

Citizen Governance: Concept and Practice

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Background

Over the years democracy has become “delegative”. People have left it for the elected representatives and officials to govern. Citizen is missing from governance. Democracy has become more representative than participatory. Citizen participation in governance becomes most apparent during elections. Between elections, there are a few institutional channels of citizen participation in issues of governance. The role of other institutions such as media and others becomes important.

As we look at issues relating to governance in the 21st century, the roles of both citizen and governance are undergoing important revolution. Government is seen more as one of the stakeholders than a regulator, funder and service provider. Citizen governance is to be seen beyond new public management. It brings a fundamental change in the reform process in that the importance of state apparatuses for the development and sustainability of viable societies is being de-emphasised and special attention to “governance” is now taking over the central place that has been hitherto given to “government”. The new vision is to evolve public policy through the joint effort of the public authorities and the citizens working in harmony. **Today the reinvention of the citizen is of crucial importance to public administrative practice.**

Indian Constitution and Citizen Governance

When India achieved independence from foreign rule, the people became the sovereign masters of the country. It was “we, the people of India” who gave unto themselves a constitution and provided in it space for the legislative, executive and judicial systems to function. As much as the Constitution is the creation of the people the basic constitutional values embodied in the Preamble, the fundamental rights and The Directive Principles of State Policy represent citizenship values. The role of the citizens is not to be seen as mere tax payers but as active participants evolving policies and plans and in monitoring performance of the government. **Citizen governance is meant to translate the concept of sovereignty of the people into a reality. The government is seen as an equal partner with the citizens.**

The 73rd and the 74th amendments to the Constitution of India are meant to bring in place citizen governance in the rural and urban areas through the involvement of the citizens in the vital areas of governance, economic development and welfare. The purpose of these amendments is to ensure civic engagement towards effective, efficient, transparent and accountable government.

The Concept of Citizen Governance

Democracies are weak without citizen governance. Citizen governance is value based and thus must be construed within civil society organisations and leaders should examine their own political context and vision for change. The concept of citizen governance is young and to sustain it government at all levels needs to learn to work in different ways within a new culture. This will require the removal of walls that have divided the bureaucracies of the government and the citizens.

Civic engagement is defined as active participation and collaboration among individuals, government and the private sector to influence and determine decisions that affect the citizens. The mere existence of civil society organisations or a formal dialogue with them will not ensure citizen governance. Unless the government is open to listen to the citizen groups and involve them in the governance process no tangible benefits will flow to the society from citizen governance.

Elements of Effective Citizen Governance Model

Citizen governance increases the democratic content of government and provides opportunities for citizens to take interest in public affairs. The three elements of the governance model are citizen engagement, performance measurement and government policy and implementation.

Citizen engagement refers to the involvements of citizens, using the term “citizens” in the broadest sense to include individuals, groups, non-profit organisations and even business corporate citizens. Private organisations are included primarily in the sense of their participation for public purposes rather than only to protect narrow private interests. In this view, citizen engagement in a community is best when it is broad, inclusive and representative of citizens.

Performance measurement refers to the development of indicators and collection of data to describe, report on, and analyse performance. Measurement can be applied to the government services or community conditions. Social audit is an effective method to ensure some of these objectives.

Government policy and implementation refers to the developments of public policy decisions about issues government chooses to address, the strategies it employs, the resources it commits and the actions it takes to carry out these decisions. This element covers the full cycle of planning, budgeting, implementing and evaluating government operations.

In this governance model the citizen’s role is seen as:

1. Customer;
2. Owner or Shareholder;
3. Issue framer;
4. Co-producer;
5. Service quality evaluator and independent outcome tracker.

The first two of these roles - Customer and Owner or Stakeholder – are relatively passive roles. The other roles are roles of active engagement that usually require citizens to make a choice to become active in a sustainable way.

Citizens as Customers

Over the recent years, the application of customer service techniques to government services has been gaining ground. The core idea is that a citizen should be treated as a valued customer by the providers of public services. Citizen’s charters are an effort in this direction.

Citizens as Stakeholders or Owners

In a democracy, citizens, in addition to being customers, really are the “owners” of public services. Through tax payments, citizens are investors in public services and publicly owned assets. A key question from the owner’s perspective with respect to government performance is whether government is getting job done. Citizen shareholders may think about the question in various ways. For example, are citizen’s concerns being met by public services? Is the job being done fairly and ethically? Does the result provide value for the public money spent? In response to these concerns, citizens deserve good information offered in a format and manner that is readily understood.

Being sensitive to citizens as shareholders or owners requires that public agencies use citizen concerns and interests as one of the shaping factors to develop “owners’ reports” on public service performance. To be effective, such reports also must provide citizens comparative contexts for the performance information provided. For example, graphically summarised performance information can show comparisons with other jurisdictions, historical trends, or publicly set goals. Such comparisons can help set reasonable expectations for services as well as indicate where change is needed to improve services and conditions in the community.

Citizens as Issue Framers

There has been a major upswing at the local and state level in engaging citizens in identifying and framing issues of concern for communities to guide planning and action. Citizens can act as “issue framers” in a number of ways. Some of these are:

- **Vision builders.** Citizens may be called on to help be “visionaries” for their communities - to articulate a desirable future and broad strategies to get there – as part of community visioning and strategic planning.
- **Advisers.** Citizens may be called on to provide advice for such things as land use, budgeting, or specific services or issues. The “adviser” roles include:
 - **Community-wide Advisers.** Citizens may be called to serve on short or longer-term community-wide advisory committees.
 - **Level Advisers.** Citizens serve on ward clubs, neighborhood associations, or other groups that identify needs, recommend priorities, and attempt to obtain service adjustments and improvements within specific neighborhoods or districts.

Citizens in issue framer roles are often involved in the complex process of public deliberation to help reach public judgments big and small, often involving different stakeholders with divergent interests in the outcome of public decisions. Building a useful community vision especially requires a well-structured process of public deliberation, as community members must arrive at important public judgments about what they value, and what long-term changes they most want to see in their community.

A community’s leaders hear citizens articulate what is important and how a desirable future for their community should look. This can be a complex process involving many stakeholders, and many issues in relation to the expectations for public services, as part of the strategy to achieve a community vision.

Citizens as Co-producers of Services

Beyond being customers, owners, and issue framers, citizens and citizen groups are often asked to play an active role in actually providing or helping to provide important services, or in solving specific problems to contribute to achieving a “community vision”. Many communities now recognise that when it comes to resolving many important issues, government cannot or will not do it alone.

Productively engaging volunteers and citizen groups as partners with government can leverage public resources with citizen effort to multiply the improvement of results for communities. An example is the “Clean and Green” movement in Andhra Pradesh.

In the role of co-producer of services, with respect to government performance management, citizens and citizen groups may become partners in the enterprise of improving both the public and nonpublic parts of service delivery to address community concerns. They may develop greater awareness of what constitutes quality in a public service and quality of life in the community, of how complex or simple it is to produce the desired service outcome, and of barriers and opportunities on the path to achieving desirable community outcomes.

Citizens as Service Quality Evaluators

Citizens can also act as partners in efforts to improve public services by assessing the performance of public services. Acting as “customers”, citizens sometimes evaluate services simply by filling in a reply after receiving a public service. As more deeply involved customers, citizens may become engaged in survey research or focus groups. At a still more involved level, citizens may become “evaluators” if they are trained as service quality raters to directly assess the performance of public services—such as PHCs, transport, electricity, water and so on.

Having citizens rate services can also build trust among residents about government’s effort to measure its performance and satisfy the citizenry it serves. Engaging citizens in this way can lead to a more interested and informed community. The use of volunteer or citizen group assessment of the performance of public services can also stretch limited resources for measuring performance.

The role of citizen as evaluator may be distinguished from that of citizen as customer in several ways. In the role of evaluator, the citizen is much more engaged in gathering data or in analysing and interpreting reports of public service performance. For example, these evaluations can involve being active data collectors, as in doing “trained observer” ratings of a neighborhood or facility, “knocking on doors” to gather data from organisations, or surveying one’s neighbors about needs or issues. This role can also include citizens interpreting performance data they collect. They might also interpret and evaluate data collected by others in the performance reports provided to citizens. In sum, the role of evaluator is much more active and result oriented than that of customer.

Citizens as Independent Outcome Trackers

In a number of communities, citizens have been involved in community and regional improvement independently of government. Citizen groups have established sets of desired outcomes for their community and established systems to track and publicise

