby improving the delivery of the services. The data has recorded a high percentage of beneficiaries at state level among the beneficiaries confirming this view (MGSIPA, 2013).

6. Satisfaction Level of Beneficiaries

It has been found that majority of the users of services are satisfied with the service delivery mechanisms of all the Centers. For example in case of Mohali district 90% per cent of service users are satisfied with the services delivered by Suwidha Centers. In case of Muktsar Sahib and Kapurthala district the respective figures are 88 per cent and 72 per cent. For State as a whole 86 % of the respondents are satisfied with the delivery of services by the Suwidha Centers. The level of satisfaction is much higher in case of Saanjh and Fard Centers (MGSIPA, 2013).

7. Use of Information and Communication Technology and Promotion of Transparency and Responsiveness I Delivery of Services

Use of ICT has a major impact on the successful implementation of all the initiatives. Another study aimed at analyzing the satisfaction of the citizen has confirmed that that the application of ICT in the delivery of notified services has enhanced citizens' satisfaction. The study further states that the use of ICT has promoted transparency and accountability and has worked as a deterrent to corruption in the administration. (Singla and Aggarwal, 2012).

8. Timely and Cost Effective Delivery of Services

The analysis of the data provided by MGSIPA' field survey states that all three institutional mechanism of service delivery, namely Suwidha, Saanjh and Fard Centres have been successful in ensuring the timely delivery of the services. Percentages of beneficiaries adhering to the view that they get delivery of services in time are 73% in case of Kapurthala's Suwidha Centre, 92% in case of Mohali's Suwidha Centre and 92% in case of Muktsar Sahib's Suwidha Centre. The respective percentage at state level in this regard is 83%. The same trend has been experienced in case of Saanjh and Suwidha Centre (MGSIPA, 2013).

Another Study by Mittal and Kaur has also confirmed that the projects like Suwidha Kendras, Vahan and Sarthi have helped the State Government in providing services to the citizen at a very low cost and with stipulated time limit. (Mittal and Kaur, 2013)

9. Bottlenecks

The survey by MGSIPA has revealed that no doubt the three IT enabled Centers for service delivery have been successful on many accounts but there is still much to be done to fully ensure the accountability of service. The analysis of data has revealed that most of the beneficiaries have responded that the Act has not fully succeeded in ensuring the accountability of the service providers (MGSIPA, 2013).

The success of Punjab Right to Service Act and other initiatives largely depends on the use of ICT in the working of the concerned departments. But the mediocre e-readiness of the concerned departments poses another challenge. The lack of awareness of the various initiatives of the state aiming at improving the delivery of public services among citizen is another stumbling block in the successful implementation of these acts. The illiteracy and rural-urban divide as some study

shows that the rural population has not been able to fully reap the benefit of these initiatives also pose a critical challenge (Ghuman et al., 2009; Ghuman 2012; PGRC, 2011; Singla and Aggarwal 2012; Mittal and Kaur, 2013; Singh and Chander, 2012, PGRC, 2009; Government of India 2010).

Conclusions

The initiatives of the Punjab so far particularly Punjab Right to Service Act aimed at improving the delivery of public services are worth praise but mediocre e-readiness of the department, lack of awareness among citizen, illiteracy and rural-urban digital divide has played as spoilsport. The success of these initiatives largely depends on overcoming these challenges and it is high time that the government should make some efforts in this regard.

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