



The Mizoram Right To Public Services Act, 2015: Enhancing Accountability And Timely Delivery Of Public Services In Mizoram

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Abstract : The Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, 2015, represents a transformative step toward citizen-centric governance in India, addressing inefficiencies and delays in public service delivery. This paper explores the historical context, provisions, and implementation challenges of the Act while analyzing its impact on governance, transparency, and citizen satisfaction. Key features of the legislation include mandatory time-bound service delivery, accountability measures through designated officers, a multi-tiered grievance redressal mechanism, and penalties for non-compliance. While the Act has improved service efficiency and administrative responsiveness, its success is constrained by limited public awareness, resource deficits, and resistance to accountability. Recommendations to strengthen its implementation include public education campaigns, enhanced training for officials, investment in digital infrastructure, and periodic policy reviews. By institutionalizing timely service delivery as a right, the Act underscores the potential for good governance and sets a model for other regions in India to replicate. This study provides critical insights into the Act's implications for public administration and the ongoing evolution of rights-based governance frameworks.

IndexTerms: Governance, Transparency, Public Service, Accountability, Citizens, Administration

1. Introduction

Governance in India post-independence has been deeply influenced by the state's omnipresence in the lives of its citizens, with poverty alleviation and the provision of essential services at the forefront of public policy. Despite significant efforts, India's governance structure has struggled to effectively deliver public services, particularly to its most vulnerable citizens, as reflected in the country's poor human development indices (Ramaswami, 2012. pp. 567-571). Endemic poverty, coupled with the absence of robust social security programs, has led to the reliance on subsidized provisions, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS). However, large-scale inefficiencies, leakages, and declining nutritional outcomes persist, highlighting systemic governance failures (Deaton & Dreze, 2009).

2. Public Service Delivery Challenges

Key public service sectors—education, healthcare, and sanitation—face persistent challenges, ranging from underfunding and infrastructure deficits to poor accountability mechanisms. For example, while education expenditure accounted for 3% of GDP in 2015-16, learning outcomes remained alarmingly low, with surveys revealing that nearly half of Grade 5 students could not read texts meant for Grade 2 students (Economic Survey of India, 2015-16; Bose, 2021. p. 9). Similarly, healthcare allocation stagnated below 1.5% of GDP, leading to inadequate services, poor sanitation, and adverse health outcomes such as high stunting rates (Spears et al., 2013).

Corruption further exacerbates these issues, undermining efficiency and equity in service provision. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index repeatedly underscores India's relatively high levels of corruption compared to other developing nations with similar economic trajectories (Olken & Pande, 2012).

pp. 479-509). Compounding this, civil servants' fixed-salary structures, low accountability, and political interference contribute to the misalignment of bureaucratic and public interests (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2011, pp. 39- 77).

3. Paradigm Shift: Citizen-Centric Governance

In response to growing disenchantment with traditional bureaucracy, the 1990s marked a paradigm shift toward citizen-centric governance models, epitomized by the Citizen's Charter initiative. Inspired by reforms in the UK, this approach aimed to enhance transparency, accountability, and service quality by placing citizens at the centre of public service delivery (Public Administration Select Committee, 2007-08). While initially successful, the voluntary nature of the Citizen's Charter in India led to poor implementation, outdated frameworks, and weak grievance redress mechanisms, as highlighted by a 2008 study conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (Bose, 2021, p. 12).

4. Emergence of Rights-Based Approaches

Rights-based service delivery models emerged to address these shortcomings, with Madhya Pradesh pioneering the first Public Service Guarantee Act in 2010. This legislative framework guaranteed time-bound service delivery and empowered citizens to appeal against delays or rejections. The approach inspired similar initiatives across more than 20 Indian states, institutionalizing mechanisms for accountability through penalties and grievance redress systems (IIPA, 2008).

The 2011 Right of Citizens for Time-Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Grievance Redressal Bill sought to extend these principles nationwide. Key features included mandatory Citizen's Charters, designated Grievance Redress Officers, and multi-tiered appellate mechanisms, culminating in penalties for non-compliance (Government of India, 2011). Despite its lapse, this bill marked a significant attempt to unify state-level innovations under a central framework.

5. Legal Framework for Right to Public Service Delivery in India

The concept of the right to public service delivery in India reflects a paradigm shift towards ensuring accountability and transparency in governance. The framework is built on principles of timely service delivery, grievance redressal, and penalization of non-compliance. While central-level legislation has been attempted, state-level acts form the backbone of this legal framework.

6. The Right of Citizens for Time-bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of Their Grievances Bill, 2011

The Right of Citizens for Time-bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of Their Grievances Bill, 2011 sought to establish a statutory framework for ensuring timely delivery of public goods and services. Although the bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha, its provisions highlight critical aspects of a citizen-centric approach to governance. Key features of the bill included (Bose, 2021, p. 17-19):

1. **Mandatory Citizen's Charter:** Public authorities were required to publish a Citizen's Charter within six months, detailing services offered, time limits for delivery, and responsible officials (Grievances Bill, 2011).
2. **Information and Facilitation Centers:** These centres, operating through various platforms such as online portals or call centres, were aimed at improving access to information at all administrative levels.
3. **Grievance Redressal Mechanism:** The bill's pivotal elements were the designation of Grievance Redress Officers (GROs) and avenues for escalating unresolved grievances to higher authorities, including state and central commissions (Grievances Bill, 2011).
4. **Appeals and Penalties:** Provision for appeals to Lokpal/Lokayukta and penalties for erring officials underscored the emphasis on accountability, with fines recoverable from salaries.

7. State-level Public Service Guarantee Acts

Over Twenty (20) Indian states have enacted public service guarantee acts, marking a decentralized approach to implementing citizen-centric service delivery mechanisms. Common features across these acts include (Bose, 2021, p. 17-19):

1. **Time-bound Service Delivery:** Stipulated timelines ensure efficiency, starting from the receipt of an application (State-Level Acts, n.d.).
2. **Appeals and Revisions:** Citizens can appeal to appellate authorities if services are not provided or applications are rejected. Provisions for revising decisions aim to balance accountability with fairness.
3. **Penalties for Non-Compliance:** The imposition of penalties, which vary across states, strengthens adherence to these laws and ensures timely service delivery.

8. Functional Duties and Procedural Dynamics

Key functionaries under these acts include Designated Officers (DOs), First Appellate Officers (FAOs), and Second Appellate Authorities (SAAs). DOs are responsible for timely service delivery, while FAOs and SAAs handle appeals, impose penalties, and ensure compliance. Citizens initiate the process by submitting applications to the DOs, with timelines starting from the receipt of the application (Raha, 2011, p. 11). The combined efforts at central and state levels reflect India's commitment to fostering citizen-centric governance. While central legislation would provide uniformity, state-level acts showcase adaptability to regional needs, making the framework robust and inclusive.

The enactment of the Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, 2015 reflects an important commitment by the state to improve the quality and timeliness of essential services provided to its citizens. The Act was created to address bureaucratic inefficiency and delay in delivering public services, which often lead to citizen dissatisfaction and erosion of trust in the administration. By enforcing a time-bound framework for service delivery, this legislation aims to increase accountability among government officials and improve citizen experiences in accessing various services.

This paper explores the Act's historical context, its principal provisions, the implications for public service officials, and its effects on citizen satisfaction and transparency. In doing so, it provides a model for understanding similar legislative frameworks in other regions and analyzes the challenges and limitations in its implementation.

9. Background and Context of the Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, 2015

The concept of guaranteeing citizens the right to timely services through a legislative framework emerged as part of broader reforms in Indian governance to reduce corruption, inefficiency, and bureaucratic delays. Other states in India had enacted similar laws before Mizoram, creating a precedent that highlighted the need for timely and efficient service delivery as a right rather than a privilege. The Right to Public Services legislation in Mizoram was part of the state's commitment to good governance and administrative reform, aligning with the nationwide ethos of transparency and accountability.

9.1. The Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, 2015, serves multiple functions:

1. **Encouraging Time-bound Delivery of Services:** By mandating specific timeframes for each service, the Act ensures that citizens are not subject to unnecessary delays.
2. **Establishing Accountability:** Designated Officers are accountable for providing the service within the prescribed timeline.
3. **Providing a Redressal Mechanism:** The Act enables citizens to appeal to higher authorities if the services are not delivered on time, thus providing a mechanism for accountability and transparency.
4. **Promoting Transparency:** The Act mandates the publication of notified services and timelines, thus creating awareness among citizens regarding their rights.

9.2. Key Provisions of the Act

The Act includes several critical provisions to ensure efficient service delivery. Below is a detailed examination of these provisions.

9.2.1. Application and Scope

Application: The Act applies to government servants substantively appointed to civil services or posts related to the Mizoram government, including employees on deputation and those working for local bodies controlled or financed by the state. However, the Act excludes certain groups such as daily-wage employees and those whose employment terms are governed by specific constitutional or legal provisions.

Scope: Services that are covered under the Act are notified by the State Government and are termed "notified services." Only these services are subject to the timelines and accountability measures specified in the Act.

9.3. Right to Public Service and Notified Services

Definition of Right to Public Service: This term refers to a citizen's right to receive notified services within a stipulated timeframe as detailed by the Act.

Notified Services: The Mizoram government periodically issues notifications listing the public services covered under the Act, along with the time limits within which these services must be delivered.

9.4. Designation of Officers and Stipulated Time Limits

Designated Officers: The Act requires the state to appoint specific officers responsible for delivering each notified service. These officers, known as Designated Officers, are directly accountable for ensuring that services are provided within the established timeframe.

Time Limits: The Act mandates the state government to specify the maximum time within which each service must be delivered to eligible citizens. This timeframe helps reduce delays and ensures that citizens receive timely responses.

9.5. Appeal Mechanisms

First Appellate Authority: If a Designated Officer fails to deliver the notified service within the stipulated time, citizens can appeal to the First Appellate Authority. This authority has the power to direct the Designated Officer to provide the service and can impose penalties for unjustified delays or refusals.

Second Appellate Authority: If a citizen is dissatisfied with the decision of the First Appellate Authority, a further appeal can be filed with the Second Appellate Authority. This authority reviews the appeals and can also impose penalties on officials for non-compliance.

9.6. Penalties for Non-compliance

Penalty Provisions: The Act stipulates penalties for Designated Officers who fail to deliver services within the specified timeframe without sufficient cause. Penalties can range from a minimum of 500 to a maximum of 5,000 rupees for delays, with additional penalties for prolonged delays.

Disciplinary Action: Apart from monetary penalties, the Act allows the Second Appellate Authority to recommend disciplinary action against officials who repeatedly fail to provide timely services, thereby adding a layer of accountability.

9.7. Protection Clauses

Protection of Officials Acting in Good Faith: The Act includes a provision that protects officials from legal actions in cases where they have acted in good faith. This clause ensures that honest mistakes or procedural delays not stemming from negligence or willful non-compliance do not result in punitive actions.

Override Clause: The Act states that its provisions override any conflicting laws, making the timely delivery of notified services a priority in the state.

9.8. Role of Citizens and the Redressal Mechanism

Citizen's Responsibility: The Act outlines citizens' responsibility to submit complete applications for services, ensuring that processing delays are minimized. It also encourages citizens to be aware of their rights and utilize the redressal mechanisms when services are not delivered on time.

Appeal and Grievance Process: The Act offers a structured appeal mechanism that begins with the First Appellate Authority and extends to the Second Appellate Authority, ensuring that citizens have multiple layers of recourse in case of unsatisfactory service.

10. Impact and Implementation Challenges

Impact on Governance and Service Delivery

The Mizoram Right to Public Services Act has been instrumental in promoting efficient service delivery and enhancing transparency in the public sector. By mandating accountability and timeliness, the Act has positively impacted government efficiency and responsiveness to citizen needs. It has also encouraged a shift in the administrative culture, where the focus is now on providing quality services within a reasonable timeframe.

However, the effectiveness of the Act depends significantly on public awareness. Many citizens may not be fully aware of their rights under the Act, which can limit its potential impact. Additionally, officials may require further training to understand the importance of timely service delivery, and procedural bottlenecks should be addressed to ensure seamless implementation.

Challenges in Implementation

Lack of Awareness Among Citizens: A major challenge in implementing the Act effectively is the lack of public awareness. Citizens who are unaware of their rights and the available grievance mechanisms are less likely to demand timely services.

Resource Constraints: Government departments may face resource constraints that prevent Designated Officers from delivering services on time, especially in rural or remote areas where administrative resources may be limited.

Resistance to Accountability: Implementing a culture of accountability can be challenging, as officials accustomed to bureaucratic inefficiencies may resist the changes mandated by the Act.

Need for Capacity Building: There is a pressing need for training programs to familiarize officials with the Act's provisions and their responsibilities, particularly regarding timely delivery and appeal handling.

Infrastructure Limitations: Inadequate technological infrastructure may also hinder the prompt processing and tracking of applications, especially in areas where online services are limited.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, 2015, represents a significant step towards achieving good governance by ensuring timely service delivery and enhancing public administration accountability. While the Act has shown promise in promoting efficiency and transparency, its successful implementation requires comprehensive awareness campaigns, capacity building among public officials, and adequate infrastructure support.

11.1. Recommendations for Strengthening the Act's Implementation:

Public Awareness Campaigns: To maximize the Act's impact, the state government should invest in campaigns to educate citizens about their rights to timely services and available grievance mechanisms.

Enhanced Training for Officials: Regular training sessions can help officials better understand the Act's requirements and improve their responsiveness to service delivery standards.

Digital Infrastructure: Establishing a robust digital system for tracking service requests can reduce processing times and improve overall efficiency.

Periodic Review and Updates: Regular reviews of the notified services and stipulated timeframes, based on citizen feedback and service efficiency, can further enhance the Act's effectiveness.

In conclusion, the Mizoram Right to Public Services Act, of 2015, lays the groundwork for a more transparent, accountable, and citizen-focused governance structure in Mizoram. With concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and citizens, this Act can drive significant improvements in public service delivery, fostering greater trust and engagement between the government and the people of Mizoram

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