MAKING GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS MORE CITIZEN FRIENDLY IN KARNATAKA

Establishment of Help Desks or One-Stop Shops

For

Sixth State Pay Commission

Government of Karnataka

By

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CENTRE

January 2018
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Committed to good governance
The study was carried out by Dr. Sanjeev D. Kenchaigol, Programme Officer, and Ms. Poornima G.R, Programme Officer, with support from Dr. Meena Nair, Head-Participatory Governance Research Group under the guidance of Shri. G. Gurucharan, Director, Public Affairs Centre.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner</td>
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<td>EDP</td>
<td>Electronic Data Processing</td>
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<td>GoI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
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<td>GoK</td>
<td>Government of Karnataka</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>KGSCA</td>
<td>Karnataka Guarantee of Services to Citizens Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>One-Stop Shop</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Relations Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTC</td>
<td>Rights, Tenancy and Crops</td>
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<td>RTI</td>
<td>Right to Information Act</td>
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<td>SAI</td>
<td>System Automated Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Message Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>ZP</td>
<td>Zilla Panchayat</td>
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Acknowledgements

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During the course of this project we undertook official visits to the districts of Raichuru, Udupi, Mysuru, Bengaluru (Rural) and Ramanagara. We are thankful to all the Deputy Commissioners and Taluka level officials for their cooperation, help and experience-sharing during our fieldwork. We thank the senior officials at the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) for providing invaluable information on the functioning of the Public Relations (PR) office there.

We are grateful to the innumerable citizens who shared their experiences and opinions regarding the delivery of government services, and whose resilience keeps the public sector going.

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**PAC Study Team**
Executive Summary

Over the years, the popular perception of public service delivery in India is that it is yet to be citizen-friendly and responsive. For an ordinary citizen, the experience of going to a typical government office even to access routine services – obtaining a certificate, seeking approval, documentation, paying bills, receiving pensions – can be intimidating. This could be due to various factors including lack of infrastructural facilities, the absence of information and guidance, non-responsiveness, and the presence of rent seeking intermediaries. Improving public service delivery in Karnataka, as in the rest of the country, has received attention from the government from time to time. Several initiatives including adopting ‘citizen charters’, enforcing the Right to Information (RTI) Act, and flagship programmes such as ‘Sakala’ and ‘Atalji Janasnehi Kendra’ to name a few, have been widely publicised but have produced mixed results. Their sustainability within the framework of government offices extant has been a challenge.

This study based on a sample survey, provides an assessment of the current state of government offices at the Taluka, District and State levels from the perspective of public service delivery; and proposes a simple, practical implementation model to make government offices citizen friendly. In doing so, the focus is on how a relevant citizen centric service delivery model or ‘citizen friendly help desk’ can be operationalised, specifically, in the offices that extend the highest number of welfare services to citizens such as the Taluka office (at taluka level), Deputy Commissioner’s Office (at district level), among other offices. The available literature on citizen centric service delivery in the public-sector suggests that countries such as Vietnam, Spain, Egypt, among others have adopted ‘one-stop shops’ on the lines of private enterprises and have been successful in improving customer experiences. Advances in e-governance and the use of new technology, growing awareness of citizens’ rights, and emerging public-private partnerships provide the opportunity to make government offices in Karnataka, truly citizen friendly, in form and substance.

To achieve this, the study provides an evidence-based approach to the ‘citizen friendly help desks’. The study was conducted in four select districts of Karnataka: Udupi (Coastal Karnataka), Raichuru (Hyderabad Karnataka), Mysuru (South Karnataka) and Bengaluru (Rural), with its headquarters in the state capital, Bengaluru. The key informant interviews conducted with the relevant staff/personnel at the select government departments and the citizens who were availing the services during the field work provided useful insights on the current state of public service delivery. With the qualitative evidence garnered on the operations of the key offices surveyed, the report identifies institutional and service delivery gaps and how these might be addressed to make government offices more citizen friendly. In this regard, the report, after a careful situation analysis, recommends a ‘rights–based’ approach to provide a citizen centric public service model that places the citizen at the centre of service design and service delivery.
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1. Citizen Friendly Offices: The Context

Introduction
Reforms in public sector with the aim of improving service delivery have received considerable attention over the last few decades. It is also true that India has witnessed significant changes in the use of technology and information for the efficient and timely delivery of public services, especially in the post reforms period. A pioneering initiative in this direction was that of several states legislating the guarantee of services act – for quality and timeliness - thus signalling a paradigm shift to a ‘rights-based’ approach. This mandate for ‘time bound’ services is popularly known as ‘Sakala’ in Karnataka, enforced through the Karnataka Guarantee of Services to Citizens Act (KGSCA), 2011 (Bajaj and Rajneesh, 2013). The act also envisaged the concept of e-governance with a majority of the services included, to be provided online. Besides Karnataka, about 15 other state governments have introduced similar legislations, some going a step further and constituting a Commission for the purpose.

These reforms in public service delivery have doubtless helped in improving the efficiency and timely delivery of some services in some government offices. The principal contribution of these measures has been to provide a normative standard against which to measure the quality of delivery of public services. While the Act does provide government offices a framework to refer to for improving service delivery, the inherent structure of the government offices has remained the same. Most government departments and offices have been unable to harness fully the transformative power of technology and innovation; and the inherent efficiency and diligence of partnering private sector institutions. Over the last decade the public offices in Karnataka have witnessed major changes in their infrastructure aimed at improving the quality and the speed of delivery of services to the citizens. The outcomes, however, have been mixed; have varied over time and space; and appear to be the direct function of the level of commitment of the head of the office. The sharp divergence, across offices and geographies in the levels of success of these initiatives suggest that they remain individual driven and are not sufficiently institutionalised. The principal issue of the sustainability of these innovative practices in the public sector remains the biggest challenge.

The situation on ground with regard to public service delivery is one of poor delivery design, the monotonous functioning of the offices, and the absence of clarity in the vision on the transparent, cost effective and timely provision of services. Little attention if any has been given to redesign the physical space for citizen interface – most offices do not provide even a place to sit or access to drinking water or a wash room; incomplete or inadequate information on the service delivery process and documentation; the absence of a help-desk to assist citizens who might need help; and no facility whatever for a grievance redress system. The citizen charters were meant to serve as the talisman for a well-defined, citizen rights-based standard for diligent public service delivery. Yet, in the field offices these were neither available nor appear to be enforced. In some offices the information kiosks meant to serve as the repository for guiding and assisting the citizens and in others even the Sakala help desk and kiosk were defunct and non-functional.
Need for Citizen Centric Offices

In most liberal democracies, citizen centricity in public service delivery is the sin-qua-non for inclusive and sustainable development. The state and its agencies strive to serve its citizens. In India too, making government offices transparent, accessible and efficient for the delivery of services to citizens has been amongst the priorities of public governance. Since most citizen centric services in India are the preserve of the state governments and delivered at the state, district and taluka levels, the focus of interventions to make government offices citizen friendly must be on the state and sub-state tiers of governance.

The urgency of addressing this need arises from some compelling reasons:

- The government of Karnataka has specified a list of 36 core services in the ‘Sakala’ project and these services range from getting income certificates to the issuing of Rights, Tenancy and Crops (RCT) documents pertaining to the land holdings. The volume of applicants is in itself a challenge. There is little scope for any improvement in a business as usual scenario.
- While thousands of citizens throng the respective public offices, there is a significant number of old, illiterate, poor, physically handicapped, and women and children who need help to access the services. At present, they receive little attention and no help at all.
- The process of service delivery is in many cases opaque, lacks transparency, and is complicated, and time consuming. This is made worse because there is no front office and as a result there is direct interface between the department personnel and the citizen that hampers efficiency and productivity the most.
- All of these reasons coalesce to give a free run to intermediaries resulting in rent-seeking, and ironically, constitutes the quicker, even if costlier avenue to access the service, thus reinforcing adverse selection.

Citizen Friendly Help Desk – An Overview

The concept of citizen-friendly help desks in public offices (although private enterprises have best functioning models) is not new in the domain of governance reforms. Many developed countries in the world have adopted such ‘one-stop shop’ models to provide easy access to services to the citizens. The need for citizen friendly help desks, does not necessarily suggest that the public agencies are corrupt or inefficient. As part of better governance initiatives, such measures have been adopted elsewhere to save the time of citizens and the work burden of the staff concerned (PwC, 2012). The citizen friendly help-desks, are operationally, single point of contact offices that citizens go to for government services or products, and are provided effective, efficient and quality services (Hecker, Jan and Miroslav Netolický, 2010). It is this condition of the help desks that defines a good and democratic relationship between the governments and the citizens (Ibid, page 6).
Literature review on the one-stop shops, as these are known elsewhere in the world, indicate the important characteristics such initiatives include:

1. The help desks improve the quality of public services of the local governments
2. They build/improve good relationships between the governments and the citizens
3. They help organise the interface between the government and citizens efficiently and effectively

It is important however to customise the concept of the help desk to best meet the local needs of citizens and to support the kind of service delivery extant. This report explores what kind of a citizen friendly office would best suit the local needs of Karnataka, and how a model help desk or one-stop shop might be used across the state to cater to the broad set of services provided to the citizens in the state.

In order to provide full information on the terms of government services and the rights of citizens in the wake of ever increasing numbers of welfare programs for the citizens, the Government of India introduced the concept of ’citizen charters’ in the year 1997 (Paul, 2008). Although this was intended to be adopted by all offices in the central and state governments, the response in most government offices was circumspect, at best. Its effective use was limited and the overarching objective of laying down service delivery standards, sensitising employees of their duty to meet those standards, and raising awareness among the citizens of their right to efficient services remained unfulfilled.

The economic reforms in the 1990s and with the growing application of information technology in government, successive governments made it mandatory to place information in the public domain and also make it accessible to the citizens to inform them of their rights and the services meant for them. In this regard citizen charters could have played a significant role in ensuring the right exchange of awareness and knowledge among the citizens. But this did not happen. A study conducted by PAC (Paul, 2008) found that out of 767 charters identified for the study in the various zones of India, the northern regions had very few charters while the southern region showed better status, and only smaller states and union territories did impressive work (Pages, 68-69). These insights drew attention to the gaps in the awareness of citizen rights and the responsibilities of the departments, however, nothing substantial has been done to bridge the gap.

The present state of the citizen charters after two decades of their introduction in the government – of neither their display nor their enforcement - reflects a deep-rooted apathy and insensitivity to citizen rights. Thus, the evidence from the field garnered by this study reinforces the need for a physically accessible and friendly space in government offices that will provide citizens information, assistance and prompt service. This citizen friendly front office for the citizen will significantly raise the quality of public service delivery and help bridge the distance between the government and its citizens.
Karnataka government has identified and listed 36 core services to be delivered under the ‘Sakala’ programme. To understand the manner in which these services are being provided to the citizens, and identify gaps in service delivery, it is useful to categorise them into three groups. This would also help determine which particular services need to be included in the front office operations or the help desk:

1. Services that can be delivered online (citizens need not visit the office)
2. Services that require identity confirmation and hence require at least one visit.
3. Services for which the presence of the applicant is mandatory and might require repeat visits.

The field visits and interviews with citizens and the staff in the sample survey indicated that for most and even basic services – obtaining certificates, Public Distribution System (PDS) benefits and pensions – applicants had made repeat visits and had to seek the help of intermediaries. As per the available information (GoK, 2014), the basic services such as PDS, land records, issuing of certificates, among other services required the applicant to follow up with the government offices. It is this evidence that provides insights into the weakness of the public service delivery model extant. It also highlights the vulnerability of the citizens who are poor, illiterate and old.

In this backdrop three important questions need to be addressed in designing a citizen-friendly office:

1. What are the barriers to and the enablers of a citizen friendly service delivery model?
2. What elements together constitute an integrated and citizen friendly help desk?
3. What are the prerequisites of a citizen friendly office and how does a citizen conceptualise a model help desk at his local government office?

The study attempts to conceptualise the citizen friendly help desk or one-stop shop based on the data and information garnered from the field offices. It seeks to provide a model that is context-specific and resource sensitive; one that is practical and can be implemented without the need for major restructuring or investment.
2. An Overview of Existing Practices

Citizen friendly help desks India and the One-Stop Shops (OSS) as they are known in other developed countries have been in existence for about four decades. The development of the OSS as a governance institution has involved various sectors and services depending on the predominant governance needs of the time. A brief overview of its conceptual and operational development in local governments and in the private sector helps understand the rationale on the basis of which they were established and how they have changed over time to meet the changing demands of governance. These changes also point to the gaps in the different models and the needs they cater to.

An important objective that OSS targeted across countries was simplicity in enabling citizens to access and use public services. In his detailed examination on the emergence of OSS, Stone (2006) records the history of the creation of OSS in the 1980s and points that these were initially catering to the needs of bankers and investment services. The rationale for the use of the OSS in the developing world came much later, in the early part of the first decade of 2000, in Egypt. The driving force for the emphasis on citizen centric services through OSS or help desks was the need to meet rising customer expectations. In different ways the best practices of the private sector's service delivery culminated in similar models in the delivery of public services. In this perspective, a study by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) (2007) provides a succinct model for public service delivery based on five select principles that have relevance to overcoming the challenges that a typical public service delivery system faces:

1. Customer-centricity
2. Connected government
3. Build capacity
4. Deliver the promise
5. Innovate

Although these principles look common to the basic approach to citizen-friendly offices, the differentiator is really the implementation process and the adoption of operating procedures that support sustainability of the innovation. In addition to a strong conceptual and implementation framework, efforts to constantly improve and upgrade service delivery based on citizen feedback, becomes imperative. To provide such an information, a study by the PwC (2012) explains the core methodology for implementing a citizen-friendly public service delivery, and the importance of a citizen centric design for delivery that combines the essential elements of speed, integration, value, and citizen experience, among others that combine to provide an efficient and effective citizen friendly office. Although this kind of a narrative might appear utopian, it is our considered view that with an innovative, decentralised, process-driven and technology-based approach, there is opportunity to transform government offices into real life citizen friendly models.
Citizen friendly Help-desks in Indian Context

The emergence of citizen centric service delivery in India, occurred in the early 1990s in the form of adopting citizen charters - the precursor to the establishment of help desks in India. The important contribution that the charters made was in nudging government service providers and the bureaucracy to be more responsible and responsive, measured against prior defined standards, thus laying the foundation for establishing citizen-friendly one-stop services. This has gained considerable momentum with the wide application of e-governance, with a number of important services being provided electronically, and in some cases online.

The following funnel method showcases the different models of citizen friendly help desks at various levels: International, National and local (Karnataka).

The concept of Help Desks in use at various levels

![Funnel model showing use of help desk models at different levels](image)

Figure 2.1 A Funnel model showing use of help desk models at different levels
3. Research Methodology, Findings and Policy Recommendations

The relevance of the research methodology for a study of this kind is the extent to which it draws on local knowledge of current practices and the barriers and enablers to change. The research team adopted a field investigation method that meant exploring and examining the problems as encountered by both the demand and supply sides at all three tiers – Taluka, District and State. Making offices citizen friendly or providing a citizen centric help desk is essentially a bottom-up problem that needs to be seen from the perspective of the citizen. Yet, citizen centricity in public service delivery brings in practice diverse layers of political and governance attributes. Deconstructing and understanding the socio-economic-political dimensions that influence access to and the entitlements for a variety of services is crucial to appreciate the patterns of exclusion of citizens from the service delivery process. Thus, two important empirical aspects that were central to the field study was to understand the demographic and socio-economic profile and distribution of the citizens at the various offices seeking services. The second was to understand the most basic services for which there is high demand and the process by which they are delivered. The practical understanding of these aspects has fed into the recommendations that this report makes.

Since the central theme of the study was the challenge of making public services citizen centric, we adopted a ‘rights-based’ approach to the problem. The expectations and aspirations of the citizens are, in our view, a manifestation of the growing awareness amongst citizens of their rights to efficient, affordable and quality services. The field visits\(^1\) were conducted in the select four districts of Karnataka, namely, Raichuru (representing the Hyderabad Karnataka), Udupi (Coastal Karnataka), Mysuru (South Karnataka) and Bengaluru (Rural) situated near the state capital. The methodology of data collected is purely qualitative in nature and represents the respondents’ narratives on the study problem. The evidence-based situation analysis has been undertaken along with interview methods. From each district, one Taluk (tehsil) was selected. In each district and tehsil offices 2-3 staff (group C and D levels) and equal number of citizens were contacted and interviewed. In addition, we also had formal interaction with the DCs and Tehsildars depending upon their availability. The collection of qualitative data from all four districts included a semi-structured questionnaire schedule that was prepared to cover the supply and demand side aspects of service delivery. The schedules covered the issues pertaining to the constraints and needs to establish help desks at government offices for the staff and the level of treatment by the staff, facilities available to citizens at service points and prevalence of corruption at any levels of the offices for the citizens.

\(^1\) This study adopts a purely descriptive and qualitative method of field exploration. Although we interviewed a few select officials and citizens, the numbers for each segment of the government staff and citizens are insufficient for a scientific sample size. Therefore, no data analysis is presented. This also goes beyond the scope of this study.
District level Situation Analysis

Udupi District

Udupi district, is a relative well-developed district by the human development and social indicators. Our interaction with the district officials indicated a positive attitude towards the citizens. We found a better equipped, clean office space in the DC office. However, the Sakala kiosk was found defunct.

![Figure 3.1 Udupi DC Office Reception](image)

Udupi district boasts a fine and clean office environment and has knowledgeable and courteous staff. Some citizen respondents, however, complained of rent-seeking by intermediaries, for issue of certificates supposedly on behalf of some officials. There was no grievance redress arrangement in place nor was there a help desk.

Mysuru District

The district headquarters of Mysuru, the cleanest city in India, has a heritage building as its office. We spoke to the staff and the citizens on how citizen friendly the office was and about the quality of services provided there. Several citizen respondents, who came to this office for RCT records, complained of having to wait for days, sometimes weeks, to get the documents that they applied for. They also complained of the non-responsive attitude of the staff. There was an appreciation among the officials of the need for a front office or help desk to make the office citizen friendly. However, they explained that severe shortage of staff, arising from a large number of vacancies against sanctioned strength was a major constraint. They were clear, though, that a full-fledged help desk with front and back office operations is a necessity.
Raichuru District

One of the most backward districts on social indicators in Karnataka, Raichuru presents a poor state of service delivery and infrastructure. The staff were unfamiliar with the concept of a front office or a help desk to make their office citizen friendly. It was encouraging, though, that they were willing to try it provided they were extended the required infrastructure and technical support.

The most common complaint across the citizen respondents was that there was no grievance redress system. They also expressed their plight of not being provided the space or the time to make their interaction less arduous, if not rewarding. They also expressed the view that a few of the staff had a positive and helpful attitude. From an observation of the service delivery process it was clear that far from being citizen friendly, the process and the quality of service delivery was rather poor.
**Bengaluru Rural District**

Although headquartered in the state capital, the situation in parts of Bengaluru Rural district appear rather dismal. The taluka office of Doddaballapur, for instance, is in a poor state. As in the case of several other offices, even in the Taluka office Doddaballapur, the SAKALA Kiosk machines were defunct and have not been used for a long time. During our visit, we found cattle in the waiting area of the office.

![A defunct Sakala Kiosk at Tehsil office Doddaballapur, Bengaluru (R) District](image)

To one of the questions related to the introduction of help desks in government offices, the response of the staff was that it was one of the many schemes that government forced upon the offices, and that unless well-trained human resources and efficient infrastructure exclusively for help desks are provided, it would not be successful. Amongst the citizen respondents, expectedly, there was widespread discontent. They complained of rent seeking and delay in services.
Major Findings

**Government staff perspectives**

1. No ‘citizen charters’ are maintained at any offices visited and most staff did not seem aware of them.
2. The help desks are a welcome step and are much needed in each of the government departments as these will reduce the burden on the staff and ensure better quality of service delivery.
3. Shortage of staff is a severe constraint to operationalise a citizen-friendly front desk. The defunct SAKALA kiosks were attributed to poor maintenance, poor infrastructure and the absence of uninterrupted internet connectivity.
4. A well-designed training program for the staff with regard to public relations and especially for help desks is necessary.

**Citizen perspectives**

1. Simplification of procedures and forms, and standardisation of all forms and making them available online will help.
2. A common front office or service counter is a necessity at all government offices, at least in the offices such as Tehsil and DC offices.
3. A well-trained team of 2-3 staff exclusively at the help desks, who are informed and empowered should be provided. The staff at the help desks need to be polite and treat the citizens well; currently the staff behaviour is not decent with the citizens.
4. Citizens often complained about the lack of basic facilities such as restrooms, drinking water and enough sitting space with chairs.
5. No cleanliness and hygiene at the waiting place meant for the citizens.

**Recommendations**

The principal recommendation we make is for the government to adopt a broad common approach to making government offices citizen-friendly but provide for a decentralised decision-making process on the specifics of the model that might best suit the local conditions. The citizen-centric design must be led by the local head of office in a manner that best suits citizen friendly service delivery based on local inter-office and intra-office conditions. Government is the biggest service provider delivering public services across a wide gamut of sectors, over vast disparate geographies. The quality of services therefore impacts a large differentiated citizenry. The principal challenge that government offices face is how to improve the quality of services - accessibility, satisfactory citizen experiences, efficient outcomes, and reducing the costs in providing those services, in a manner that best suits the local population and the basic services that predominate in that jurisdiction. A one size fits all-solution is bound to fail and will face resistance. Enabling decentralised innovation, will instead, foster wider ownership of the initiative amongst the office staff and find greater resonance in the community.
Reforms in public service delivery have received considerable attention in Karnataka over the years. Yet, it is important to recognise that several factors: growing awareness of their rights, technological advances, and a large aspirational young population of citizens has meant that government offices have lagged behind both in citizen centricity and in-service quality levels. The rising expectations of citizens for better services is state-wide – transcending economic status or geography – compelling government offices to redefine their role, transform into citizen friendly spaces, and focus on integrated service delivery. The first step in doing this is to outline some broad principles that will govern the model to make government offices citizen-friendly – placing the citizen at the heart of service design and service delivery – but providing flexibility for local customisation. This report, based on a sample assessment of the status of government offices extant, seeks to address how this might be achieved.

Making government at all three levels – the taluka, the district, and the state-level - citizen friendly must be based on ‘first principles’:

1. Citizen-Centricity: Understand the needs of the citizen.
2. Integrated Service Delivery: Eliminate the Silos approach.

We dwell in brief on these:

1. Citizen-centricity

The task of transforming government offices into citizen friendly spaces is a challenge. Public service delivery in Karnataka is characterised by two features that also represent constraints: services are delivered on scale (wide geography and high volumes), and often (if not always) entail interface with several departments or agencies. Addressing these two constraints will require a redesigning of the government office. Understanding the needs of the citizens based on data - demographic, socio-economic, and behavioural, provides a scientific basis for designing public service delivery models that are citizen friendly. Another important element is adopting well-defined service standards that reflect citizen-oriented quality assurance, and the implementation of processes that ensure that citizen feedback becomes the driver for continuous improvement in service delivery.

2. Integrated Service Delivery

Government represents a complex hierarchy within which departments and their field offices typically function as independent verticals or silos. While from an administrative perspective, these are perhaps necessary; from a service delivery perspective these silos constitute the fundamental barriers to being citizen friendly and fragment the service delivery process. Eliminating the ‘silos-based’ approach in government offices does not require major restructuring. Aligning the objective of being citizen friendly with the service delivery design; streamlining inter-office information exchange; adopting standard operating procedures in the front office and the back-office operations; establishing service quality protocols; and breaking
down the intra-agency silos and defining the target outcomes are incremental reforms that are necessary.

3. Strengthening Capacities

Central to transforming a government office to a citizen-friendly space is to change the way the office thinks and acts, and how the personnel perceive their roles and responsibilities. Focusing on three aspects of strengthening capacities should serve as the building blocks:

- Driving process re-engineering and establishing performance measurement standards to include key incremental reforms - standardisation of all forms and standardised operating procedures
- Redesigning the office to empower staff to deliver citizen friendly services - eliminate the interface between citizens and the staff
- Training and capacity-building needed to manage the transformation, including Efficient of use technology (ICT) for effective and efficient service delivery.

Transforming government offices to become citizen friendly is about implementing a seamless, integrated model for service delivery comprising – a clean, welcoming space; information and assistance; well-defined transparent processes, and bench-marked standards for efficient outcomes – accessibility, timeliness and service levels.

The first step towards developing the right service delivery model is to clearly define the role the office plays - policy maker, regulator or service provider. This role clarity should determine the degree of e-services, the degree of physical interface between the citizen and the office and the role of public-private partnerships to imbibe good practices from the private sector. Not everything need be done by government. Ideally, the front office should be outsourced with back office operations being government’s domain. Continuous improvement must inform public service delivery. Citizen feedback is key to achieving this. Based on the reflection of citizens and the staff we propose the following to be adopted to provide a citizen friendly help desks at the government offices.
4. Help Desk: Implementation Plan

Based on the best practices adopted elsewhere, the need assessment, and citizens’ perspectives, we propose the following implementation plan for a help desk model.

Step 1: Creating Support for Help Desk

Political support

Creating a help desk for better service delivery requires process re-engineering in the government offices. In this regard, the support from the elected representatives who look after the affairs of the system of the governance will provide support to the initiative. Hence, the use of potential platforms to let politicians know the problems and grievances of the citizens in the government departments becomes inevitable. The activities may include a number of events such as high-profile meetings and workshops at the local level.

Organisational support

Once the political support is established, there is need for strong leadership from within the local office. This can be achieved in a similar manner as it is done for the political support. The organisational support can be sought from the local organisations or departments by inviting them to assess the requirements of the desk and provide their inputs on the ways to improve the conditions further. Developing champions for the cause from within will help in implementation.

Citizen Support and Participation

It is well known that citizens are an integral part of the local governments. The office or department should therefore mobilise citizen support for the initiative and seek their feedback and inputs on implementing such help desks.

Support from Authorities

In some cases, support from various government authorities need to be sought in order to obtain some funding or subsidies to establish such initiatives. Hence, in order to get such benefits, the organisation should seek the support from the relevant authorities – typically, the head of the department or the Secretary of the department.

Step 2: Establishing the Project

The second and most crucial step is the preparatory work for establishing help desks. This will include activities such as a detailed list of involved parties, creation of a project team and project steering group within the organisation. Further, developing project objectives, project
results and an activity schedule will be the next important activity. Listing the parties to be involved in the project is important.

**Invitation of the parties**

1. Elected representative(s),
2. An ICT expert,
3. Expert on process analysis and organisational matters,
4. Expert on HRM,
5. Expert on product and services,
6. Expert on purchasing and contracting (hardware),
7. A legal expert

**Project Team**

The formation of a project team is meant for undertaking day-to-day work and in this regard, the organisation should recruit the required staff to carry out the daily work. Such a team needs to be headed by a team manager who is a civil servant trusted by the politicians and the management of the local government organisation. The Team manager will:

1. Formulate the vision of the help desk
2. Recruit the right candidates to handle various tasks
3. Persuade the heads to make their staff available to the help desk
4. Implement the organisational changes with the help of the heads of the departments

In case of taking services from the employees of other departments, the project manager needs to take the permission from the respective department heads. There would be some conflicts on the number of hours to be spent on the project by each employee, in such cases both the manager and the department heads should resolve the issue considering the extra work pressure on employees due to new project.

**Steering Group**

A steering committee can be formed to review the work of the project from time to time. This committee should be headed by the DC and/or other equivalent civil servants. The project manager is to be included as one of the group members. Further, other members can be the local politician, District CEO, communications adviser etc. The committee makes decisions on strategic matters and monitors the progress of the work. The committee can meet on a regular basis but not often.

**Project Plan**

The project plan is a leading document on establishing the help desk. It contains the fundamental activities required for help desk. It can be developed under the step 1: ‘Creating the support’ and completing necessary formalities such as taking approval from the local...
government council to establish the help desk. The project manager is the responsible person to develop the document with the help of his team. Finally, the project document needs to be approved by the steering committee before it is rolled out.

**The plan document consists of the following ‘elements’ in it:**

**i. Objectives**

The objective defines the clear-cut goal of the project – what the project should achieve. For instance, on January 5, 2018, a one-stop help desk with 10 services is fully functioning.

**ii. Results**

The objective consists of several results, and the results provide information on the realisation of what needs to be done. For instance:

Result 1. A location is furnished and equipped with the required infrastructure- to provide a clean neutral space for citizens.
Result 2. Front and back offices are established
Result 3. Three civil servants are trained to work at help desk (front office)
Result 4. The identified services are delivered by the help desk

**iii. Activities**

The activities, in this regard, are the tasks necessary to achieve the above-mentioned results. This also includes the details of the time schedule and the kind of task to be completed.

**iv. A Budget Plan**

For establishing a successful help desk, monetary resources are much needed for conceiving the plan and planning for its sustainability. The following are some relevant elements;

One-time investment cost

1. Acquisition/renovation of the building
2. Purchasing of hardware and software
3. Training costs of the staff
4. Communication and organising costs (meetings/events/workshop)

Maintenance Costs

1. Annual maintenance cost
2. Other costs on licenses, rent etc. to run the office
Step 3. Reorganising the Department/s

Once the physical place for help desk is established, it becomes a separate entity within the department. To make it operational, the relevant products and services need to be identified. In this respect reorganisation task should include the following:

1. Identify the products and services
2. Analysis of the process of delivering the finally identified services
3. Creation of front and back offices at the department and embedded into the organisation.
4. Get the feedback of the citizens for seamless functioning of help desk

Step 4. Bringing qualified Staff

To achieve a well-functioning help desk, well qualified staff needs to be deployed and they need be trained accordingly. Most importantly, the training of the staff to suit the requirements of a help desk is much needed. It becomes very crucial for the help desk that the staff need to have a friendly attitude towards citizens. In this respect, the employee needs to:

1. Be proactive and treat him/herself as a citizen
2. Understand the needs of the citizen and helps them to find solutions
3. Know well about the products and services
4. Behave passionately and know how to say ‘no’ without being rude.

Step 5. Building One-Stop Help Desk

Finding the Right location

As a one-stop desk is quite a prominent place where most of the citizens will be visiting, a significant need to provide a pleasant ambience within the space of help desk is highly required. In the final step, the physical space and infrastructure required for the help desk becomes critically important. While looking at such a plan, the following can be considered:

1. The number of products and services culminating with a huge space for future growth
2. The number of staff required to serve there
3. The relation between the front (Help desk) and the back office. A large distance between the two may create some coordination problems including delays in files movement.

Designing the one-stop desk

In its more crucial stage, the help desk should have all the following requirements that define the citizen friendliness of the government offices as:
1. A clear signpost of help desks out of the main building
2. An easy access for people with disabilities
3. Clearly indicate where the visitor has to go
4. A simple and clear indication of all the counters to the visitors
5. A properly set comfortable waiting room (not to mention the access to basic necessities such as drinking water, sufficient chairs, fans, restrooms etc) for the visitors. Be able to see and hear that when it is their turn to go to the right counter – this should be aligned with an automated token system
6. During waiting some reading materials such as magazines, newspapers, TV screens and a well-equipped children’s space is appreciated
7. The help desk design is open and transparent with glass made cubicles but with a strong glass panel between visitors and staff member for protection from aggressive customers
8. In the help desk space, to maintain privacy, physical separation between the counters is most important.
9. Some services need special furniture, for instance, such as helping citizens write letter/fill an application form etc.
10. The information on various services can be displayed on the walls with bright posters, TV screens showing still pictures/video clips on services.

Use of ICT Hardware and Software

Most importantly, for an efficiently functioning help desk, the use of ICT system becomes crucial. To provide seamless and efficient help desk services, the following needs can be considered.

1. Help desk computers can be connected to the most common systems at the local government such as land records, tax records, population registers, etc.
2. A proper connectivity between the help desk and back-office via computer systems
3. Register the clients at the help desk and direct them to the right counter and which services they need; registration will help for evaluation of the help desks
4. In respect of the services that are in high demand, the systems can measure the average waiting time and service delivery time
5. As some services are charged, the payment system can make help desks very citizen friendly through online payments than direct cash payments, which may result in corruption/fraud.

Step 6. Sustainability (of Improved Service Delivery)

In most of the times, while delivering citizen friendly services, returning to the good old routine occurs in public offices and hence, there could be a deterioration of services at the help desks. Following are important to follow to maintain better service delivery and achieve sustainability of service delivery by help desks in the long run.
1. **Develop a long-term vision:**
   Important questions on the purpose and ultimate goals of the help desk such as a) why one-stop help desk is needed; how it is valued for (constantly building citizens-government affinity) and what is the ultimate result of a help desk: making government services citizen friendly.

2. **Generate media attention:**
   Sufficient publication of help desk services among the media/news and gain support from political entities, organisations and citizens.

3. **Continued training:**
   Training of the staff at the help desk on new products introduced, citizen-friendliness, behaviour and attitudinal changes, updating computer skills etc. need to go on, on a continuous basis.

4. **Assured funding:**
   Sufficient funding for the project will enhance the sustainability of service delivery. Follow up tasks including long-term budget planning and retain the support of politicians, NGOs and donors.

5. **Gain citizen support:**
   The improper handling of citizen complaints will bring down the hopes of citizens in the project. It should be a constant endeavour of the help desks that they always provide effective solutions to citizens' problems.
Figure 4.1 A One-Stop Help Desk Model (A General Framework)
General framework of a Help-Desk Model

Figure 1 presents a schematic representation of a ‘general framework’ of a one-stop help desk and is recommended by this study for contextual replication in the government offices with required modifications within the model. The model contains two segments in its structure:

1. Back office and
2. Front Office (help-desk counter).

The Back office could be a single department office or a complex of departments that provide relevant services to the citizens on a daily basis. In most of the cases, in the absence of help-desk counters, the back office provides the services directly to the citizens\(^2\). Such functioning of these offices, as the staff of select government offices felt, hamper the work of the staff due to constant interference by the visitors hence delaying their work assignments. At the same time, some of the citizens who spoke with us revealed that they are not given due respect and are constantly told to come back many times by the staff. They continue to visit these public offices at the cost of their daily jobs/wages etc.

One of the visitors told the PAC Study Team that he has been visiting the tehsil office at Nanjangud taluk of Mysuru district for the last one year to get his land records to be transferred from his father’s to his own name, and till now nothing has happened. When he enquires, the concerned case work provides innumerable reasons for the delay. He says he doesn’t know what to do now...

The second part of the structure represents the proposed model of help-desk that will provide direct services and information to the citizens. This kind of a model facilitates direct interaction of citizens with the front office or help desk and cuts the usual interactions of citizens with the back office thus improving the efficiency of the back-office staff. As the figure indicates, when established, the help-desk will have ‘x’ number of counters depending on the need and will be guided and helped by ‘x’ number of back office sections or departments. At times when there is incomplete or insufficient information from the help desk, the system can facilitate interaction with the back office by providing a token or a pass to the concerned citizen to meet the required section/department or officer. This model presents a tested case of hassle-free services for the citizen based on a help desk that is currently functioning at the accountant general’s office, Bangalore (elaborated in the last chapter).

\(^2\) Although the government of Karnataka has introduced many innovative reforms in this regard, such as ‘Sakala’, ‘Padasalet’ and ‘Atal Jansnehi Kendra’, among others, our visits to the select study offices indicated that these schemes are either not functioning at the expected levels or were defunct during our study visits in the districts of Udupi, Raichuru, Mysuru, Ramanagara and Bangalore (rural).
5. Proposed Department-Centric Help Desk Models for Replication through a Case Study of Ramanagara District

The following department-centric models have been structured with inputs from various government departments from Ramanagara district. The departments visited, in this regard were: Deputy Commissioner's (DC) Office, the Zilla Panchayat (ZP) Office, the Taluka Revenue (Tehsil) Office, the District Social Welfare Department and the District Agriculture Department. The research team met relevant officers from each of these departments and discussed the possible models of department-specific Help Desks to cater to the required number of citizens in the respective offices. The following table provides a bird’s eye view of suggested models according to the differential needs of the offices. The models are indicative only and the infrastructure and budget estimations are purely based on approximation of costs and rents/fees/charges and may vary in different contexts in different regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office/Dept. visited in Ramanagara</th>
<th>Help Desk suggested at the Level of Administration</th>
<th>Discussions held with Concerned Officer/staff</th>
<th>Suggested Model (Number of Counters)</th>
<th>No. of staff at proposed help Desks</th>
<th>Key skills of staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ZP Office</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary, ZP and the staff</td>
<td>3 Counters</td>
<td>3+1</td>
<td>FDAs with adequate computer skills and better coordinating abilities with the different departments in ZP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Office</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner and the staff</td>
<td>4 Counters</td>
<td>4+1</td>
<td>SDAs with adequate computer skills, knowledge of land reform acts and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehsil Office</td>
<td>Taluka</td>
<td>In-charge Tehsildar and the staff</td>
<td>4 Counters</td>
<td>4+2</td>
<td>FDAs with complete knowledge of available schemes and welfare services with computer skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare</td>
<td>Taluka</td>
<td>Deputy Director and the staff</td>
<td>2 Counters</td>
<td>2+1</td>
<td>FDAs with all level knowledge of scholarships/prizemon ey to beneficiaries etc. with computer knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Taluka</td>
<td>Joint Director and the staff</td>
<td>1 Counter</td>
<td>1+1</td>
<td>A technical staff with relevant knowledge of field services and computer skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: the additional (+) numbers indicate the number of office assistants required in each Help Desk.*
Department-Specific Models of Help Desks with Details on Infrastructure and Budget

The Study team visited the Zilla Panchayat (ZP) office and met the Deputy Secretary, administration and other staff to provide their insights on a model help desk in their office.

Zilla Panchayat, Ramanagara

The Zilla Panchayat (ZP) office houses about 20 odd departments in its office complex and requires a help desk within the office to help the visitors. To gather needed information on the requirements of a help desk in this office we met the Deputy Secretary, Administration and discussed the need and significance of a help desk at ZP. According the information provided by the officers, there is no well-functioning help counter at the gate of the office and there is an urgent need for the same as a number of visitors visit the office for different reasons and do not know whom to approach for their work.

The office houses multiple departments starting from rural development and panchayat raj to agriculture and social welfare and women and child development, to mention a few. In the absence of a well-functioning help desk counter at the front of the office, the officers felt that a number of services towards the welfare of the people are not being availed due to lack of proper information and documentation among applicants. It is with this backdrop, the deputy secretary felt that a well-equipped help-desk may serve a useful purpose.

Infrastructure and other requirements

Since the concept of a help-desk is being conveyed in an entirely new way through the culmination of state-of-the-art infrastructure and advanced technology in terms of computers and telecommunication systems, we presented the general model and to the officials and requested them to provide an approximate cost estimate based on required manpower and physical infrastructure. The number of visitors at this office was approximated at 100 per day for which a 3-counter help-desk was selected as the ‘right model’ for the ZP office along with required infrastructure. Table 5.2 provides the infrastructure and budget details.
Table 5.2 A Zilla Panchayat Specific 3-Counter Help Desk Model: Infrastructure and Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Particulars of Unit</th>
<th>Number of units</th>
<th>Cost / Unit / Salary / person / Rent / month</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A. Variable Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Well-Trained staff**</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) FDA</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25000.0</td>
<td>75000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Office Asst.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>12000.0</td>
<td>12000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magazine/Newspaper**</td>
<td>Newspaper/magazines at the waiting</td>
<td></td>
<td>500.0</td>
<td>500.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Subtotal (A)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>87500.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B. Fixed Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Staff Training cost</td>
<td>Specific staff training</td>
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<td>9000.0</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Office Space</td>
<td>Renovating Office building</td>
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<td>400000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Computer Hardware</td>
<td>Computer units</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Computer software</td>
<td>Software</td>
<td></td>
<td>50000.0</td>
<td>50000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Network cost</td>
<td>Internet cost</td>
<td></td>
<td>40000.0</td>
<td>40000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Intercom system</td>
<td>Telephone connection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2000.0</td>
<td>6000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Help desk Furniture</td>
<td>Help desk counter furniture</td>
<td></td>
<td>75000.0</td>
<td>225000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chairs for visitors</td>
<td>Sitting chairs for citizens at waiting place</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14000.0</td>
<td>140000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>TV Screen</td>
<td>2 TV screens for creating awareness and knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35000.0</td>
<td>70000.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Electric Token System</td>
<td>Token system for citizens to maintain smooth functioning</td>
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<td>5000.0</td>
<td>5000.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1065000.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong> (A+B)</td>
<td>1152500.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ** indicates costs per month. The fixed costs are one-time investment. The cost of Help Desk building may vary depending upon the cost of building acquirement/rent under the current market rates and in context of various regions.*
Figure 5.1 A Zilla Panchayat Specific 3-Counter Help Desk Model (Office with 20+ Departments)
Deputy Commissioner’s (DC) Office, Ramanagara

For providing citizen services, the Deputy Commissioner’s office at the district level plays a significant role, especially in providing a large array of social welfare benefits and schemes. As is well known, the DC office normally houses multiple departments and thus provides department-specific services. It houses about 20 departments and a majority of the services fall under the domain of social welfare and land records. According to the information provided by the staff at the DC office, most of the citizens visit the DC office when their works are within the purview of Taluka offices and if the Taluka offices are unable process their applications.

The DC is the ultimate authority at the district level to implement and maintain law and order, peace and development in the entire district. Primarily, the DC focuses on 1) law and order and magisterial matters, 2) land revenue and 3) development activities.

Although, the law and order situation is maintained by the police force at the district level, the DC is the district magistrate and looks after matters of district jails. Matters related to land revenue command major focus and require enormous amount of work and diligence. The records, tenancy and crops (RTC) division at the district and tehsil levels forms a predominant sector of public interaction at these offices and attracts hundreds of citizens to the DC office, along with land related issues.

The third and most important component comprises of disbursements related to social welfare schemes and programmes. The DC office also takes care of disaster management programmes within the districts including rehabilitation of displaced people. Together these constitute a bulk of the development initiatives and welfare schemes that need to be provided to citizens. A range of development schemes are especially meant for the poor, socially disadvantaged and destitute women. Predominantly these benefits include monetary assistance in the form of cash transfers as monthly pensions to beneficiaries that include old-age pensioners, widows, unmarried poor women, and transgenders.

Within this backdrop, a help-desk at the DC office would mean a place where a number of visitors avail a lot of information on social welfare benefits in an easy and hassle-free manner. The staff at this office felt that a 4-counter help-desk would be adequate and necessary. Although, there exist a number of help-providing services meant for citizens, those are either not functioning up to the expected levels or are let defunct. A well-equipped and well-designed help desk would bridge the existing gap in this regard. A practical visualisation and budgetary allocation for the proposed help-desk at the DC office can be seen as follows.
Table 5.3 A DC Office Specific 4-Counter Help Desk Model: Infrastructure and Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Particulars of Unit</th>
<th>Number of unit</th>
<th>Cost / Unit / Salary /person/Rent/month</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Well-Trained staff</td>
<td>Human Resources**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1) SDA</td>
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<td>2) Office Asst.</td>
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<td>13000.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Magazine/News paper</td>
<td>Newspaper/magazines at the waiting place**</td>
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Subtotal (B) 1203000.0
Grand Total (A+B) 1288500.0

Note: ** indicates costs per month. The fixed costs are one-time investment. The cost of Help Desk building may vary depending upon the cost of building acquirement/rent under the current market rates and in context of various regions.
Figure 5.2 A DC Office with Four Counter Help Desk Model (for an office with 20 departments)
Tehsil Office (Revenue), Ramanagara (Taluka level)

A tehsil (revenue) office at the sub district or taluka level works towards disbursing multiple welfare benefits to citizens - old age pensions, PDS services, housing, land records, and issuing various certificates. Planning a help desk in the Tehsil office provides a better understanding of the scope, range and efficiency with which benefits are to be disbursed.

During our visits to various government offices at Ramanagara, we came to know that the Tehsil office provides the largest number of grassroots-level benefits to citizens and is the focal point of service disbursement for many social welfare programmes. Regarding the introduction of a one-stop help-desk in government offices, the Deputy Tehsildar shared that the mainstream visitors are from villages within the jurisdiction of Ramanagara taluka and belong to economically poor and socially backward households. They are farmers, agricultural and daily wage labourers, illiterate women, old age pensioners, widows and poor school children who come to avail respective services. They also come from farthest of parts of the taluka and cannot afford to travel frequently for repeated visits. Such an initiative would reduce the burden of the government staff and provide some relief to the citizens in terms of easy access to the staff and required help when needed, provided the latter is established with political will and government support.

The citizens who visited these service centres revealed that they have to wait for a long time for any kind of service. Especially those coming from remote places, said that they had to give up their one or two days of daily wages and incur extra transport costs. As far as amenities at the services counters are concerned, they said they do not expect such things for them from the government but at least some place to wait, especially for old aged and women and children, would be welcome.
Our interactions with the users thus provided enough insights on the way the current system functions and how the citizens who commute from the farthest places have to go through a lot of discomfort in the form of repeated visits with no relevant response from the staff.
Table 5.4 A Tehsil Office Specific 4-Counter Help Desk Model: Infrastructure and Budget

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Note: ** indicates costs per month. The fixed costs are one-time investment. The cost of Help Desk building may vary depending upon the cost of building acquirement/rent under the current market rates and in context of various regions.
Figure 5.6 A Taluka Revenue Officer with 4-Counter Help Desk Model
### Table 5.5 A Social Welfare Office at Taluka with Two Counter Help Desk Model: Infrastructure and Budget

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**Note:** ** indicates costs per month. Items from 3 to 11 are one-time investment. The cost of Help Desk building may vary depending upon the cost of building acquirement/rent under the current market rates and in context of various regions.
Figure 5.7 A Taluka Social Welfare Office with Two Counter Help Desk Model
Table 5.6 A Taluka Agriculture Officer with One Counter Help Desk Model Infrastructure and Budget

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Note: ** indicates costs per month. Items from 3 to 11 are one-time investment. The cost of Help Desk building may vary depending upon the cost of building acquirement/rent under the current market rates and in context of various regions.
Figure 5.8 A Taluka Agriculture Office with One Counter Help Desk Model
6. A Case Study of a Model Help Desk: Office of the Accountant General (Accounts and Entitlements (Pensions Division), Bangalore

Introduction

Since this project is entirely based on the prescription for a model help desk, it becomes quite important to identify a successfully working help desk that would be exactly representative of our framework – we found this at the office of Accountant General (Accounts and Entitlements (pensions division)), Bangalore. At the suggestion of the 6th State Pay Commission, we studied this model and found to be the best functioning system at its core. Although the motivation of this help-desk is unidimensional, in that it offers services only to pensioners and PF beneficiaries, the model of this help desk prescribes to all the principles of the model framework keeping it as real as possible. The help-desk office provides a state of the art office with well-connected internet services and maximum utilisation of ICT. The office facilitates all the basic necessities that a citizen can desire to have during his or her visit to the office – a visibly-displayed citizen’s charter, a well-equipped sitting lounge, an electric token system etc. The following section provides detailed information on the functioning of this model help-desk, which, in all respects looks citizen friendly and is diligent, and as this report suggests can be replicated elsewhere as well.

Figure 6.1 A Citizen’s Charter displayed on the wall at the office
The help desk is structured in such a way that it is connected with the back office and no citizen interface takes place between the citizens and the Back office except for some extreme situations. The Help Desk or Public Relations Office (PRO), which it is normally referred to in the public sector has all the required infrastructure and essentials. For instance, a Citizen’s Charter is displayed on the wall and explains rights and responsibilities of the PR office, not seen in many government offices nowadays.

The space also features a well-designed help desk counter with a unique software enabled computer system. An electric token system mounted on the wall near the counter helps the counters function seamlessly and helps citizen interaction efficiently. Among other facilities, a well-equipped waiting lounge for citizens is provided with all amenities such a TV and drinking water. In addition, a well maintained sitting lounge with a centre table to write applications and filling up forms is provided. Right on top of the wall, a TV screen is mounted to provide programme specific information and awareness clips.

Figure 6.2 Electric token dispenser machine with token number display and a visitor’s pass to go to Back Office
The Back Office and the Front Office

The functioning of this model is based on the principle of zero interface between the back office and the citizen on an everyday basis. This to ensure a smooth and hassle-free functioning of the back office also to ensure free and efficient flow of information from the back office to the front office. Having said that, this office provides a scope for the citizens to interact with the back office staff only in exceptional cases. In such situations, a visitor’s pass is given to required visitor with the details on the pass and is allowed to meet the concerned section clerk in the back office.

The major customers of this office are pensioners from government and private sectors. This is a single fold service that this office is providing, where the required documents are directly sent by the concerned departments from where a pensioner has retired from service.

Once this office gets the documents, the back office generates an instant unique ID for the customers and the same is sent to the concerned pensioner through a system generated short message service (SMS). Once the ID is created the back office makes sure that all the details of the documents are fed to the system, and vetted and peer reviewed at multiple levels for authenticity. The same is also informed to the pensioner if s/he enquires about the status of their application.

In case of certain extreme conditions such as missing documents, biases during two wives etc. the delays in application processing happens and in such cases, the applicants are allowed to meet the concerned section/case worker. This is done through a systematic process of obtaining a visitor’s pass, which is given at the help desk counter.

In carrying all this work the back office provides efficient and diligent support to the front office.

Figure 6.3 The visitor’s lounge
The Front Office

The front office is equipped with two efficient staff and two computers that are enabled with unique (System Automated Information) SAI software that provides all the needed information on the state of progress about the pensions. The services are provided as per the call taken from the electric token system and hence each token number is called by the help desk staff.

![Figure 6.4 The Help Desk Counter](image)

We were also told that not all the services need personal visits to this office. A number of people from many parts of the state make telephone calls to this office with regard to their problems/clarifications etc. Hence, the help desk staff also need to take calls from outside and provide the needed information. According to a senior in-charge of the Public Relations Office (PRO), this office gets on an average of 100 to 150 visitors every day. And each person spends an average of 5-10 minutes at the help desk.

With such a system of functioning in align with the back office, there is very limited citizen and back office interface and at the same time this helps the back office to provide an efficient support to the front office without any interruptions.

The front office counter, here, has two efficient staff members, who have been exclusively put at the help desk. The staff are regular employees of this office and are graduates. Before induction to this space, they were rigorously trained to handle the activities of PR office. The help desk counter is provided with uninterruptible power supply and internet facility. Cuts in power supply rarely happens and it is taken care that there should be no interruptions at any time of the day. As the whole process of help providing services entirely depends on the functioning of the system, utmost care is taken for uninterruptible power supply and internet is available all the time.
As far as its function is concerned, the help desk staff member asks for the unique ID number, which is then fed to the software. Once the system accepts the unique ID, it provides all related information of the applicant on the computer screen in addition to the status of the progress.

As this office provides a single service delivery, it becomes quite critical for the other offices such as Tehsil, ZP and DC that witness a huge number of citizens visiting these offices for multiple services to go for a ‘Bangalore One’ model that virtually offers multiple services at one place with the help of very advanced IT enabled software system.

Step by step stages of processing the received applications at Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) office

The following is a step by step explanation of how the back office and PRO (help desk) carry out their services on a daily basis:

STEP 1: The pension documents from various departments are received at TAPAL section
STEP 2: The TAPAL section undertakes a department wise sorting of all the received documents
STEP 3: Each document is considered as a ‘CASE’ and all the cases received from TAPAL are further sent to Electronic Data Processing (EDP) section for indexing
STEP 4: Once the data processing is done at EDP section (it is at this moment that a unique ID number is generated for each case and is sent to the respective beneficiary through an automated SMS), the respective documents are further sent to different pools (sections)
STEP 5: Once the cases are sent to the concerned pool, these cases are further looked after by the section clerk. At this stage, each section clerk verifies all documents and validates the same. An SMS is also sent to the customer on the state of the progress of the application.
STEP 6: Once the concerned section clerk validates the case, it is further sent to the Chief Accounts Officer for final verification, the status of which is also sent to the customer through an SMS.

According to the Chief Accounts Officer, for each case or application, as per the norm of citizen charter, a time duration of 60 days is provided to complete the case processing formalities. Normally, within this stipulated time frame, the cases are processed. In quite exceptional cases such as disputes among the brothers, death of spouse or in cases of two wives, it normally takes more than 60 days.

*All this work of the back office is further sent to the front office (help desk counter) on a daily basis and the same is shared with the citizens and callers from far remote places by the latter.*
References


World Bank (??): Citizen Service Centres: Pathways towards Improved Public Service Delivery
Annexure 1
Staff Questionnaire Schedule

A. General Information
Name of the government office: ______________________ Date: ________________
Place: ____________________ Taluk: ____________________ Dist. _________________

B. Respondent information
B.1 Name of the respondent: ______________________________________
B.2 Respondent category:  
  a) Group B employee…………………………………………1
  b) Group C employee…………………………………………2
  c) Group D employee…………………………………………3
B.3 Educational Qualification: ______________________
B.4 Age: ______________________ Years
B.5 Total years of experience ______________________ Years
B.6 Sex: ______________________
B.7 Place of respondent: ______________________
B.8 Contact No: ______________________

C. Existing Arrangements
C.1 Do you have any idea about what citizen friendly offices are for?
Yes.........1) No...............2)  
If no, please explain the respondent about citizen friendly offices and then continue

  Details of self-involvement:

  Details of self-involvement:

C.2 What according to you are the existing arrangements for citizen friendly help desks in your office?

  Details of arrangements:

  Details of arrangements:
C.3 How do you personally contribute in this perspective of creating citizen friendly environment?

Details of self-involvement:

Details of self-involvement:

C.4 Do you think customers are best satisfied with the current state functioning in disbursing the best services?

Yes........1) No...............2)

If yes, in what way? If no, >> C. 5

Details of attributes of best services:

Details of attributes of best services:

C.5 If no, please provide the possible reasons for the same

Reasons for under performance:

Reasons for under performance:

C.6 have you been given any kind of training/skill building on citizen friendly service disbursement?

Yes........1) No...............2)

If yes, please provide details on what kind of training/skill building you received

Details of training/skill building:

Details of training/skill building:
C.7 Do you think you have some hurdles in working towards citizen friendly office system? If yes, please provide details such as Infrastructure and/or lack of capacity building etc.

Details of existing gaps:

Details of existing gaps:

C.8 What are your suggestions to improve the existing conditions towards providing a citizen friendly help desk?

Details of suggestion:

Details of suggestion:
Annexure 2
Citizens’ Questionnaire Schedule

A. General Information
Name of the government office: ______________________ Date: ________________
Place: ____________________ Taluk: ________________ Dist. ________________

B. Respondent information
B.1 Name of the respondent: ________________________________________
B.2 Respondent category
   a) Old aged applicant……………………………………….1
   b) Young applicant……………………………………….…2
   c) Woman applicant…………………………………….…3
   d) Illiterate/physically handicapped applicant…………..4
B.3 Educational Qualification: ______________________
B.4 Age: ______________________ Years
B.5 Sex: ______________________
B.6 Place of respondent: ______________________
B.7 Contact No: ______________________

C. Respondent visit details
C.1 What is the purpose of your visit to this office?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose:</th>
<th>Any detailed information:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>

C.2 What is the frequency of your visit?

   a) First visit……………………………………….1
   b) Second visit………………………………………2
   c) Third visit……………………………………….3
   d) Fourth visit………………………………………4
   5) More than four times……………………………5 >> C.3

C.3 In case of this frequency, what do you think could be the main reasons for such delay?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons:</th>
<th>Any detailed information:</th>
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</table>
C.4 For each visit, for how long you have to wait in this office?
   a) < 1 hour……………………………………………1
   b) 1 to 2 hours…………………………………2
   c) 2 to 3 hours…………………………………3
   d) > 3 hours……………………………………4

C.5 During the long hours of wait, where you are suggested to wait?

Waiting place: __________________________________________________________
Any detailed information:

C.6 What are the facilities provided for you during your wait?

Facilities in waiting place: (such as drinking water)
_____________________________________________________
Any detailed information:

C.7 Whether the officers deal with you politely?
   Yes….1, No…..2
   If no, what are the reasons?

Reasons: __________________________________________________________
Any detailed information:

C.8 Whether the officers demand money for your work?
   Yes….1, No…..2
   If yes, please provide the details

Detailed information:

C.9 So far what is your experience of availing services from this office? Please provide the details

Detailed information:
6.10 In case of bad experience, what are the reasons that you would attribute?

a) Reason 1__________________________________
b) Reason 2__________________________________
c) Reason 3__________________________________
d) Reason 4__________________________________
e) Any other__________________________________
(Please provide the detailed information)

Detailed information:

C.11 Please provide the information on the existing arrangements/facilities made available to the citizens/consumers in this office

Detailed information on existing arrangements:

C.12 Please provide your feedback/suggestions for improving the facilities and speeding up the processes of everyday transactions

Feedback:
Any remarks:

Remarks: