

Improving grievance redressal in Haryana through effective use of 'Chief Minister's Window' (C M Window)

Summary of key recommendations:

- 1. To improve grievance redressal in Haryana through the innovative apparatus of C M Window*
- 2. To increase awareness of the citizens about the details of the tools and stories of success*
- 3. To introduce offline complaint tracking in order to supplement the current online tracking*
- 4. To add block level complaint windows to the existing district level windows in order to bring the process of grievance redressal closer to the people.*

Introducing the Study:

The study on C M Window, based on which the current policy brief is formulated, attempts to examine how a time-bound complaint mechanism has aided the communities to move one step ahead towards improving public governance in Haryana. The study is based on the experiences of the community members in five villages of Mewat district of Haryana, who are in contact with S M Sehgal Foundation's ¹ (SF) 'Good Governance Now' (GGN) initiative. The GGN initiative since 2008 has been enabling villagers of Mewat district, Haryana, to understand and access their rights based entitlements and engage with government officials in addressing governance issues.

The primary objective of the study is to analyse the role and effectiveness of alternative grievance redressal channels like C M Window which has been pioneered by the Government of Haryana for improving delivery of public services. It also explores the reasons and extent of unresponsiveness of the formal grievance redressal mechanisms associated with various crucial rights and entitlements. Picking up case studies from five villages in five different blocks of Mewat², the study highlights the fact that additional

¹ S M Sehgal Foundation was established as a charitable trust in 1999 with the mission of strengthening community-led development initiatives to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change across rural India. The Foundation team works together with rural communities to create sustainable programs for managing water resources, increasing agricultural productivity, and strengthening rural governance

² Mewat is a district in the state of Haryana and is the core area of Sehgal Foundation's work. It has 431 villages with a total population of 1.1 Million and sex ratio of 906:1000 as per census 2011. Literacy rates as per same source is 56.1% (male) and 37.6% (female); access to toilet facilities is 16.2%⁴

channels of grievance redressal such as C M Window can be a very effective tool because of systematic and timely methods of follow-up.

Key Messages:

- Sehgal Foundation’s primary research in five different villages of Mewat district in Haryana has revealed that C M Window is becoming immensely popular among the rural citizens because of its simple, user-friendly approach and time-bound solution even for protracted governance issues.
- Online tracking of the complaints and location of the windows only at the district headquarters are the two factors that citizens found difficult to deal with. Creation of windows at block headquarters for submission of complaints would make the tool more popular and user-friendly.
- Low level of awareness of the communities about the processes of complaint lodging in C M Window has restricted the use of the tool by the public. Increasing use of C M Window can be ensured if greater awareness about the details of the tool can be created among the citizens. In addition to this, sticking to the 30-day timeline and opening windows at the block level could motivate the communities to use the tool increasingly. Perhaps an introduction of offline tracking either through toll-free number along with the existing online one could make the apparatus further user-friendly in the context of rural Haryana.

I. C M Window in Haryana: Purpose and Structure

Majority of Haryana's population still lives in the villages; almost 65.12 % of the population is rural and only 34.88% is urban with the rural literacy rate being 71.42%.³ Haryana is witnessing rapid economic growth but delivery of public services has not been able to keep pace with it. Citizens in rural areas still face difficulties in accessing public services and poor awareness level prevents them from realizing their rights and entitlements.

Citizens say that grievance redressal at the district and block level is slow and they need a better mechanism to settle complaints or grievances.

Coupled with this comes the lack of awareness of the citizens about systems of grievance redressal. They do not know where to file complaints or how to write applications. The communities also remain puzzled because of the multiple layers within the grievance redressal apparatus at the village, block, district, state levels. Grievance redressal sometimes works if a complaint is filed at Deputy Commissioner (DC)/ Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) level or district level officials, but filing a complaint at this level is not possible for 95 % of people as they are quite far away from district headquarters and lack the necessary resources to contact multiple departments. Besides, the attitude and willingness of the government functionaries also becomes crucial in this respect. If a government functionary in charge of vigilance and complaints is citizen-friendly and willing to follow up on complaints filed in a time bound manner, then grievance redressal apparatus can work wonder.

³ www.census2011.co.in accessed on 30.08.2015

Keeping these circumstances in view and inspired by the Chief Minister's Special Cell initiative of the government of Tamil Nadu⁴, the state government of Haryana conceptualized an e-governance centre named 'C M Window'; it is a simple and user friendly one stop complaint cell exclusively for citizens' grievance redressal located in all district headquarters of the state. Applications submitted are scanned and updated to the office of the Chief Minister and thereafter are routed back to the concerned government departments. Within 30 days of lodging the complaint, the respective government department should either redress the grievance or reply to the complainant why the request cannot be approved.

Since the launch of this mechanism on December 25, 2014, the Haryana government and several nongovernmental organizations working in the state have been encouraging and assisting the communities to make effective use of the same. The objective is to address the complaints related to poor delivery of food items in the Public Distribution System, pendency of pensions, teachers' poor attendance in schools, and many more that are reported and resolved at this one-stop window more or less within the stipulated time limit.

II. C M Window: Is it proving effective in settling grievances?

The success of an alternate grievance redressal mechanism like C M Window depends on a number of factors. From the primary research of use of C M

⁴ Online petition filing and monitoring system of the government of Tamil Nadu accessed at <http://www.cmcell.tn.gov.in/> on 30.08.2015

Window in five villages of Mewat district, the following major trends can be enumerated.

C M Window is the evidence of the willingness of the state government to redress public grievances

The concept of C M Window, being conceived by the Chief Minister of Haryana, gives it an exceptional position as its creation reveals strong zeal on the part of the state government to improve public governance. Follow up of all complaints by the office of the CM is a key reason behind its success. The letters and instructions given by the office of the C M Window make all the government departments and bureaucrats including the offices of Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), Deputy Commissioner (DC), Assistant Food Supply Officer (AFSO), District Food & Supply Controller (DFSC), Block Development Officer (BDO), Block Elementary Education Officer (BEEEO), Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) or even Sarpanch and Panchayat Secretaries proactive. Administrators often tend to break the deep-rooted tradition of non-responsiveness and give greater importance to complaints lodged in the C M Window as they receive direct follow-up calls from the office of the CM.

Slow response from existing grievance redressal systems

The formal tools of grievance redressal have many levels – village, block, district and state, which may confuse an unaware citizen. Lack of response from government offices further creates disappointment among the citizens.

The primary research conducted in five villages of Mewat shows that the C M

Window is robust and user-friendly and with its help citizens have received their entitlements.

Awareness among the citizens leading to proper utilization C M Window

The district of Mewat has low literacy rates and hence it is impossible for common people to understand and utilize a new grievance redressal mechanism. Hence, it is crucial that Haryana government as well as NGOs working at the local level engage in creating greater awareness about the C M Window. A number of people will be interested in using this tool if they are aware of its simple and user-friendly procedures. Success stories of citizens who have used this mechanism will further educate and inspire others.

III. C M Window: Scope of improvement

Viewing the success of C M Window in Haryana in promptly solving governance problems, it is recommended that other Indian states should also attempt in replicating a similar device of alternate grievance redressal with slight modifications and improvements. Some of these recommended improvements are as follows:

Increase awareness among the citizens

At present, communities lack clear ideas about the processes of complaint lodging and instances have come to the fore that people have even tried filing Right To Information (RTI) applications through C M Window. Apart from using its own

awareness generation methods such as media campaigns, it is also recommended that the government should take help of local organizations which can reach till the last mile through their work. Besides mainstream media, use of the existing eight community radios in Haryana as tools to spread awareness about C M Window is also vital. Additionally, use of toll-free numbers, hotlines as well as the legal aid clinics to spread awareness about the mechanism as a whole can make it more popular. This could accelerate awareness levels of rural people and inspire the citizens to use C M Window more robustly.

Establish block level complaint windows

The C M Window is located only at the district headquarters. Citizens from remote villages would like to utilize this mechanism and get better access to their rights and entitlements, but may not have the time or resources to travel so far. Thus it is recommended that smaller outlets of C M Window be opened at the block headquarters so that citizens do not have to travel far to file their complaints.

Set up toll free numbers for tracking complaints

The internet based online procedure brings in discomfort to the villagers because majority are unable to access or use computer and internet. To overcome this problem, it is recommended that the government should introduce non-internet based tracking facilities as well. For example, use of a toll-free helpline number which can be reached in case the complainants do not receive any response within 30 days of lodging the complaints.

Improved online tracking

Currently, the online tracking system does not reveal how many complaints are yet pending to get resolved and the actual status of complaints even if the 30 days' timeline is exceeded. Up-gradation of the online tracking system revealing how many complaints are pending and where exactly are they struck is thus highly recommended in order to make the C M Window mechanism function with maximum transparency.

These improvements in C M Window will lead to better access to public services for common citizens.