BRINGING GOOD GOVERNANCE TO GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The CM Window is an online citizen grievance redressal portal initiated and launched by the Chief Minister of Haryana on the 25th of December 2014. CM Window enables citizens to voice their complaints directly with the CM. Since 2014, over 9.5 lakh grievances have been registered on the portal, of which over 5.6 lakh grievances have been addressed. Officers at every level of the bureaucracy have their own accounts on the CM Window, through which they too can access the grievances and take meaningful action.

The CM Window has a robust technical as well as operational design. It is supported by CM Window counters established across the state, where citizens can register their complaints. Written complaints are scanned and uploaded. Once uploaded a team at the CM's office, sends the grievance to the concerned officer, who will them take it upon himself / herself to address. A stipulated period of 30 days is provided to redress any complaint registered on the CM Window.

The Chief Minister's Good Governance Associates (CMGGA), is a program initiated by initiated by Ashoka University in collaboration with the Government of Haryana, as a means providing feedback on the implementation of key programs, such as the CM Window, and policies as well as bringing good governance, efficiency and transparency, to service delivery in the state of Haryana. Initiated in 2016 as a one year fellowship, 21 associates were posted across 21 districts of Haryana. Their responsibilities included monitoring the state's flagship programs, working closely with the district administration to implement policies, and supporting the various state departments

through diagnostics into specific challenge areas. A program management team worked closely between the CM's office and the Associates through each of the the three areas of work.

Being one of the flagship programs of the Chief Minister's, the CM Window was closely monitored by the CMGGAs. In close collaboration with the CM's office and National Informatics Center (NIC), the CMGGAs were able to make many contributions to the effective functioning of the grievance redressal portal. This case study describes these contributions. It provides a brief outline of the working of the CM Window, the specific mechanisms for review set in place through the CMGGA program, the challenges identified and recommendations made by the Associates, and finally a proposal for its effective evaluation going forward.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE WINDOW

A dedicated team led by an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the CM, assisted by a Law Officer, a Scientist from the National Informatics Center (NIC), and a team of retired Haryana Civil Service (HCS) officers, operate the CM's CM Window account. This team ensures that complaints registered on the CM Window are forwarded to the appropriate authorities, and tracked over time to ensure timely resolution.

Subtending from the CM's CM Window account are his subordinate, approximately 79 CM Window accounts including those of the Chief Secretary, the Administrative Secretaries, Director General of Police, various Commissions, Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners.

Each of these accounts have their own subordinates, which further branch out to cover all roles within the bureaucracy. New accounts for subordinates can be created by CM Window users at any time. In total, there are approximately 6,935 CM Window users. In addition to the CM Window accounts of officers, there are separate accounts for the registration of complaints, one for each of the 71 CM Window Counters (23 prior to 25th December 2016) in the state. As for the citizens who register their complaints, except for government employees, the CM Window accepts complaints from anyone.

FIVE STEPS TO GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

There are several steps between the registration of a complaint on the CM Window and it's redressal. Many of these steps are online and can therefore be tracked. In addition there are many steps involved in the redressal of a grievance that may be taken offline as well, and this is symbolic of the heavy reliance of paper trails within the government. There is little visibility of the exchanges, even though they are taken towards the redressal of complaints registered on the CM Window. Below is a detailing out of the online steps involved in the process of redressing a grievance.

STEP 1: REGISTERING

In order to register a complaint, citizens must visit one of the CM Window counters located across the state. There they are required to submit a written complaint along with a valid ID proof.

At the counter, a data operator, scans the complaint as well as the ID proof and registers the grievance. An acknowledgment slip that records the registration number of the grievance is printed out and handed over to the complainant. The complainant also receives an SMS acknowledging the registration of their grievance.

There are few restrictions on what kind of complaints can be registered on the CM Window. These are complaints registered as requests for information under the Rights to Information (RTI), complaints from existing government employees and complaints regarding the transfer of government employees.

STEP 2: MARKING

Once a grievance is registered it is directly viewable by the CM Window Cell. The complaint is scrutinized in order to determine who it should be marked down to. At this point, it is also determined whether the complaint registered is a grievance, a suggestion or a demand (for the purposes of this case study grievances, demands and suggestions shall all be referred to as grievances, unless explicitly stated otherwise), as well as which grievance category it falls within. The CM Window has over 100 grievance categories. The grievance is marked downwards, through the bureaucratic hierarchy, from officer's account to officer's account until it is marked to the appropriate officer.

One of the features available to the 79 CM's subordinate accounts is Additional Marking. Through Additional Marking, these officers can additionally mark a grievance to another officer. This is typically done in the case where the redressal of a grievance requires the coordination of two departments.

STEP 3: UNDERTAKING

Once a grievance has been marked, the user to whom it was marked has the option of marking it forward to their subordinates, or undertaking the grievance. In undertaking the grievance, the user agrees to conduct the necessary enquiry and actions to redress it. There are four stages of a grievance related to the action of undertaken

A. New: Until a grievance has been undertaken it will appear as New
B. Pending: Once a grievance has been undertaken and is within the 30 days allotted for disposal
C. Overdue: Over 30 days have passed since the grievance was undertaken and no ATR has been filed
D. In-Action: Pending and Overdue Grievances together are referred to as in-action

If a user believes a grievance marked to him / her does not pertain to them, they can return it back to the sender, without undertaking it. Within seven days of undertaking a grievance, a user can request for an extension beyond the 30 days period within which the grievance is expected to be redressed.

STEP 4: ACTION TAKEN REPORT

Once a grievance has been undertaken by a CM Window user, and all enquiries and actions necessary to redress the grievance has been conducted, they have to write an Action Taken Report (ATR). This ATR is then scanned and uploaded onto the CM Window portal.

The ATR is then forwarded back up the chain of users through which it was originally marked down, till it is received at the CM Window Cell. Related to the ATR, are two other transactions possible on CM Window.

A. Interim Report: A user who has undertaken a grievance can also write and upload an interim report, in case the redressal process is taking longer than usual, or if there is a need to inform their subordinates that steps towards necessary action is being taken.

B. Clarification: At any point in the chain, should a user feel that the ATR is inadequate or incomplete, they can request for a clarification. This clarification is then marked back down to the user who uploaded the ATR.

STEP 5: DISPOSAL

Once an ATR has been deemed as satisfactory by the CM Window Cell, it is disposed. In the process of disposal, the CM Office has also instituted a satisfaction call process. Employees at a call center, reach out to the complaints to understand whether they have been contacted by the concerned department or officer, and whether they are satisfied with the actions taken by them. Satisfaction of the complainant is not the sole factor upon which disposal is based. Members of the CM Window Cell take discrete call given their knowledge and scrutiny of all aspects of the complaint.

At any point, a citizen can track the status of their grievance using the registration number provided to them. A mobile application has also been created for the same.

METHODOLOGY

Work Module: Reviewing the CM Window Weekly

As part of their work modules, in order to ensure that citizens receive speedy and quality resolution of their grievances, CMGGA's were tasked with two essential activities

I. Weekly analysis of the status of grievances at the district level
II. Facilitating CM Window review meetings, once every week under the chairmanship of the City Magistrate – the Nodal Officer at the district level, and once every month under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner

A detailed guideline was created to support the associates along with an analysis template. The template designed was meant to assist the associate with their weekly analysis, and associates were given the opportunity to tweak the template as per the requirements of the district. A Google spreadsheet was created, to track whether meetings were held in all districts. Associates would fill in the tracker with the date, a colour code to denote whether the meeting was chaired by the CTM or the DC, and link it to the analysis they had prepared for the week.

In the first quarter of the program, several best practices were documented with respect to how CM Window weekly reviews were being conducted. In Yamunanagar, the DC would chair the CM Window review every week, instead of once a month potentially leading to Yamunanagar's high performance on CM Window throughout the entire year. In Faridabad, the CM Window review meetings would begin with an acknowledgement and applause of those officers who had performed well in the previous week.

They also focused especially on the quality of the ATRs being uploaded by officers. In Karnal, clear targets were set at every meeting, for officers to adhere to by the following week. The weekly meetings were receiving media attention in district such as Rewari. Other districts were experiencing an improvement in the CM Window performance. In Karnal the total overdue grievances dropped by 32.1% and in Faridabad grievances overdue since 2015 decreased by 46.8%.

In the second quarter in addition to the weekly review meetings, Associates were asked to identify critical grievances pertaining to their districts. Critical grievances were those that were either pertaining to cases of corruption or would significantly impact a large number of people. These would be brought to the notice of the CM Window Cell, through a Google spreadsheet, which Associates would fill in every month. Since September 2016, 397 critical grievances were identified by the Associates in 2018, of which the CM Window Cell identified 159 as serious. 135 of all the critical grievances identified were disposed off by the end of 2018.

In the third quarter, to work towards the sustainability of the CM Window weekly review meetings, Associates were asked to assist the nodal officer in facilitating the meeting only every fortnight, with the assumption that the nodal officer would continue the review meetings every week. During this time, the program team and CMGGA Sonipat, also began using data analysis at the state level to gain more insight into the working of the CM Window.

The CM Window work module spanned the entire year of the program. A state level review meeting is held every month, and has been attended by a CMGGA program management team member.

A program management team member was in constant coordination with the CM Window Cell for updates and inputs on the CM Window work module. In addition, an Associate was also assigned the role of the CM Window Impact Champion to coordinate more closely with the CM Window Cell.

The Diagnostic: Redesigning the CM Window

Alongside the work module, the Associates from Kaithal and Panchkula were also tasked with redesigning the CM Window portal and developing a range of help and training tools. In order to identify the challenges that users of CM Window face, all CMGGAs were reached out to in order to provide input based on their CM Window weekly reviews and interactions officers in the district. These inputs were categorized into questions, challenges and recommendations. The collated list was then analyzed, categorized and discussed in detail with the CM Window Cell in Chandigarh, both from a technical and operational point of view.

Presentations and Workshops

Regular meetings with the CM were held through the course of the year. During each of these meetings, Associates presented their key findings based on data analysis, challenges identified from field, solutions recommended, solutions implemented and their impact. Based on the presentation and following discussion, the CM would take decisions for future implementation. In order to ensure that coordination between the CMGGA program and the CM Window Cell was smooth, the Additional Principal Secretary (APS) to the CM held a collaborative workshop to review the progress made. In preparation for the presentations and workshops, the CMGGAs worked collaboratively to put build consensus on the recommendations being put forth.

On December 2016, CMGGA Kaithal and a member of the program team had the opportunity of attending the Regional Conference on Innovations in Citizen Service Delivery, along with the CM Window Cell team who were presenting the CM Window. Together they learned about Rajasthan's grievance redressal portal Sampark, and brought back their learnings to feed into suggestions for improvements to the CM.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

As Associates facilitated weekly CM Window review meetings each district, they continued to take note of the challenges being faced by CM Window users, departments, the nodal officer as well as the DC. Many of these challenges were collected and submitted as part of the diagnostic report prepared by CMGGAs Kaithal and Panchkula and included

A. Lack of Training: Associates observed a general lack of awareness around the many features and functionalities of the CM Window by its users, because of which many challenges are identified that have previously been addressed. During the very first quarter CM Window training was conducted by the CM Window Cell along with Haryana Institute of Public Administration (HIPA), in Ambala, Kaithal and Yamunanagar, and was planned for other districts in the Ambala division, due to its geographical proximity to Panchkula and Chandigarh, where HIPA and the CM Window Cell offices are. However, for HIPA to conduct training for all the other divisions, funds were required.

B. Duplicate User Accounts: As the CM Window allows users to create account for their subordinates, there were several

instances where, accounts for an officer working at the district level, were created by both his / her department as well as by the DC.

C. Data Discrepancy: CMGGAs observed a great deal of data discrepency on the CM Window portal, especially through the DCs account from where cumulative data on the CM Window performance of each post at the district level can be reviewed. This was due to two main causes. The first is that the cumulative data in a tab referred to as the Earlier Monitoring Status, was not live, and often reflected the status from a day ago. This often meant that an officer and the DC were referring to different numbers during weekly reviews. The second cause, was found out to be related to the marking of grievances. Officers received grievances marked to them by the DC, as well as through their department. Although the DC is responsible for the CM Window performance of the district, he or she doesn't have a clear overview of the grievances marked directly from the departments to officers at the district level. This makes it difficult for them to review and enforce action pertaining to those grievances.

D. Prolonged Deadlines: It is public knowledge that grievances registered on the CM Window should be disposed within a 30 day period. However, due to the several layers of administrative structure that the grievance has to pass through before reaching the officer who will undertake it for dressal there are several delays observed. Often the CM Window Cell itself takes 15-20 days (before being forwarded to officers/districts). Following which it might take a few days in the marking down process. CMGGA's also noticed that officers might take several days to undertake a grievance that has been marked to them. Data analysis revealed departments that hadn't undertaken grievances for over several months.

E. Ineffective Communication: Language of the interface as well as input by the user is a challenge. Typing in Hindi is only available at the time of registering a complaint, and not while dealing with the grievance on the portal. Due to this many users of the portal do not type in details, and leave certain information out, reducing the quality and effectiveness of grievance redressal and communication.

F. Complicated User Interface: The nomenclature, graphs, symbols and colours used on the platform to indicate a variety of details are currently overcrowding the interface, and complicating the user interactions. Several of these features are unnecessary and not being used in the way it was intended.

G. No Analytic Insight: Grievances currently received through the CM Window are not analyzed in ways that can enable systemic changes or policy decisions. Much of the content of the grievances can be used to re-engineer existing processes and identify critical bottlenecks. The focus as observed by CMGGAs was typically on the disposal of individual grievances.

H. Competitive Portals: While it should be the case that there are several channels for citizens to lodge complaints, and have them heard, multiple conflicting portals representing the State. Government of Haryana reduces the effectiveness of the CM Window portal. The previous government had set up the Harsamadhan portal, for grievance redressal. CMGGAs found that many online websites still linked to the Harsamadhan portal, confusing citizens about where to register their complaints. In additional to the Harsamadhan portal, many citizens choose to lodge complaints about the same issue through multiple channels, often burdening the officers who have to deal with it.

Officers often times have to deal with serial complainers, for whom the CM Window Cell has a blacklisting mechanism.

CHANGES INCORPORATED

Through their efforts in reviewing the performance of the CM Window and identifying critical grievances, there are perhaps four key contributions that the CMGGAs made to the improving the functioning of the CM Window.

A. Training & Support for CM Window Users: CMGGAs' interactions with district level officials handling the CM Window revealed that the level of awareness about the portals various features was relatively low. Often, this was a result of contractual data operators, with no decision making abilities or responsibilities, operating the CM Window on behalf of the officers. One of the suggestions made within the first quarter of the program, was for training to be conducted across all districts. As the first step, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), a User Manual, and Video Tutorials were put together and published to a portal in a Help Section. Following this, a push for district level training to be conducted resulted in HIPA scheduling a training. The onus for attending was put on to the officers, as the training involved a fee and travel to Panchkula. As CMGGAs became more acquainted with the portal themselves, they became channels of raising awareness on using the platform, and often acted an intermediary between the CM Window Cell and the officers in the district.

B. Portal Redesign for Improved User Experience: CMGGAs, worked closely with the NIC team spearheading the CM Window to incorporate changes that would ease the use of the portal.

One of the first changes made to the portal, was the inclusion of typing in Hindi, using Google keyboard inputs, to encourage more officers and their data operators to write detailed remarks while down or up marking a grievance on the portal. The information architecture of the tables on the portal were streamlined, and described for ease of use. Rows were coloured green, yellow and red based on the status of the grievance is pending, overdue in 10 days, and overdue respectively. The excel files that were downloadable were reformatted for improved filtering and sorting. An Inbox features was added where all the grievances marked, whether as new, or additionally marked, or returned, or clarification sought, to a CM Window user would be easily accessible. A visual representation of the weekly performance of a user, as well as their subordinates was made available on the website. Most importantly the data available on the portal was made live, so that whenever an officer signs in he or she can view a real time status of their subordinates performance. Through feedback from the CMGGAs, the NIC team, is sensitive to the visual design of the portal and are now continuously finding ways to improve it.

C. Improved Quality of Action Taken: During the CM Window Weekly reviews in Faridabad district, the need to improve the quality of ATRs filed on the portal was identified. The City Magistrate and the CMGGA together designed an ATR format which they asked all the officers in the district to use while creating ATRs. This spread through the CMGGAs to other districts, and with anecdotal evidence from the CM Window Cell, suggesting that the form had reduced the time taken for them to read through an ATR had significantly reduced, it was chosen to be scaled up across the entire state. Today a standardized ATR form can be downloaded in Hindi and English on the CM Window portal, and officers can use it to file their reports.

D. Improved Process for CM Window Portal: CMGGAs also worked to improve the process of the CM Window. The first step towards this, was delinking and deleting duplicate accounts of officers. On direction from the Chief Minister, new accounts were created for Demands and Suggestions filed on the CM Window, so that they were not marked down to the districts, where little could be done of them. To ensure that time taken by the CM Window Cell to mark down grievances was reduced, more resources were hired into the team. Similarly, to ensure officers do not take more than seven days to undertake a grievance, an instruction was issued to the same effect. The Harsamadhan portal was de-linked from the Government of Haryana website, so as to reduce confusion on which portal to file complaints on. Before the conclusion of the first year, CMGGAs submitted a proposal to streamline the grievance categories listed on the website, streamline the departments and linking of various accounts to the appropriate departments, and finally institute a robust CM Window performance evaluation metric.

In addition to the changes recommended in made by, with and through the CMGGAs, two important decisions regarding the CM Window were taken through the course of the last year. The first was the expansion of the CM Window counters, from district headquarters to sub-division headquarters. These were inaugurated on the 25th of December 2016, and was followed up on by the CMGGAs. In February 2017, an extension of the CM Window was provided to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). In May 2017, a list of eminent citizens was released by the CM Window Cell. The eminent citizens would be responsible for intermediating between complainants and officers in the case of any dispute regarding the grievance redressal. Moreover their signatures would be required on the ATR.

OPENING UP THE WINDOW TO MORE

Much effort has been put in by the CMGGAs on contributing to the effectiveness of the CM Window. At the bare minimum, in the last year, a total of 963 CM Window review meetings have been held, of which 216 have been chaired by the DC. 397 grievances have been identified as critical on the Critical Grievances Tracker, of which 159 were regarded as serious by the CM Window Cell, and 135 have been disposed. Apart from this, many CMGGAs have experienced citizens requesting them to look into their CM Window grievances. As district administrations and CMGGAs together increase their focus on responding to grievances registered on the portal, there is room to incorporate two essential activities in their scope of work – using grievances as inputs for innovation or policy reform, and establishing a mechanism for assessing the impact of the CM Window.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

On the 1st of July 2017, for a presentation to the CM, CMGGAs found six parameters that had improved over a year. The rate of disposal of grievances had increased from 73% to 81% and the average number of days taken to undertake a grievance had reduced from 26 days to 12 days. Clarifications received on every grievance were reduced from 2.4 to 0.6. It was also observed that the time taken for grievances to be redressed had improved. The percentage of grievances closed within the stipulated 30 days had increased from 8% to 21%, and those closed within 60 days, had increased from 36% to 65%.

The establishment of the weekly review meeting, if well attended and facilitated, is meant to improve the time taken and quality of grievance redressal. This in turn it can be ascertained would lead to more satisfied citizens, which will eventually result in an improved experience of service delivery. Given the nature of the CM Window, data is readily available and can be used to measure these improvements quite successfully.