

Assessment of the Effectiveness of CM Window Grievance Redressal System

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the effectiveness of grievance redressal using the example of CM window functioning in district Kaithal, Haryana. It is a technology-based innovation aimed at improving the grievance redressal system. As opposed to assessing the effectiveness of the technology-based solution by analysing existing quantitative data such as number of grievances received and redressed, this study delves into the citizen experience of using CM window and assesses its effectiveness along certain key parameters. For the purpose of this study, the parameters range from behavioural aspects such as the behaviour of the staff responsible for filing the complaint to questions that gauged the citizen experience more directly such as the number of times they visited the office to file their grievance. The study concludes that there is a need to create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the operation of CM Window. The ground staff needs to be oriented as per the SOP and their capacity building has to be done. If the government is serious about the effectiveness of CM Window, there should be a separate cadre of grievance redressal staff at the district level whose sole responsibility should be to work on the grievances.

I INTRODUCTION

Governments across the world are constantly working to develop effective service delivery systems for citizens and the case of India is no different. In urban setups, increased awareness often improves the likelihood of better access to public services. Whereas in rural areas of India, constraints such as poor administrative infrastructure and weak dissemination of information leads to difficulties in accessing services meant for the well-being of citizens.

But there are certain key factors that hinder effective service delivery across rural and urban India. Consider for example the high volume of citizen transactions in services such as Public Distribution Services (PDS) and pensions. Another factor that cuts across the rural-urban divide is ineffective dissemination of information which leads to lack of clarity regarding procedures to avail services. In a set-up which is plagued with high volume of applications and low level of awareness among citizens, red-tapism and corruption often finds a fertile ground to grow. Keeping these challenges in mind, governments have explored innovative solutions through new technology options to improve redressal of grievances.

Many states already have a system of citizens' *Darbar* where the citizens come with their complaints to either the chief minister, the elected representatives of the state, or administrative heads. A major drawback of this grievance redressal system is the need for the physical presence of the citizen. It has also been seen during fieldwork in Kaithal district that the monitoring and tracking of redressal of grievances received through such means is weak.

In Haryana, the Chief Minister's Window (CM window) which was launched by present *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) government on 25 December 2014, is a technology based innovation aimed at improving the grievance redressal system. CM Window is envisaged as a one stop solution for grievance redressal. Due to the complex administrative set-up, citizens sometimes remain clueless about the right office to file their complaints. Even if a citizen knows the right place to file the complaint, bureaucratic apathy often becomes a hurdle in the resolution of the grievance. CM Window, by bringing in more transparency in the process of grievance redressal and leaving little to the whims and fancies of the officers, has helped improve the citizen's experience of governance.

Functioning of CM Window

When a citizen encounters an issue either in public service delivery or any administrative hurdle, s/he is required to write an application detailing the grievance in the most elaborate manner. This application along with a valid government ID proof is submitted at a counter at either at the sub-divisional headquarter or the district

headquarter. The operator at the CM Window uploads the application along with ID proof on the CM Window portal. The complaint is received by the CM cell stationed at the CM Office in Chandigarh.

The supervisors at the CM cell go through the complaint in detail and assess its authenticity. If the complaint is found to be authentic, the complaint is either marked to the deputy commissioner of the concerned district or the administrative head of the concerned department, depending on the nature of the complaint. At the district level, the complaint is undertaken and then marked to the concerned district officer for its assessment. If it falls within the purview of the district officer, the complaint is undertaken by his/her office. The concerned district officer then contacts the citizen and understands the nature of the complaint. Based on the requirement for grievance redressal, district officers take necessary action(s). The district officer(s) prepare an Action Taken Report (ATR) which details the necessary details and resolution of the grievance. The ATR is uploaded on the CM Window portal and assessed by the deputy commissioner's office. If the ATR is found to be authentic, it is marked to the CM cell.

Based on the nature of the redressal, CM cell either asks for a clarification from the concerned district officer or the complaint is disposed. Random phone calls are also made to the citizens by the CM cell to do a spot check of the resolution. In case the citizen is not satisfied, the complaint is sent for clarification to the district officer.

A review system has been instituted to ensure that the grievance redressal is properly done at the district level. As part of the review system a weekly meeting under the chairmanship of the city magistrate is held. The meeting sees the participation of various officers from the district who present the status of their CM Window complaints. A similar meeting is chaired by the deputy commissioner every month. Such meetings help to keep a check on the status of grievance redressal in the district. Many a times, a grievance requires more than one department to work in coordination with each other. These review meetings also act as platform to remove any bottlenecks that hinder the effectiveness of the coordination.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CM Window has fairly stabilised due to the efforts by the civil administration in past three years. The incoming rate of complaints is witnessing a gradual increase which indicates the growing awareness among the public regarding this new grievance redressal mechanism. Over time, the review meetings in the district to check progress of grievance redressal have become frequent and consistent. This can potentially mean that the district administration is showing more faith in CM Window mechanism and that monitoring of the work done at the district level is more stringent.

However, despite sincere efforts by many officers, these review meetings don't necessarily capture the effectiveness of the grievance redressal. High volume of complaints and low administrative capabilities due to increased burden of work might be key contributors to ineffective grievance redressal. The state and district

administration haven't made a serious effort to gauge the quality of grievance redressal. Hence, there is a need to measure the effectiveness of CM Window apparatus by directly interacting with beneficiaries, in this case by using the method of citizen surveys. One way to assess the effectiveness of CM Window is to analyse the data provided by the CM Window portal. This data might include the number of complaints filed, number of grievances resolved and the average time taken to resolve the grievances. This data might not reflect the reality on the ground, as all the inputs are provided by the government departments with little feedback from the citizens. Hence, in order to get a feedback on the effectiveness of CM Window, it is important to reach out to the citizens. For this purpose, citizen interview was chosen as the method for this case study. Since I was working with the district administration of Kaithal, the sample for citizen interviews was chosen from Kaithal district. District administration in Kaithal gave me access to the data related to CM Window of district.

The year 2017 was chosen to get the sample data. Out of the total 7532 grievances received for Kaithal district, 6978 grievances have been disposed, leading to a disposal rate of 92.6 per cent. The complaints filed in 2015 and 2016 would have been too old and it would be difficult for the complainants to remember the key details of the grievance.

Sample selection

In Kaithal, 2386 complaints were filed using CM Window in the year 2017. Kaithal is divided into three sub-divisions, seven blocks, seven tehsils and sub-tehsils, and five municipal councils and committees. Most of the grievances were pertaining to one of these offices. Other than these, grievances related to banks, forest department, food and supplies department, etc, were also present. Grievances pertaining to different departments were downloaded in different excel sheets. A sample of 20 per cent grievances was selected at random from the individual departments. This was done to maintain a fair representation from every department without any operational bias. A total of 480 complaints were sorted thus maintaining the sample size of at 20 per cent of the total number of grievances filed in 2017. As per the reports on CM Window portal of the district, all of these grievances had been disposed.

Citizen interview

A detailed questionnaire was prepared to measure the effectiveness of the CM Window. Couple of questions in the beginning of the questionnaire were meant to be conversation starters and have played no role in the analysis. The latter questions gauge the quality of grievance redressal. For the citizen interviews four interns with deputy commissioner office of Kaithal were assigned the work of calling the complainants and asking them the questions.

Every conversation took 15 minutes on an average, as the interns had to brief the citizens about the background of the work before asking them the questions. The citizens were informed about the purpose of the survey and their consent was taken. Citizens were also informed that their identities will not be revealed in any part of the study. In order to ensure the authenticity of the data, 10 per cent random calls were also made by

me to verify the recorded data. In all the cases, the recorded responses were found to match exactly with the citizen's response.

Limitations of the study

This study was taken up to measure the effectiveness of CM Window grievance redressal mechanism in satisfying the aggrieved citizens. The citizen survey however suffers from certain limitations. Authenticity of the citizens' claims is always a concern with citizen surveys. The bias of the respondents could come into play, especially because it concerned their own grievances. There might be traces of sponsorship bias as well because the interns conducting these citizen interviews might have been seen as part of the government apparatus.

The first key limitation of this study is regarding its geographic scoping. The citizen survey was conducted only in Kaithal district, while CM Window is operational throughout the state. Different districts have different approaches towards handling CM Window complaints, due to which citizens' responses would also vary. The study doesn't capture the variability of responses arising out of geographic differences.

The response of citizens was recorded prima facie and little effort was made to establish the authenticity of the claim. For example, when citizens said that their hearing took more than an hour, the survey doesn't capture the reason behind this. Also, when citizens informed that they were not satisfied with the redressal of their grievance, a follow-up question to gauge the reasons for their dissatisfaction would have improved the analysis.

II ASSESSMENT OF CITIZEN EXPERIENCE OF CM WINDOW

The first question in the questionnaire was about the source of information about CM Window. An overwhelmingly 94 per cent of the respondents (Figure 1) mentioned that they heard about CM Window from other citizens – either their neighbours, acquaintance or relatives. Efforts by the state and district administration also contributed to the information dissemination about CM Window. However, no citizen mentioned that they saw any government advertisement about the CM Window. This shows that a lot of the publicity about CM Window was through word of mouth.

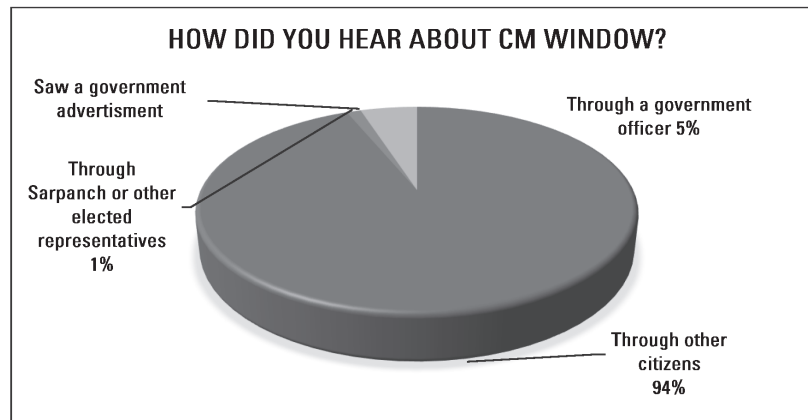


Figure 1: Source of information about CM Window

When citizens were asked about the number of visits they had to make to file their complaint, 47 per cent responded that they had to go just once (Figure 2), 41 per cent of the respondents went twice, while 9 per cent had to go thrice to file their grievance at the CM Window. Only 3 per cent of the respondents said that they had to visit more than three times to file their complaint. Citizens who had to visit more than once maintained that they didn't have either the ID proof with them or they didn't have a legible written application with them at the time of filing the complaint. Some of the citizens couldn't cite any reason for multiple visits.

All the respondents had visited the CM Window to file their grievance. This highlights the fact that the positioning of CM Window at SDM offices has led to easier access for the citizens, and hence they are physically present to file their grievance. All the respondents also maintained that the behaviour of the staff at the CM Window was cordial and they didn't face any difficulty in filing the complaint.

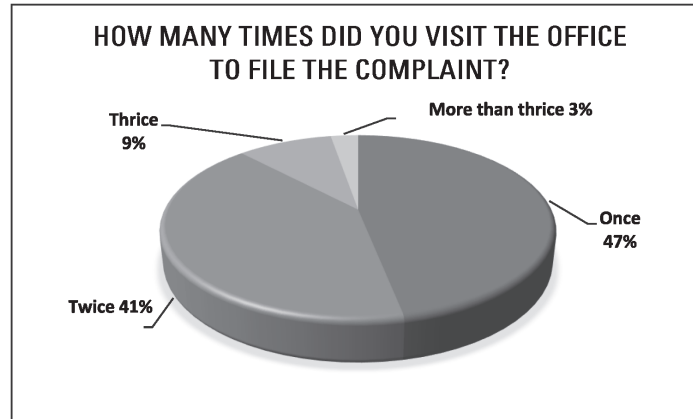


Figure 2: Number of visits to file the complaint

The question regarding the number of days officials took to contact the citizen about their grievance led to some alarming revelations. Only one per cent of the respondents said that they were contacted by the concerned officer or staff within 15 days of filing the complaint. Out of the 480 respondents, 164 said that they were contacted 15-30 days after filing the grievance. Sixty per cent of the respondents maintained that they were never contacted by the concerned department's staff or officer for their grievances. Since the official figures on the CM window portal count these grievances as disposed complaints, it is clear that many of the grievances are disposed without ever having contacted the complainant.

When the grievance is first filed, it directly goes to the CM grievance cell operating out of CM office in Chandigarh. CM cell checks the nature of the complaint and marks the complaint to the concerned deputy commissioner's office. Grievance cell at the deputy commissioner office then marks the complaint to the relevant department in the district. This process takes some time and hence it is not surprising that only one per cent of the citizens who were part of the survey were contacted within 15 days of filing the grievance filing.

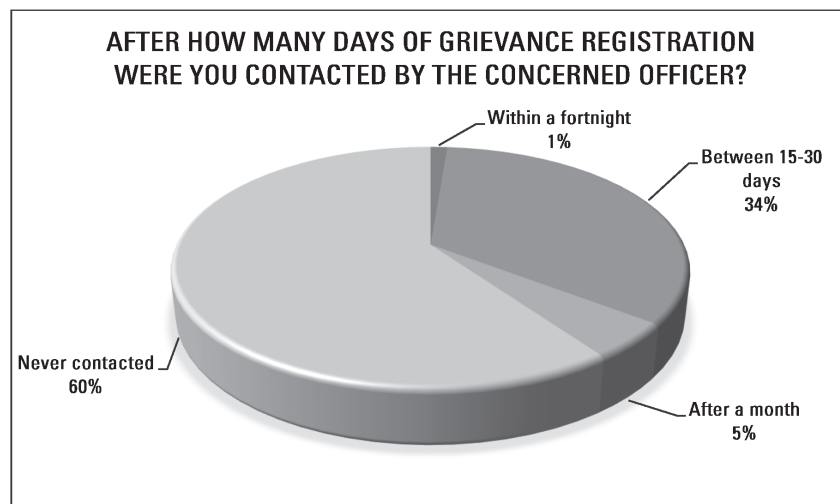


Figure 3: First contact after filing the grievance

Next three questions are relevant for only those respondents who said that they were contacted after filing their complaints. Out of the 193 people who were contacted, 169 citizens were called for the hearing by the concerned department officials. For the next three questions, the denominator for percentage calculation will be adjusted to 193.

Ideally, the hearing should not take much time, as it is burden on both the citizen and the concerned department's staff. Around 87 per cent of the interviewees (Figure 4) responded that their hearing was over within an hour. The hearing took more than an hour for 13 per cent of the respondents.

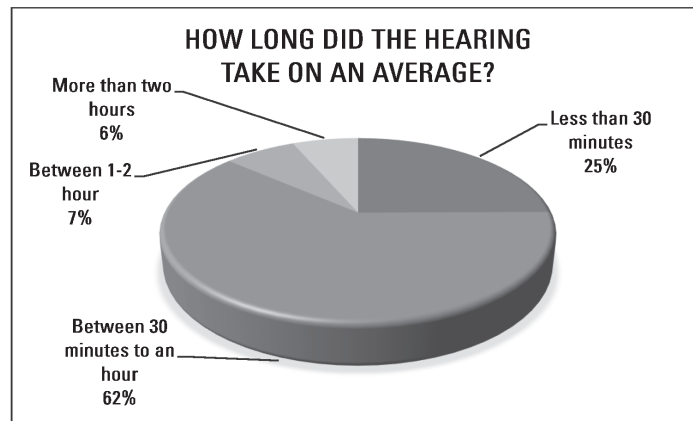


Figure 4: Duration of grievance hearing

96 per cent of the respondents (Figure 5) maintained that during the hearing the concerned officer paid attention to their grievance. Only three per cent of the interviewees said that that they weren't properly heard by the officials.

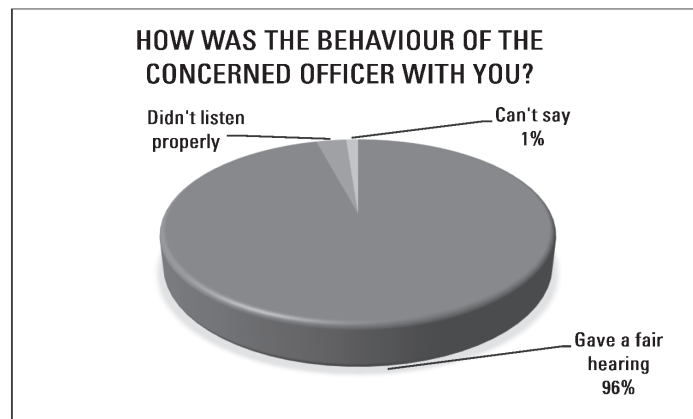


Figure 5: Behaviour of the concerned officer

An important metric of genuine grievance redressal is the approach of the concerned staff/officer after the hearing of the complaint. If the citizen is approached again, it reveals willingness and effort to resolve the complaint. Out of the 169 respondents who were heard, 88 per cent told (Figure 6) that they were approached again to either

get more information about the grievance or to inform about the redressal. Ten per cent of the respondents also said that they were intimidated or threatened to either drop their complaint or to comply with the false redressal of their complaints. Only two per cent of the interviewees were not approached after the hearing.

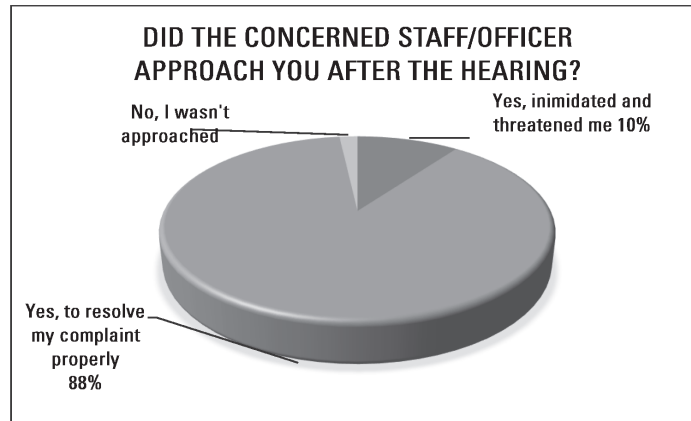


Figure 6: *Contact after the hearing*

An important step after the grievance resolution is information dissemination to the citizen. Whether a citizen's grievance is resolved or not, due intimation to the citizen about the final status of the grievance is a must. Only 33 per cent of the complainants responded (Figure 7) that they got a copy of the final status of their complaints. While 66 per cent didn't get either an official copy or any form of information about the status of their complaint. Many citizens were found to be unsure about the status even after three months of filing their grievances.

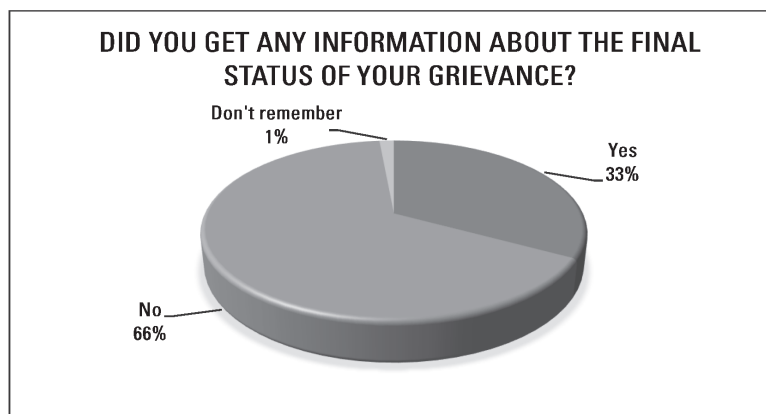


Figure 7: *Information about the final status*

A common observation based on field work is that despite the order by the officers or higher authorities to redress the grievances, it is not complied with by the ground staff. Citizens are left in the lurch as official records show their grievances as redressed, while it doesn't fructify in reality. A staggering 64 per cent of the respondents (Figure

8) said that the necessary orders were not complied with by the concerned department staff or officer, hence resulting in non-resolution of their actual grievance. Only 35 per cent compliance was observed resulting in genuine resolution of the disposed complaints.

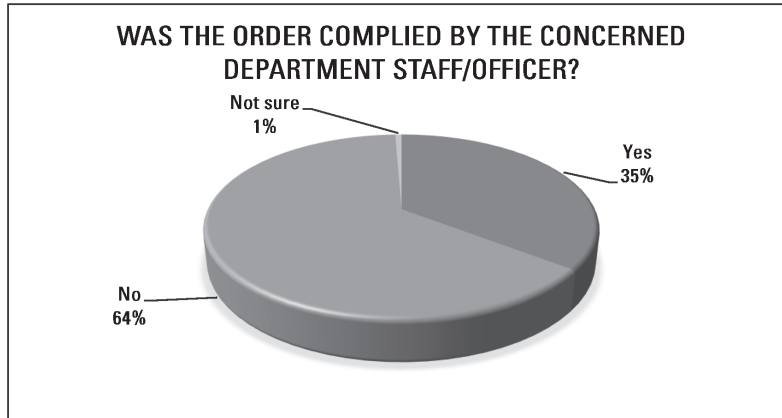


Figure 8: Compliance of the order

A crucial question asked from the citizen is whether he/she is satisfied with the final redressal of the grievance. Thirty-four per cent of the respondents (Figure 9) said that they are completely satisfied with the redressal and that CM Window has helped them resolve their grievance. Satisfaction from CM Window is dependent on the speed of the redressal, efforts required by the citizen to navigate the system and the time taken for the redressal. If the citizen doesn't feel satisfied in one or more of these metrics of satisfaction, it would be a partial satisfaction for the citizen. None of the respondents talked about partial satisfaction.

Sixty-six per cent of the citizens who were interviewed informed that they were not satisfied. They quoted different reasons for their dissatisfaction which ranged from unwanted delay in the grievance redressal process, indifferent attitude of concerned staff, to name a few. It was difficult to collate these varied reasons under different categories and this was not the concern of the present study.



Figure 9: Satisfaction from the final redressal

Next two questions in the questionnaire further probe citizens' satisfaction. Here, the assumption is made that the satisfied citizens will advocate about CM Window to others and will use it again when the need arises.

As demonstrated in Figure 10, only 35 per cent of the respondents advocated further use of CM Window among their acquaintances and neighbours. This figure is commensurate with the percentage of respondents (34 per cent) who were fully satisfied with CM Window grievance redressal (Figure 9). Sixty-five per cent of the respondents didn't tell anyone else about CM Window and 51 per cent of the interviewed citizens (Figure 11) chose to use CM Window again, either for the same unresolved complaint or a new complaint. Forty-nine per cent of the respondents haven't used CM Window again, till the time of interview for this study.

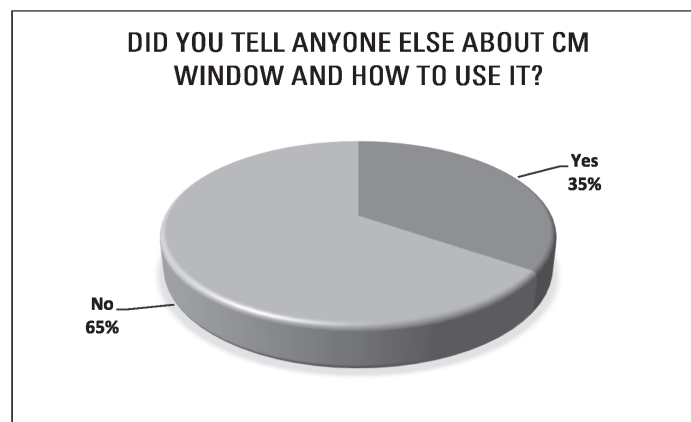


Figure 10: *Advocating the use of CM Window*

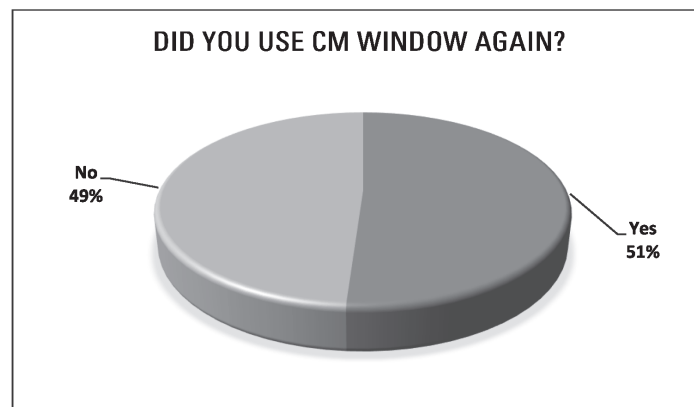


Figure 11: *Subsequent use of CM Window*

The last question posed to the citizens helped gauge the existing problems they are facing in their locality. The answer to this question can help the administration prioritise their interventions and work proactively on the key issues identified. It was found that 34 per cent of the respondents think that sanitation is a major issue. Most of these grievances fall within the purview of the Development and Panchayat Department and the Urban Local Bodies Department. 11 per cent of the respondents felt that

education is major concern, while nine per cent interviewees considered poor roads as the most important problem. For eight per cent of the interviewees, electricity was the major problem. 38 per cent of the respondents' responses went into the others category, which might comprise of issues with land records and registration, issues with public service delivery, wrong allotments of benefits, etc.

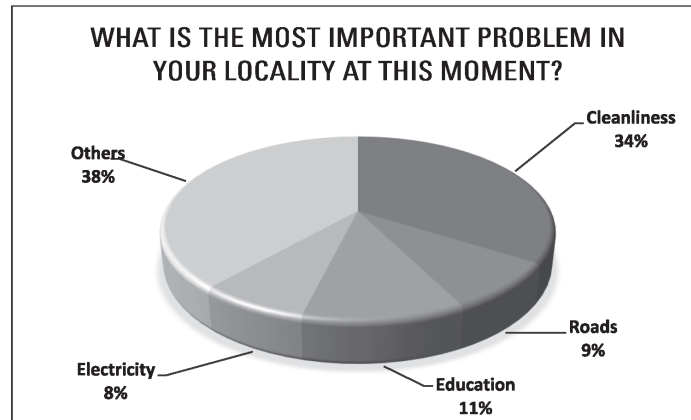


Figure 12: Most important problem in the locality

III DISCUSSION

This study provides insight into the current gaps and loopholes in the existing CM Window system in Kaithal district. CM Window can turn into a tool for proactive governance, where government can use the grievance related data to pin point the problematic issues and take appropriate policy decisions. Accurate data analysis of CM Window complaints will also help in identifying the low performing departments and take relevant administrative decisions to improve their functioning.

From an administrative viewpoint, CM Window is a good mechanism for grievance redressal where a streamlined workflow and accountability checks have ensured that established procedures are followed. However, the citizen survey demonstrates that citizen satisfaction is still low. There can be different reasons attributed to this dissatisfaction which are discussed below.

Citizens know about CM Window's functions, yet there seems to be a lack of proper information dissemination regarding the documents needed at the time of filing the complaint. According to the survey data, many citizens had to visit CM Window more than once, as they didn't have the right information regarding the written application and ID proof. Administration needs to undertake effective Information, Education and Communication (IEC), especially in the rural areas.

After the citizen has filed the complaint, it reaches the CM cell which marks it to the concerned district officer. Ideally, the district officer or the office staff should contact the citizen and give a fair and detailed hearing to the aggrieved citizen. However, the survey results show that a majority of citizens were never contacted regarding their complaints. This might mean that the concerned district officer doesn't have a citizen's perspective about the complaint and he/she works on complain resolution based on his/her own interpretation of the issue.

A common retort by the district officers during the review meetings is that citizens were contacted but they didn't respond positively. There is no simple way to test the veracity of such verbal claims. However, a technical solution can be provided to ensure that maximum number of citizens are contacted after they file their grievance. A mechanism should be provided in the CM Window portal which captures the attempts to contact the citizen. If it's through a phone call, the option to call the citizen should be there on the portal. The call should be further recorded to have evidence. If the citizen is contacted through a letter, the copy should be uploaded on the portal too. Further, a random check of these contact attempts should become a part of the review meetings to ensure compliance by the district officers.

An interesting observation from the survey is that in the cases where citizens were contacted they were treated well and were given a fair hearing by the concerned officer or staff. These citizens were contacted subsequently to delve deeper into their complaints. This reveals that contacting the citizens can potentially lead to better redressal of grievances. Two-third of the interviewed citizens maintained that they were not given any intimation regarding their grievance disposal. As part of proactive disclosure, administration should intimate the citizens about the final status of their grievance.

Another interesting observation from the citizen survey was regarding the final compliance of the order given by a district officer as a part of grievance redressal mechanism. Ideally, the concerned department should comply with the order mentioned in the Action Taken Report. But 64 per cent of the respondents said that the orders weren't complied with. For example, there was a case where the citizen was not included in the list of Prime Minister *Awas Yojana* (PMAY, housing scheme for the underprivileged) beneficiaries despite fulfilling the eligibility criteria. The citizen filed his complaint through the CM Window and, after an enquiry by the block development officer it was found that his name was supposed to be on the list. The complaint was disposed as the necessary orders were given from the concerned office to include the name of citizen in PMAY list. However, even after three months of the grievance having been disposed, the orders were not complied with. The citizen had to file another CM Window complaint to get his work done.

In order to ensure better compliance, there should be a separate category of such complaints which can be tagged as “temporarily resolved”. Based on the nature of administrative order, there should be a differential timeline after which such grievances should be reopened. This will help keep a track of such complaints and will ensure that they are not ignored due to administrative oversight.

Keeping the findings and recommendations in mind, there is a need to create a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the CM Window. The ground staff needs to be oriented as per the SOP and their capacity building has to be done. If the government is serious about the effectiveness of CM Window, there should be a separate cadre of grievance redressal staff at the district level whose sole responsibility should be to work on the grievances.

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