

Affairs of State

The citizen handbook is a unique experiment to bring about long term and sustained improvement in governance structures

An informed citizenry is vital to the maintenance and growth of a vibrant and dynamic, liberal democracy. It studies its institutions and helps to reform it, so that democracy can survive and grow. Civil societies and citizen bodies are often joined in their efforts by government representatives to reform the system so that they can participate in their own governance. One area where there is a glaring need for reform is in the poor information and feedback mechanisms for citizens on issues such as what is the government doing with the taxes it collects from them and how they wish their money to be spent.

To address this and other governance concerns the Centre for Civil Society, a think tank, conceived the *Citizen Handbook* and the first one was published on Delhi, in 2003. The

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handbook contains previously undocumented information on complex government budgets, management, and programme delivery; and innovative ideas to improve the effectiveness of governance.

It studies agencies, boards, corporations, departments, schemes, and programmes of the state and municipal corporations. The criteria to evaluate existing systems and the basis of policy recommendations is the universal yet rarely understood concepts of *New Public Management* and the *principle of subsidiarity*. These concepts challenge conventional wisdom and advocate government provision and private production, increased choice and competition, and ward-level and result-oriented management as the means for introducing long-term and sustained improvement in governance structures.



Following the enormous success of the handbook in 2003, CCS has used the same methodology to create two more handbooks on Delhi, which were published in 2006 and more recently in 2009; and one each for Mumbai, and Jharkhand. The handbooks provide well-researched information on governance and have shown how a little effort in the right direction can lead to positive change.

Some changes that are visible and can be attributed to the handbooks are in agricultural marketing reform involving the introduction of private markets; flexible shop timings; and privatisation of garbage collection. The handbooks have been widely discussed in the media, the bureaucracy and political circuits, and endorsed by prominent thinkers and economists such as Swaminathan Aiyar, Consulting Editor, *The Economic Times*, Sunil Jain, Senior Associate Editor, *Business Standard*, Deepak Lal, economics professor, UCLA (who is also a specialist contributor for the *Business Standard*), Dr Ashok V Desai, Specialist Contributor, *BusinessWorld*, and Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Chairman, Centre for Policy Research.

Speaking about the handbook, author Gurcharan Das says, "It is steps like the *Delhi Citizen Handbook* which can make a difference to governance in our country."

The most recent handbook on Delhi attempts to raise citizens' understand-

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ing of the workings of the government and encourages greater independent, fact-based, qualitative and quantitative research so that the next time citizens demand better governance they can support their claims with proper data. Apart from focussing on public services, infrastructure and development, revenues and finance, and mechanisms of accountability, the *Delhi Handbook 2009* also focuses on governance for underserved groups including refugees, street children, children with special needs, and minorities. Given the importance of the Commonwealth Games 2010, and their impact on the city, the handbook, while addressing issues of displacement, discusses future use of these facilities.

The rationale

What makes these handbooks unique and different from other similar publications, you may well ask: First, it is the recommendations that are based on principles of sound public policy, and second, the creators of the handbook form the majority segment of our population, namely, the youth.

With India racing towards development (many have criticised it for being uninclusive), its citizenry is no longer apathetic, cynical and ignorant, but concerned and informed about what is going on around it. Bollywood films increasingly inspire citizens, particularly the youth, to share the responsibility of changing the destiny of their country. It is their

potential to bring about change that fills us with optimism. However, they need to be armed with not just inspiration, passion, and concern, but also information and the ability to critically analyse this information for long-term, desired change. Instead of *morchas* and *dharnas*, in this information age, they need to 'protest' constructively through well-formulated questions and informed debate.

In this regard, the CCS Internship Programme, called Researching Reality, is very useful as it provides a greatly valued and needed learning experience in the real-life application of social and economic principles. It teaches young college students the skills of research, analysis, writing, and critical thinking, and grooms them to understand and critically evaluate public policy from a rational perspective. By being out in the field, the youth experience the ground reality and decide for themselves how a problem can be studied and solved. The programme prepares them to be future researchers and change agents, and enables CCS to conduct studies in areas that require the collection of first-hand information and data, which can be done best by enthusiastic, energetic, and dedicated students.

Since 2001, over 200 students from across India and the world, have undertaken this intensive two-month programme and have contributed towards improved governance by creating well researched papers on key issues. After being selected through a rigorous process from among hundreds of applications, 25 youth are trained annually through a multi-dimensional orientation programme which includes field visits, orientation sessions with experts, group reflections, and documentary screenings. With the help of research guides, interns make the demanding journey from research, to writing their final papers.

In the summer of 2009, 20 young researchers were selected as interns from among 175 applicants to work in Delhi on the handbook. The prospect of working to create such a publication, and their initial meeting with Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit,



inspired them to bear the sweltering heat and gather information from government officials, retired officers of the concerned departments, and with the people who had been affected, either positively or negatively, by these organisations. With the support of Mrs Dikshit, we aim to engage officials from selected government departments, with a series of workshops, for the Delhi Governance Reform Series in future.

On May 18, 2009, at a special meeting with CCS interns, Mrs Dikshit said, "It's wonderful to see the youth participate in such programmes. Let me know what you are looking forward to in the next couple of years because that will be of great help to me. Encouragement is what I get when I know there are people interested and thinking about better governance because we really need to see people say that Delhi's governance is better than the best. It's your aspirations we need to fulfil, not our own."

DCH 2009: A Sneak Preview

Access centres of the government

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), with its jurisdiction over 97 per cent of Delhi's population, started a unique IT initiative to deliver its services electronically to its citizens through a Citizen Service Bureau (CSB), set up in its 12 zones. The CSBs are run by a consortium of IT companies namely ECIL and Spark Systems. All the CSBs, including the one in the Town Hall, are connected through radio frequency (RF) network, with ISDN lines as backup. There are further plans to open 272 CSBs (one in each ward).

The concept behind establishing a CSB is to provide all municipal services under one roof, in air-conditioned comfort, on payment of a very small transaction fee.

The MCD also proposes to connect senior officers (about 250) and provide them e-mail through the same RF network. This will enable all citizens to get in touch with senior officers with any complaints that they have about the municipal services.

Services offered: The services the

There are just too many numbers and our recommendation is to have one single helpline number which improves the quality of service



CSB offer are the registration of births and deaths and issuance of those certificates; accepting applications for, and issuance and renewal of all licences under its jurisdiction. All these services are also offered over the internet including accepting payment of municipal dues through credit cards over secure payment gateways. Deaths can also be registered via the internet at specific crematoriums in the city. The plan and purpose of the CSBs seem just perfect, but reality paints a different picture. For instance, there is one CSB for every 10,04,683 citizens in Delhi, and these are irrationally placed in the city. In addition, the services they provide are so limited in number and scope, that it requires second thought over whether more such bureaus are even required. And if you have not heard of its existence before, then you are not an exception. This is the state of the much hyped, one-stop-shop kiosk/portal for citizens to access government services at their doorsteps in Delhi.

What can the government do to improve the situation?

- Set up a large number of comprehensive centres in areas of maximum demand, with rationalised supply, and services that are inclusive and facilitate better governance
- Advertise for greater visibility, so that the public know that these facilities exist
- Conduct surveys to ensure there are no overlaps of centres

and services

- Maintain and upgrade the quality of the centres and the services

Opacity: 'Vigilating' the Vigilance Department

The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Delhi, (DoV), deals with disciplinary cases against delinquent gazetted officers of all departments under the Government of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. Complaints against gazetted / non-gazetted employees received through the general public, the Central Bureau of Intelligence (CBI), the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), and other sources are also processed. The DoV finalises the chargesheets after re-drafting / vetting the draft chargesheets received from the various departments of the Delhi government. Where there are specific, serious irregularities, the investigation is done by the Anti-Corruption Branch of the DoV, which functions as an investigating agency.

The DoV aims for corruption-free governance, fairness, transparency and efficiency in enquiries and investigations, adherence to rules and government policies, and action on genuine complaints of corruption. But despite having an elaborate infrastructure in place, corruption still persists.

Solutions recommended

- **Make the vigilance department independent:** We need to remove the problem of inter-connectivity between the vigilance officers and other bureaucrats, including the ones against whom there might be a case in progress. The moment a person is posted in the vigilance field, whether it is the DoV, the CVC, or the vigilance cell of any department, the person should not be posted back into any other department of the bureaucracy for the rest of his/her services. It is something like creating a separate vigilance circle, independent of the rest of the bureaucracy, without actually creating a new service or exam for vigilance per se.
- **Tackle people's resistance to making complaints:** The DoV must be

held accountable to the people and not just to the senior authorities. Each offence can be further sub-categorised. The time period within which the file needs to be moved to the next stage or closed should be decided for each category. Similarly, offenses can be sub-categorised to take action within a stipulated period of time, crossing which the salary of officers involved in the investigation must be affected.

- **Open communication channels between the DoV and the media:** Once the stipulated time period for an action is over, the media or any external person must have a right to know the status of the case; whether it has been moved to the next stage of investigation or some decision has been taken with the necessary evidence. The Central Information Commission and the Administrative Reforms Department must ensure that these reports are in the public domain. The media should be able to publish it.

How helpful are Delhi's Helplines?

Delhi has a number of helplines for the services it offers to its citizens. To check out how effective these helplines are in easing their problems, we called some of the helplines three times during July 2008, and recorded and analysed their response / no response on various parameters such as on the level cooperativeness, general level of awareness of duties, time taken to respond to the queries, and the tone of the language used. What we found was that the helpline for children is highly cooperative and willing to hear queries, but is unreachable at times. The one on women is most responsive to complaints that are rape-related. For elder citizens, the helpline is very disappointing as it just does not respond to calls. The department does not know what its duties are. Crime information does not take any calls at all, but traffic will entertain calls made only in Hindi; also it has no proper mechanism by which the caller can find out whether action

has been taken on its complaint. The Vigilance Cell and the Anti-Corruption cell answer calls promptly, and are aware of the channel of hierarchy in the cell; but the attendants do not know how to file complaints, where to forward / direct the caller, and what their duties are. The most efficient is the Disaster Management helpline. The lost and found unit of the Transport department is clear about its duties but is not conversant in English; which is a major problem for tourists. The helpline for the Food and Supplies department answers after several tries and is unwilling to take action.

Our observation: There are just too many numbers, and our recommendation is to have one single helpline number which has few numbers and improves the quality of service. ■

DCH 2009 is available online at http://ccs.in/ccsindia/books_dch_2009.asp For further details email Amit at amit@ccs.in



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