

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

the results of these outcomes. These groups follow various themes, such as “healthy communities”, “quality of life”, and “sustainable communities”.

What is different about the private, citizen-based groups we refer to as “independent outcome trackers” is that they tend to track a broad range of issues with a community or regional outcomes focus. They are not narrowly focused on a particular interest or viewpoint as are most traditional interest and advocacy groups. While certain values may be implied by an interest in community sustainability, for example, such as environmental conservation, sustainability groups tend to look beyond environmentalism to consider economic and social conditions, as well.

Building Knowledge and Capacity of Citizens

If citizens are asked to participate in public decision processes, and if they are to be provided with performance information and expected to make intelligent use of it, it helps if they are provided with contextual knowledge and some level of training or technical assistance to help them participate wisely and effectively. The experience of the communities that have involved citizens in identifying priority issues and developing goals and performance indicators confirms that citizens can participate intelligently in these processes without having the years of technical knowledge and expertise that can be expected of service managers. However, the more deeply citizens are involved in these processes, the more important it is to help them develop their capacity to understand issues, work with performance data, and make good choices.

Six Ways to Initiate and Sustain Effective Citizen Governance

Local Government and Community Action Citizen Governance

Citizen governance must begin at the Panchayats and avenues must be created for their participation and community action delinked from politics. The 73rd amendment to the constitution of India has laid out a road map in this direction for the local government bodies.

Build momentum in the community

We need to stimulate involvement of citizens to the point where it builds upon itself: Once a broad base of citizens is involved in a process, and they see that the process is useful and it is in their interest to maintain, the process can take on a life of its own.

Partner

Involve community-based organisations, and, where applicable, multiple government entities to help build a collaborative community culture—participation by private, usually community-based organisations, is helpful to build a collaborative community culture, and can help sustain measurement and involvement practices when government interest might otherwise lag.

Fund and sustain

Develop resource streams to initiate and then to maintain efforts over time. Depending upon the local setting, support can come from government, business, non-profit organisations, local foundations, universities, or from a combination of sources.

Leverage learning opportunities

Use peer and professional influence and frameworks of “good” and “promising” practices to advance widespread implementation.

Maintain citizen pressure and support

Citizens play an important role in demanding and achieving good performance. Finally, citizens are a vital force to shape the responsiveness and quality of government in their community. Apathy and indifference in the community can breed apathy and unresponsiveness in the government and vice versa. Active, concerned, and involved citizens can do much to prevent and dispel this negative cycle.

Why Strive for Citizen’s Participation?

Citizen’s participation is both an end in itself, and a means to an end. Citizen participation is a long promised but elusive goal, limited by access to information and by an incomplete understanding of as to how government works.

Men and women have a right to take part in making decisions that affect their community. This is because it affects their own development and future. In mainstream models of local government, citizens delegate community management and development to politicians and specialists. Direct participation can be seen as an aspect of citizenship, a matter of people having access to information and policy-making processes, as well as to the full range of their society’s decision-making processes.

The purpose of citizen participation is to:

1. To be heard in a meaningful way, to be treated as if their opinions and information mattered;
2. To influence problem definition as well as proposed policies;
3. To work with administrators and policy makers to find solutions to public problems;
4. To have an equal force in the policy process.

A means to an end

People’s participation can improve governance by making it more:

- Transparent
- Coherent , accountable
- Effective
- Efficient

Citizen Governance is about responding to people’s needs and demands. Involving the people themselves in identifying these needs and demands, and in designing policies and programmes to meet them, is an excellent way of doing this. Citizens’ participation can be considered as a means of achieving better governance.

Stages and Levels of Participation

Stages

One way to characterise participation is to identify the stage or phase of the process in which citizen participation is sought. The following stages have been identified:

1. *Problem identification*: investigation and discussion aimed at identifying the root cause or the most important aspect of a problem or issue.
2. *Problem analysis*: analysis of the context and factors influencing the issue or problem, followed by the development of possible interventions and/or policies.
3. *Policy preparation*: examining the feasibility of various policy options and identifying potential.
4. *Policy design*: choosing the optimal policy option, followed by refining and concretisation, so that it can be put into practice.
5. *Policy implementation*: putting the chosen policy into practice.
6. *Monitoring, evaluation and follow-up*: supervising implementation, gathering feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of the chosen measures, and adjusting policies, plans and implementation in accordance with the feedback, in order to ensure sustainability.

Levels

During any of the above stages, different levels of citizens' participation are possible. The lowest level is that of merely being informed. At the other end of the scale, the highest level is being fully responsible for managing a process. These are the levels that have been identified:

1. *Resistance*: active opposition from the people concerned.
2. *Opposition*: this can mean several things. First, the formal role played by political parties that are not in government in controlling and influencing the parties and policies of these governments. Second, the actions that citizens and/or civil organisations take to protest against and change policy decisions and other governmental measures. Lastly and more generally, the term can also refer to all processes and mobilisations of people / factions / parties to protest, question and try to change decisions or measures inside or outside organisations.
3. *Information*: understood here as a one-way communication to stakeholders.
4. *Consultation*: This is a two-way communication. Stakeholders have the opportunity to express suggestions and concerns, but without any assurance that their input will be used, or used in the way they intended.
 - a) *Consensus-building*: stakeholders interact with one another and discuss various options, with the objective of agreeing negotiated positions that are acceptable to all.
 - b) *Decision-making*: citizens are directly involved in making decisions and share responsibility for the resulting outcomes.
 - c) *Risk-sharing*: participating citizens are personally implicated in the outcomes, and share the risk that the outcomes might be different from what was intended. In this way, they share accountability.
 - d) *Partnership*: this level builds on the two preceding ones. Here, citizens do not only take part in decision-making and accountability, but also

participate in implementing decisions on a basis of equality with other stakeholders.

- e) **Self-management:** citizens autonomously manage the matter at hand, thus carrying full responsibility and accountability. This is the highest level of participation.

Tools for Participation

1. **Standing Citizens' Panels:** The Panel will consist of 10 to 25 members. Members of the Panel drawn from related fields of expertise or Public concern will advise government on policy issues or make recommendations on improving the services rendered by the department, review the annual performance of the departments concerned.
2. **Round-Tables:** This concept was developed in Canada. The purpose is to bring together groups of interested parties and stakeholders to deliberate on various issues periodically.
3. **Participatory Planning Communities:** This tool can be used successfully for citizen participators right from problems identification and analysis to planning and implementation.
4. **Forums:** These are similar to round tables, but are less formal and less engaging than round-tables.
5. **Public Hearings:** Public hearings enhance citizen participation. Hearings have the explicit aim of soliciting people's opinions and reactions to proposals, with the intention of taking this feedback into account.
6. **Citizen/Community Outreach:** This is a popular way of motivating citizens to participate by arranging lunch, parties or events where citizens want to give suggestions, ideas or express support to the initiatives of the government.
7. **Citizen Committees:** A committee with 8 to 10 concerned citizens may be formed for each department, which helps the government in policy making, implementation etc.
8. **Joint Project Teams:** Project teams represent intensive interaction. They enhance citizen participation. Administrators should delegate powers to project teams to allocate funds and manage complementation.

Barriers to Participation

We must move from public administration to public service. We need to create settings for participation that are open and welcoming rather than intimidating. The following are viewed as barriers to participation:

1. A disconnected administration which prevents or restricts dialogue ;
2. Politics of power.
3. Centralisation as compared to decentralisation;
4. Endless stream of regulations;
5. Ineffective or insufficient policies and services;
6. Citizens viewed as passive recipients of governmental services rather than active agents who could work with administrators to deal meaningfully with their problems.

Administrators must balance governance needs and citizen involvement. The key is to distinguish between administrative routine where expertise counts and public policy decisions that affect life. The role of the administrator must change from that of an expert to facilitator.

Qualities required to be imbibed by Administrators

1. Humanise: frame issues in human terms.
2. Collaborate: encourage citizen participation.
3. Strategise: use citizen governance and perspectives to evaluate the delivery of public services, encourage citizen feedback.
4. Organise: make space for citizens' groups, welcome results of collective efforts by citizen groups.

Developing a Culture of Public Participation

Our responsibility is to engage citizens. However, we tend to hear things we want hear and we have to be willing to hear what we do not want to hear. We have to do this quickly if citizen governance is to be effective. A large population is disengaged merely because they have the perception that the government does not listen. Therefore administrators need to develop skills critical to citizen participation.

10 Skills Critical to Citizen Participation

1. Active listening
2. Creative conflict
3. Mediation
4. Negotiation
5. Political imagination
6. Public dialogue
7. Public judgment
8. Appreciation of citizen's view point
9. Evaluation of reflection
10. Mentoring.

It is important to create spaces for dialogue and to ensure that administrators listen to the citizens and respect their views. Active administrators were found to have the following behavioural attitudes when dealing with citizens.

1. See citizens as citizens;
2. Share authority;
3. Reduce personnel and organisational control ;
4. Trust in efficacy of collaboration;
5. Balance experimental with scientific and professional knowledge.

Enabling Factors for Citizen Governance

Ensuring public access to government information, transparency, conducting public hearing and referenda and involving civil society to monitor government's performance in areas such as accountability, cost effectiveness and information sharing enable citizen governance.

Developing a culture of civic solidarity wherein all stakeholders treat each other on the basis of respect and acceptance of diversity of opinion is important. There is a need to establish the legal authority for civil society to participate effectively in governance.

Capacity Enhancement

There is a view that the average citizen lacks the understanding and capacity to participate in policy review and micro decisions relating to administrative matters and issues of governance. There is a need to build competency among the civil society groups, individuals and organisations at the local, district and national level in these areas.

Building Networks

Citizen participation means co-management, community management, self governance and looking at citizens as owners. To achieve this goal, administrators should build networks with citizen organisations, neighborhood groups, public interest groups, voluntary organisations, professional groups and activist individuals. All government departments should scout for locating these groups in the geographical areas they function.

Citizen Governance Index

How to judge that governments are implementing / encouraging / supporting citizen governance in their states? The citizen governance index calculated with weightages given for the following indicators will help in arriving at the index. The indicators are:

1. Information access to citizens that is easy to obtain, reliable, multi channel;
2. Level of participation of citizens;
3. Degree of participation;
4. Degree of participation of different sections of the society and gender equality;
5. Partnership built by the government with the civic society;
6. Capacity building programmes conducted by the government for the administrators and citizens for developing skills, tools and knowledge in citizen governance;
7. Use of new and creative methods in citizen governance and participatory processes;
8. Citizen out reach programmes to open up new and multi avenues for citizen participation.

A Citizen Governance Model

Characteristics of a Governance Model that is sensitive to a community's needs:

- **Accessible**
Citizens will have easy access to the elected and staff decision makers who are responsible for services.
- **Accountable**
Elected and appointed officials will owe responsibility to the public.
- **Inclusive**
The community will be recognised as an important component of decision making.
- **Representative**
Citizens will be fairly and democratically represented.
- **Comprehensive**
All government functions and services will be addressed; services will be delivered at a level communities believe to be appropriate; clear and logical responsibility for service-delivery will be identified; voluntary citizen participation will be acknowledged.
- **Comprehensible**
It will be easy to understand who does what.
- **Cost-effective**
Appropriate quality service will be delivered efficiently and in a manner that makes citizens feel they are receiving a reasonable return on their tax money.

Are We Ready for Citizen Governance?

There are certain pre requisites to be fulfilled by governments before they can initiate programmes for citizen governance. Citizen governance needs basic edifice to build on. Governments must ensure that the following are in place for citizen governance to take off:

- 1. Citizen friendly ambience is government offices:**
Citizens' information desk, "May I Help You" counters, & Citizen Reception Centers should be managed by staff who show physical willingness to serve.
- 2. Courtesy and Helpfulness:**
Citizens visiting government offices should be treated with courtesy and offered helpful and timely service.
- 3. Availability and accessibility of public officials**
Officers should be available during the working hours or during the timings ear-marked for public interviews. Availability and accessibility also means availability on telephone. Citizens should be able to get routine information on phone without the need to visit government offices.
- 4. Feedback:** There is a need to put in place a feedback system to measure citizen's satisfaction of the services rendered by the government departments.
- 5. Willingness to listen to citizens and act**
Government must show enthusiasm in holding a dialogue with individual citizens, activists and groups and act on their suggestions.

Judged on the above indicators on a scale of 1 to 10, if the departments score a rating of 5 and above, we may then say that they are ready for citizen governance.

The challenge to citizen governance comes from structural constructs, politics, laws, centralisation, tight institutional frameworks and fiscal measures and bureaucrats who are unwilling to consult and involve citizens in policy making. Government will have to remove these hurdles so that citizen governance becomes an enabling mechanism to ensure that public goods and services are more accessible to vulnerable sections of the people.

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