

Strengthening Grievance Redress System: A Case of Narsingdi District Administration

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ABSTRACT

Grievance Redress System (GRS) is one of the critical social accountability tools for ensuring accountable and people-friendly Public Administration of Bangladesh. For ensuring quality service delivery and accountability, Cabinet Division introduced GRS in 2007. Subsequently, in 2014, online GRS was designed to modernize and update the management of existing system, under the supervision of the Cabinet Division. The purpose behind the initiative was to redress the citizens' grievances effectively and timely. Moreover, Cabinet Division published a guideline in 2015 on GRS. Finally, second version of GRS software was hosted in 2018 for establishing user-friendly online GRS in the Ministries/Divisions and subordinate offices. Present study was carried out to assess the current status of implementation of Online GRS in the district level government offices of Bangladesh alongside its potential challenges. In order to attain the research objectives qualitative approach was followed in this study. Semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interview, observation, Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion methods were used to collect primary data while all relevant sources were used to collect secondary data. The study revealed that the implementation status of GRS in the field level government offices was its infancy. The service providers were not properly following the guidelines of GRS and they were found busy with other state functions and less attentive in strengthening the GRS system. There were stumbling blocks in implementing the system including a small number of complaints submission, lack of proper monitoring and evaluation etc. Lack of public awareness was one of the leading causes of poor implementation of GRS. The research has come up with the conclusion that institutionalization of awareness building program, capacity development of the service providers, establishing a separate legal Authority of GRS under Cabinet Division and result-based monitoring and evaluation are essential to better outcome of GRS.

Keywords: Grievance Redress System, social accountability tools, public administration, service delivery, service providers, service seekers

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In order to ensure accountability and quality public service, the Government of Bangladesh is presently working with five accountability tools. Grievance Redress System (GRS) is one of the important five accountability tools (Cabinet Division 2018). In today's modern public governance, the term accountability becomes a buzzword. Accountability is a logical concept that facilitates connectivity between service provider and the service seekers or who are affected by the piece of works they perform (Bovens et al. 2014). Moreover, SDGs (Goal 16) and 'Vision 2041' aligned with GRS and for attaining all the desired goals of the government GRS can play an essential role. Through GRS, aggrieved citizens can take the opportunities to mitigate their complaints whenever such complaints appear during interaction between government offices and citizens. Therefore, GRS ensure peoples friendly service delivery as well as participation of citizens in the process of decision making and there by people get empowered (Hossain & Islam 2020).

Five dimensions of service quality which includes reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles have significant influence on customer satisfaction (Mohammad & Alhamadani 2011). However, it is not expected that each and every decision of the government authority will satisfy the aggrieved citizens who are affected by the decisions. GRS is an appropriate platform for the aggrieved citizens to submit their complaints (Alom 2021). In spite of having the GRS platform, most of the dissatisfied citizens do not submit complaint (Oren 1992). Ultimately, the efficacy and sustainability of GRS can be improved when it is institutionalized while government internal systems of accountability are more crystal clear and open to citizen participation (Singh et al. 2004).

Government of Bangladesh established a grievance redress system in all line ministries in 2007. GRS has been launched and institutionalized considering that the scopes for corruption might be reduced through extensive digitization. Therefore, the online GRS which is mutually active web-based software has been introduced by the Cabinet Division to correctly handle the complaints in Government offices. The system is available online at www.grs.gov.bd. In addition, the Coordination & Reform Unit of the Cabinet Division published a guideline in 2015 on Grievance Redress System (Cabinet division 2018). However, the formal grievance redress system has some obstacles to the availability and efficacy, especially, the marginalized or poor people may lack the potentialities and link to approach formal systems. However, responsiveness of service providers might be hindered by diverse constraints namely financial, institutional and manpower (Ranganathan 2008).

The execution of GRS strengthens accountability and transparency in public service delivery by ensuring the engagement of the citizens (Aziz 2015). However, in our context, the reality is different. Both the service providers and the service recipients, as a whole, are not substantially sensitized in operating the tools because of the knowledge gap. Against the above context, this study has been carried out to examine the perceptions of the selected citizens and top management who are concerned with GRS at district level about the efficacy of current process. Hence, the research questions have been designed to find the status and challenges of GRS.

Problem statement

In Bangladesh, majority of the Government offices do not usually follow GRS (Hossain & Islam 2020). As implementing agencies of GRS Government offices are predominantly falling behind to make the system effective and people-friendly. Successful implementation of GRS faces many drawbacks from the service providers and the service recipients and both of the parties are more or less equally liable for its failure (Ranganathan 2008). The reality is that the rate of grievance redress in the ministries level is quite good but it is very low in the sub-ordinate offices. It might be the cause of inter-agency coordination gap or sub-ordinate offices are not properly monitored by the concern ministry which indicates existence of institutional inability. However, it is also fact that the number of grievance submission is quite low. Diverse causes might be involved for a smaller number of complaints submission which includes peoples are not aware about how and to whom complain, panic of the consequences of doing so or have less trust on the government officials and many more (Aziz 2015). So, it is crucial for the government to find out the root causes of the failure of GRS implementation in the field level offices. Otherwise, establishment of people-friendly and accountable public administration would not be possible. There is an antagonistic relation between implementation of GRS and delivery of public service as redress of grievance is also a public service. Consequently, effective implementation of GRS will ensure better public service delivery. Hence, to make sure the public offices are accountable to the service seekers, it is essential to make GRS effective in the all-levels Government organizations. So, this was the main focus of this study.

Rationale of the Study

It is expected that effective mitigation of public grievances in a specified time will ensure quality service and accountability of the government offices. Moreover, introduction of online GRS obviously will expedite the process. District administrations provide numerous services and it is the most important government entity in implementing GRS. Therefore, understanding the real picture of implementation in the field level is crucial. The present study attempted to find out the current implementation status of GRS in the selected field administrations with potential challenges. After adoption of the GRS none of the study dealt with the

effectiveness of GRS and this area is unexplored. Besides, Cabinet Division is the central management authority of GRS implementation and being an officer of the Cabinet Division, the researcher has special interest to conduct the study on GRS. Moreover, this study may be helpful for the concerned government authorities for further policy interventions in strengthening the GRS.

Objectives

1. To assess the implementation status of GRS in the selected District Administrations and sub-ordinate offices.
2. To find out the challenges and possible remedies for making GRS effective.

Research Questions

1. What is the present implementation status of GRS in the selected public offices?
2. What are the problems of successful implementation of GRS and how this system can be made effective?

Literature Review

Definition and Causes of Grievance

Grievance might be defined as 'statements about expectations that have not been met' (Aziz 2015). Furthermore, Sugandhar & Chaudhary (2020) opined that the word 'grievance' can be defined as complaint or dissatisfaction against an unjust or unfair act and system. Moreover, 'application submitted electronically or by conventional methods in a specific format by citizens/clients regarding their dissatisfaction on services or products and/or processes of service delivery or unlawful act related to services delivery or refusal to provide lawful rights to the service seekers, will be considered as a grievance' (Cabinet Division 2018; UNDP 2016). There are three types of grievances namely public grievance, staff grievance and official grievance (Cabinet Division 2018). Generally, complaints arise for the reasons that citizens experience ill-considered or disrespectful treatment, exclusions, mistakes, inconsistencies, misleading guidance, ambiguous procedures, displayed unfairness or injustices in their dealings with public officials (Brewer 2007).

Definition of Grievance Redress System

Grievance redress mechanism of an organization is the scale to measure its effectiveness and capability as it comes up with essential feedback on the working of the government (Nair 2016). It is a formal method with specific rules and procedures to resolve grievances in a systematic manner. It gives a productive avenue for

expressing grievances and possible solution for the citizens and elevates a mutually positive relationship between Government and citizens (Hossain & Islam 2020). Similarly, Sugandhar & Chaudhary (2020) argue that grievance redress mechanism is a system set up by organizations to receive, record, investigate, redress, analyse, prevent and /or take any other appropriate action in respect of grievances lodged against them. Furthermore, according to the report of UNDP (2016), GRS usually widely defined as 'instruments, methods, and processes by which a resolution to a grievance is sought and provided'.

The process followed in grievance redress

If the service seekers get aggrieved anyway, they can apply either online or offline. After submission of complaints in any ways whatever it is online or offline or anonymous responsibility lies with the Grievance Redress Officer (GRO) to resolve it. Generally, within 40 days of complaints submission GRO has to resolve it. However, if there is any matter to further investigate then GRO is allowed to complete the task within additional 20 days' time-frame. If anybody is dissatisfied with the decision of GRO there is an option for appeal. The citizen should get the solution within 20 days in the appeal segment. Above all, the full tenure for grievance redress is 60 days (Cabinet Division 2018).

Relationship with public service delivery, citizen's satisfaction and GRS

It is no doubt that satisfaction of service recipients depends largely on timely and smoothly delivery of services. So, it can be said that there is a meaningful relationship between GRS and service delivery (Aziz 2015; Cabinet Division 2018). Moreover, Cronin & Taylor (1992) asserted that distinguished quality of service leads to the satisfaction of the customer. The other researches also affirmed that quality of service is the predecessor of satisfaction (Spreng & Mackoy 1996; Brady & Robertson 2001). Moreover, Strauss & Hill (2001) argue that effective managing of the grievances increased the level of customer satisfaction, establishing long term relationships. According to Jing (2010), by delivering quality service the bank management may heighten the level of customer satisfaction. In addition, GRS ensures G2G communication as a result, field level offices can also be answerable to the head of the administration. Moreover, any aggrieved citizen can make public officials accountable by file a complaint through this system and thereby some preconditions of good governance can be achieved through GRS. (Hossain & Islam 2020).

Barriers of GRS and causes of a smaller number of complaint submission

A large number of people and service seekers have no idea about GRS due to lack of proper publicity (Hossain & Islam 2020). Similarly, Oren (1992) argued that most of the dissatisfied customers do not complain for two principal reasons. firstly, they do

not know how, or to whom complaints can be lodged and secondly, they do not trust it would be valuing their time as well as difficulty. Similarly, Brennan & Douglas (2002) mentioned that considerable number of clients do not submit grievance straightforwardly for the reason that they simply do not believe it would bring any result. Furthermore, Chebat et al. (2005) asserted that many consumers have minimum degrees of confidence or feel powerlessness or anxious about challenging the service providers. In addition to that, in some contexts, they panic that they would experience maltreatment or inferior service delivery following their grievance has been submitted (Lyon & Powers 2001). Moreover, Seneviratne & Cracknell (1988) found that 58% of the service seekers had no knowledge about the existence of grievance redress mechanism in their local office.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Selection of an appropriate research methodology usually depends on the objectives and research questions to be explored (Ekanem 2007). Therefore, the main focus of this chapter is to contend the methods that has been applied in defining the research questions and for data collection. The research followed interpretive paradigm.

Research Design

Research design is a plan or framework to conduct the research that investigates the research questions. (Pandey & Pandey 2015).

Inductive and Deductive Approach

There are two approaches immensely highlights to conduct a research namely inductive and deductive approach (Creswell 2007). Inductive approach focuses on collecting and analyzing facts with a view to established a theory. Moreover, inductive approach of the study ensures analysis of peoples' perception as well as their considerations about a problem or situation effectively. However, deductive method of research intimates with the hypothesis or theory testing (Creswell 2007). The research adopted inductive approach since it is concerned with meaning-making of the GRS.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

For any research, data can be gathered either by qualitative or quantitative method (Creswell & Plano 2007). However, Bryman & Bell (2011) stated that quantitative study mostly deals with the numbers, it concerns with the theory testing and this method is mainly structured. On the contrary, qualitative study deals with the expressions or words, it reflects the ideas of respondents, it relates to developing

theory, and this method is mainly unstructured. Anderson (2007) criticizes that in quantitative method it is critical to realize the perceptions of the people to answer the 'why' question. Conversely, qualitative research produces invaluable insights of people's, attitudes, behavior, knowledge and beliefs that might be overlooked by any other methods (Bryman & Bell 2011). Therefore, to achieve the objectives qualitative method was used in this study.

Methods of Data Collection

Pandey & Pandey (2015) opined that diverse tools can be used for the collection of data which includes questionnaire survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), interviews, observations. Moreover, semi-structured questionnaire is the most suitable method of collection of qualitative data since it permits the researcher to ask additional questions that fosters the validity of the collected data (Bryman & Bell 2011; Creswell 2007; Yin 2009). In this research, data were gathered both from primary and secondary sources. For collection of primary data researcher has adopted semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interview, observations, FGD and KII (Key Informants Interview) tools. The researcher conducted semi-structured questionnaire for the service seekers. Top most management of concerned government offices were interviewed separately by means of KII. However, relevant books, journals, government circulars, reports, and internet were used as a source of secondary data.

Sampling Methods and Study Area

In case of qualitative study, researchers guided by his/her own perception i.e., who can provide the 'best' information and sample size is less important (Kumar 2011). Likewise, Creswell (2007) as well as Pandey and Pandey (2015) affirm that a small sample size is sufficient like four to ten in any inductive qualitative study. Kumar (2011) also opined that purposive sampling approach is the most pertinent in the qualitative research. Therefore, purposive sampling technique has been followed in this study. Hence, as the key informant interview with four top level officials (both from district administration and Cabinet Division) and for semi-structured questionnaire thirty service receivers have been selected as sample. The researcher selected five districts of Dhaka Divisions as a study area which includes Narsingdi, Mymensingh, Tangail, Gazipur and Narayanganj. Among the five selected districts as a case study, researcher visited the Narsingdi district administration to collect data. Narsingdi is the nearest to the capital city of Dhaka and peoples of this district are mostly involved in different business activities and working abroad. Moreover, this district has diversified geographical character with char land. As a result, district administration faces multidimensional problems and has to resolve various complaints. Importantly, no research on implementation of online GRS was conducted in this district before. In this context, researcher selected the Narsingdi District as a study area.

DATA ANALYSIS

Examining the implementation status of GRS was the core focus of the study. The collected data have been analyzed by using simple and appropriate mathematical tools like tabulation, percentage etc. Furthermore, thematic analysis has been carried out. Basically, the indicators have been selected based on citizen's satisfaction regarding service delivery and the effectiveness of the ongoing GRS in the selected government offices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intention of this chapter is to assess and critically analyze the qualitative data collected through semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews, KII, direct observations and FGD. Furthermore, it clarified the findings unveiled from the study in connection with review of literature. Thus, the major findings have been presented below with thematic analysis.

Status of implementation of grievance redress system

Mode of grievance submission

According to the GRS guidelines, an aggrieved person can lodge complaints through direct login into the webpage i.e., www.grs.gov.bd, sending email, by physically present at the front desk and by postal service utilizing prescribed form. Applicants then receive a tracking number through SMS who submit complaints through website. In the fiscal year 2021-2022, total 648 grievances were submitted in the five-district administrations (Figure 1). Among them 245 (38%) and 403 (62%) grievances were submitted by means of online and offline respectively (Figure 2), where offline system was found preferable than online system. It might be that peoples were short of skills to use electronic devices or problem of internet facilities. Ranganathan (2008) underpinned that the marginalized or poor people may lack the potentialities and link to approach formal systems. They also might be geographically very isolated or due to time-constrained formal registration and follow-up of their complaints cannot be possible. Moreover, during observation it is disclosed that citizens were accustomed to submit complaints through informal system like computer composed application. It is also acknowledged by the GRO of Narsingdi district administration that every year on an average more than thousands of complaints submitted by the citizens in the informal way of computer composed application. So, it is indicated that online grievance redress system is yet to be properly publicized and institutionalized in the district level government offices.

Figure 1 & 2: Mode of grievance submission in the district administrations (July 2021-June 2022)

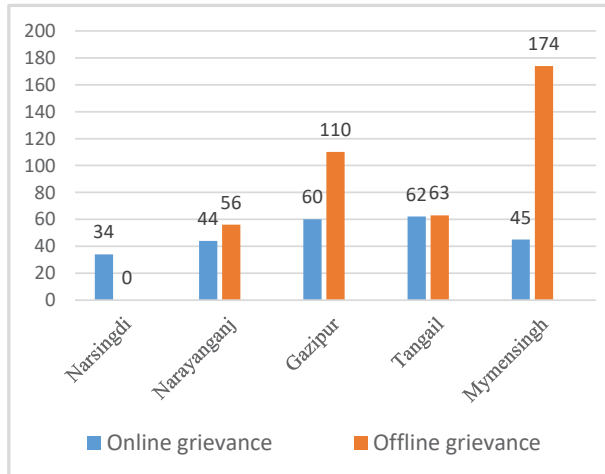


Figure 1: Mode of grievance submission in numbers

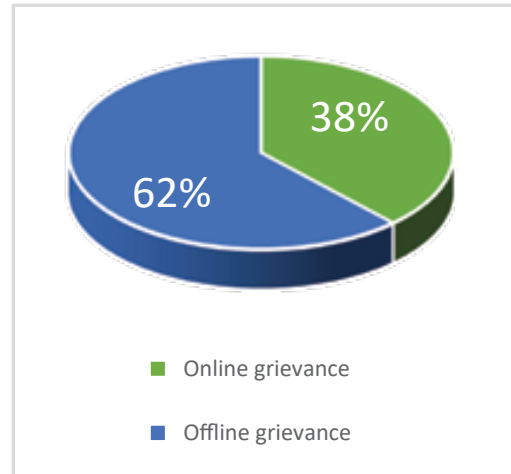


Figure 2: Mode of grievance submission in percentage

Data sources: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division (online grievances) and field survey data (offline grievances)

Status of Online Grievance Redress

It is revealed that during the period of one year (From July 2021- June 2022) only 245 complaints received by the five Deputy Commissioners’ offices through online. Average redress rate was only 24% and most of the grievances (76%) were found unredressed and remained pending for long time. In specific, among the pending complaints 66% of them found crossed the stipulated time schedule of redress (Table 1). Generally, within 40 days of complaints submission GRO has to resolve it. However, if there is any matter to further investigate, then GRO will be allowed to complete the task within additional 20 days’ time-frame (Cabinet Division 2018). Nevertheless, the redress rate of some of the offices was found satisfactory (80.64%) indicating that some government officials were capable or trained or accountable to the higher authority to redress the grievance. However, it is opined by the key informants of the Cabinet Division that most of the district level government offices did not follow the GRS guideline properly. Research by Hossain & Islam (2020) also supported that majority of the government offices in Bangladesh do not usually follow GRS. It is also disclosed from the statement of key informants that having no dedicated GRO and lack of monitoring were other causes of ineffective GRS. During FGD most of the GRO acknowledged that they did not undergo training on GRS and were not completely aware about the system, whereas, some of them opined that the existing online system was frequently found dysfunctional. Moreover, most of the GRO claimed that lack of

manpower; excessive workload and having no adequate institutional set-up were the main constraints of GRS implementation (Table 1).

Table 1: Status of online grievance redresses in the five district administrations since July 2021 - June 2022

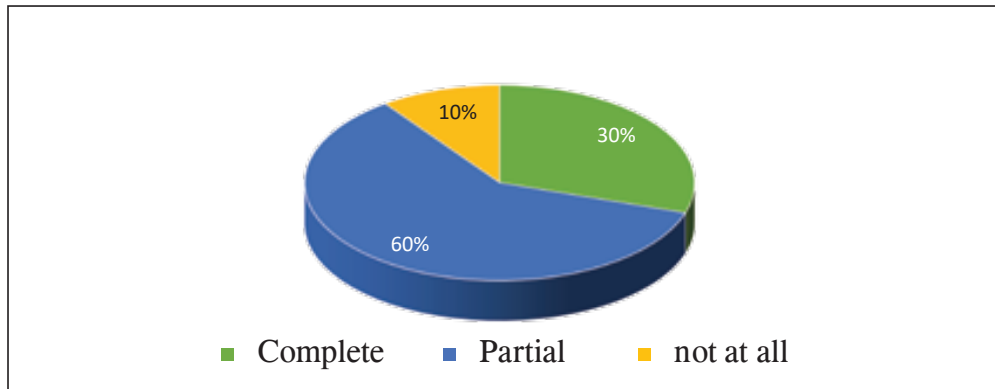
SL No.	Name of districts	Lodged grievances	Within time limit	Out of time limit	Unredressed	Redressed	Redress rate(%)
01.	Narsingdi	34	4	30	34	0	0
02.	Narayanganj	44	6	38	44	0	0
03.	Gazipur	60	5	55	60	0	0
04.	Mymensingh	45	6	30	36	9	20
05.	Tangail	62	3	9	12	50	80.64
Grand total		245	24	162	186	59	24%
Percentage			8%	66%	76%	24%	100%

Data source: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division

Knowledge level of service providers about GRS

During FGD with district level Grievance Redress Officers it is revealed that only 30% of the officials had proper knowledge of GRS, however, majority of them (60%) possessed very poor knowledge. In this context, respondents opined that they were not provided training and they were busy with other activities as functions of the GRO was their additional responsibility. Regarding this issue, key informants opined that most of the district level officers were not properly sensitized and did not follow the GRS guidelines. In addition, during observation, researcher found out that lack of motivational training and frequent changing of GRO were liable for ineffective implementation of this tool. Similarly, Research by Rahman et al. (2020) stated that service providers were not intimate with the goals, philosophy and key features of GRS and were not stimulated to receive the new initiatives. Similarly, Post & Agarwal (2012) affirm that effective implementation of GRS greatly depends on the understanding level of the GROs (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Knowledge level of service providers about GRS in district level

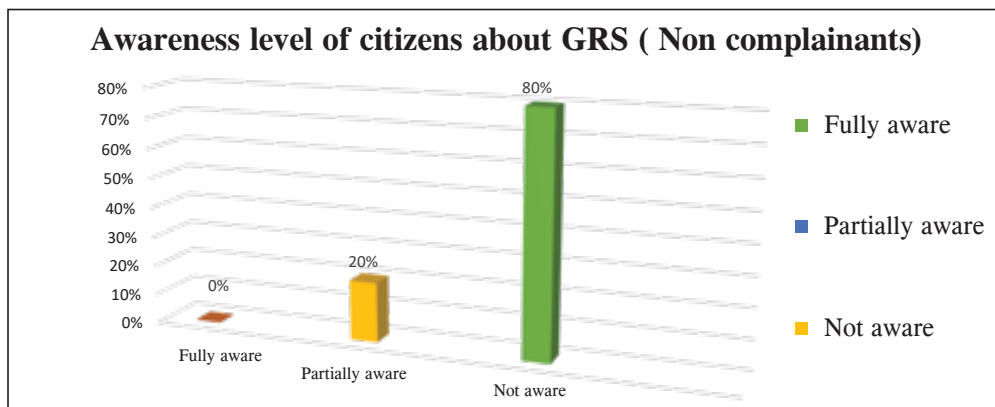


Data source: Field data

Awareness level of citizens about GRS

The researcher conducted a semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interview of 30 service seekers in the premises of the DC office of Narsingdi to assess their attitude and awareness level about GRS. It has been disclosed that 80% of them were not totally aware about GRS and only 20% were found partially aware (Figure 4). However, some of the respondents also told that for the first time they have heard about this system from the researcher. Findings of the research conducted by Alom (2021) supported that people were less aware of the prevails of grievance redress system. Again, Research by Seneviratne & Cracknell (1988) also found that 58% of service recipients were totally ignorant that their local service provider entity having a system of grievance redress. Importantly, most of them, however, also said that they have had their grievances and applied for remedy by means of informal system with computer composed papers. During in-depth interview many of them opined that huge publicity is needed for raising people’s awareness about this system (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Awareness level of citizens about GRS (Non-complainants)

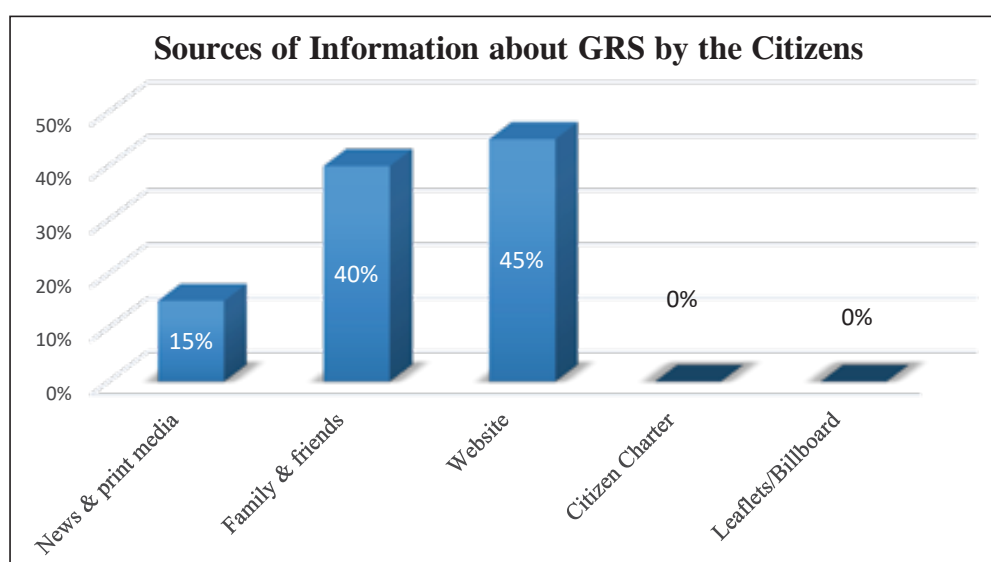


Data source: Field data

Publicity and Sources of Information of GRS

It is disclosed from the study that most of the service seekers (45%) were informed about the GRS through official website while 40% by family and friends and 15% by news and print media. It was also found that none of them was informed through Citizen Charter and/or leaflets/billboard (Figure 5). Moreover, researcher came to know by FGD that none of the field level offices used leaflets or billboard for the publicity of GRS. According to the instruction 9(l) of the GRS guidelines, it is the responsibility of the head of the respective offices to raise public awareness through wide publicity by means of printing leaflets, books and media coverage. It was also found that lack of public awareness was the main weakness of implementation of GRS. Moreover, Alom (2015) also supported this argument that government service provider entities of field level did not undertake proper publicity program to raise awareness about GRS. Lack of publicity, therefore, might be one of the key reasons for small number of complaints submission through online GRS platform in the field offices.

Figure 5: Sources of Information about GRS by the Citizens



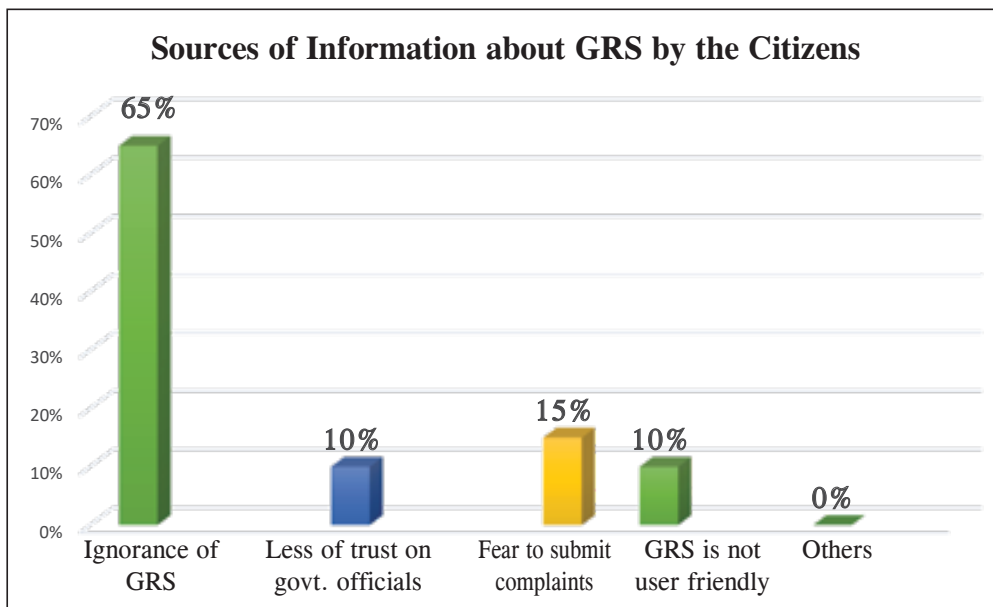
Data source: Field data

Reasons of small numbers of complaints lodged by the citizens (complainants view)

It was disclosed from collected data that number of grievance submission through online was found significantly low. Specifically, during the period of one year (From July 2021- June 2022) only 245 complaints were received by the five Deputy Commissioners' office which was not usual. Research by Oren (1992) also stated that most of the dissatisfied customers do not complain because they do not know how or to whom complaints can be lodged. Similarly, Brennan and Douglas (2002) mentioned

that significant number of consumers do not submit grievance simply because they “do not think it would do any good”. During study, majority of the respondents (65%) opined that ignorance of GRS is one of the main causes of a smaller number of complaints submission by the aggrieved citizens. Other causes were also cognizable namely “fear to submit complaints” (15%), “GRS not user friendly” (10%), and “less trust on officials” (10%). Importantly, while interviewing, one of the complainants claimed that “one of my friends had valid complaint and he was familiar with online GRS but he did not file complaints because he thought that it will bring no result as opponent is powerful”. Some of the respondents opined that for convenience of the people of all walks of life, mobile phone friendly complaint submission system can be introduced. From this data, it can be concluded that there were various reasons involved with small number of complaints submission but main cause was found ignorance of GRS. One of the key informants opined that peoples have trust issues. So, approach and attitude of the service providers should be much more positive so that people can build trust on them and receive satisfactory service delivery.

Figure 6: Reasons of small numbers of complaints lodged by the citizens



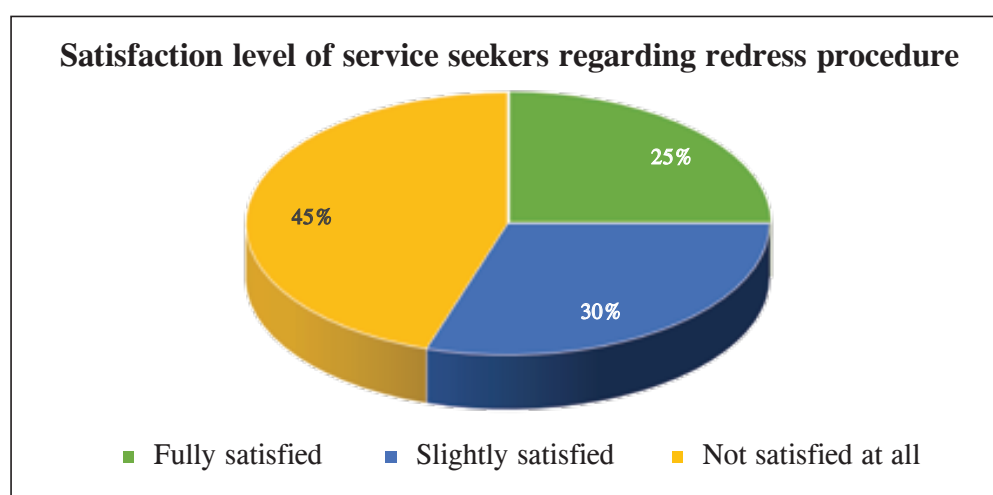
Data source: Field data

Satisfaction level of service seekers regarding redress procedure (complainants’ view)

Effective and efficient redressal of grievances is decisive to ensure satisfactory level of service delivery. To assess the satisfaction level of the complainants, this question was asked: to what extent they were satisfied regarding mitigation of their complaint lodged. Study revealed that only 25 % of the respondents were fully satisfied, 30% of

them slightly satisfied and 45% were not satisfied at all (Figure 7). The dissatisfaction level of service recipients has been captured in a thematic sense in the following manner:

Figure 7: Satisfaction level of service seekers regarding redress procedure (complainants' view)



Data source: Field data

Indifferent responsibility

While interviewing, some of the respondents claimed that in many cases grievance was disposed without taking any action and they did not get actual remedy against their complaints. One of the respondents uttered with sorrow: “despite the scope of disposal by himself, however, most of the time GRO forwarded the complaints to the subordinate office without valid ground and GRO of sub-ordinate offices did not take attempt to redressal on time which caused unwarranted delay and harassment of the citizens, which is apathetic behavior of service provider”. Similarly, some of the respondents claimed that they were not satisfied with the remedy because of taking long time by the GRO to redress the simple grievance. Moreover, some of the complainants alleged that in many cases GROs were found busy with other functions instead of grievance redress and in some cases their behavior was uncourteous which made the citizens dissatisfied.

Uncourteous behavior

Unprofessional behavior of service providers was another cause of dissatisfaction of the service receivers and some of them claimed that service providers did not behave well and not receiving the phone calls which was not desirable. Moreover, some respondents opined that in many occasions service providers did not provide any updates of lodged complaints and also did not inform about the final result of grievance

redressed. However, few respondents acknowledged that they got proper remedy of their complaints and they were satisfied.

Unavailability of GRO

Many of the respondents claimed that most of the time GRO were found unavailable at office to meet and talk. As a result, it was required to visit the office again and again which was embarrassing and painful. It might be that there were no dedicated GRO and all of them working as GRO on their additional charge. So, proper staffing is required to make the system effective in real sense.

Effectiveness of online grievance redress system (Complainants’ view)

In order to assess the degree of effectiveness of GRS, the respondents were asked to give their opinion whether they agreed or disagreed against provided statements using Likert scale. It is revealed that almost all of the respondents (18 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that the publicity of GRS was adequate and majority of the respondents (15 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that complaints resolved within time limit. Moreover, most of them (14 out of 20) showed their disagreement with the statement of ‘GRO informed the final decision of grievance timely’. Again, majority (11 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that attitude of GRO was positive. However, many of them (13 out of 20) agreed that existing online GRS were user-friendly and easy to submit complaints (Table 2). Research by Akanda (2016) found that friendliness and punctuality of the service providers might be in charge of satisfaction of the service seekers and this satisfaction could lead to the trust on service providers and government organizations.

Table 2: Effectiveness of online grievance redress system (complainants’ view)

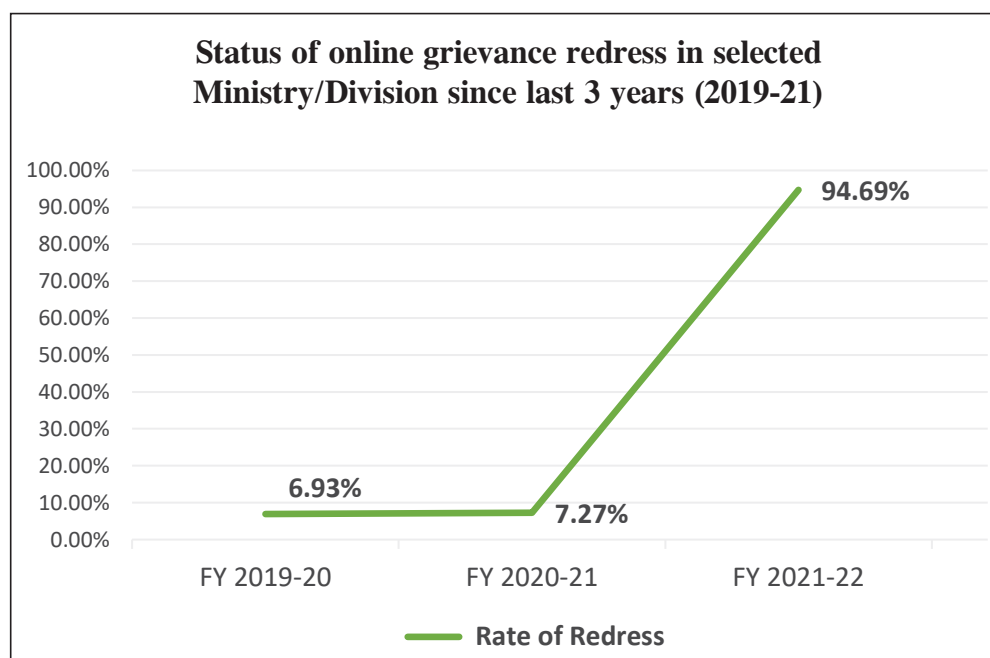
Statements	Degree of agreement of effectiveness		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree
1. Online GRS user friendly	13	7	0
2. Attitude of GRO is positive	6	11	3
3. Publicity is adequate	2	18	0
4. Website is updated	4	13	3
5. Internet is speedy as required	3	15	2
6. Complaints resolved within time limit	3	15	2
7. GRO inform final decision timely	4	14	2

Data source: Field data

Online Grievance redressal scenario in selected Ministries/Divisions

Secondary data of six related ministry/division were collected from the Dashboard of Cabinet Division to understand the grievance redress status. It has exhibited that in the ministry/division level online grievance redress rate dramatically increased in the year of 2021-2022 which was 94.69%. However, it was only 6.93% in 2019-2020 and 7.27% in 2020-21 (Figure 8). Importantly, in the year 2020-21 performance of GRS was integrated with the evaluation process of Annual Performance Agreement (APA) with the allocation of 4 marks for GRS. According to the key informants of Cabinet Division, the recent trend of highest rate of grievance redress in the ministry/division level was the direct impact of integration of GRS in the evaluation process of APA. However, according to key informants, last year serious measures have been taken by the Cabinet Division for strengthening the GRS in the ministry/division level including formulation of detailed workplan for GRS, conducting training for GROs, ensuring monthly and quarterly report to the Cabinet Division, continuous monitoring and conducting several seminar/workshops also had impact on such performance.

Figure 8: Online grievance redressal status in Ministry/Division since last 3 years (2019-21)

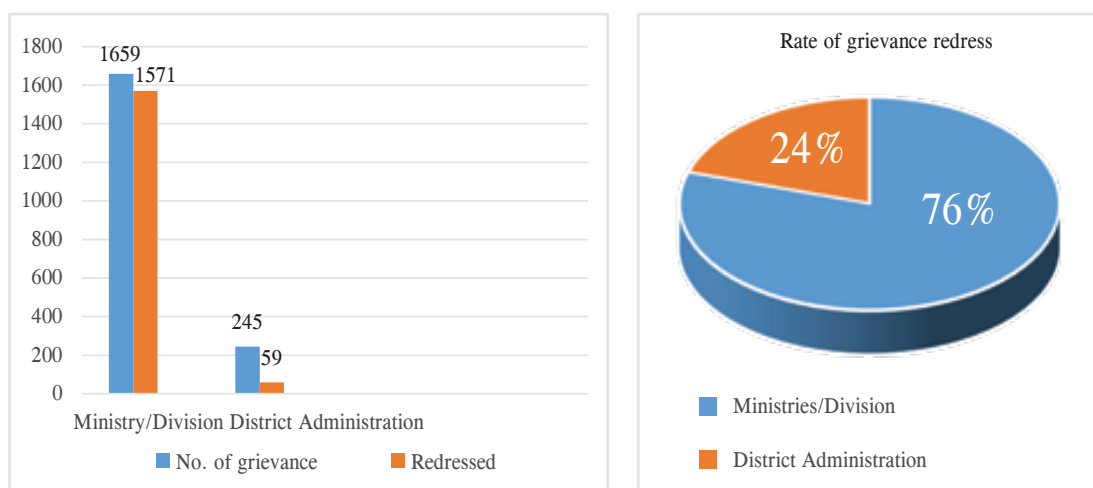


Source: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division

Comparison of grievance redress between Ministries/Divisions and District level offices

From the analysis of the secondary data collected from the GRS website of Cabinet Division, it is revealed that in the last fiscal year (2021-22) five district administrations received only 245 complaints through online GRS and rate of redress was only 24%. On the other hand, selected six-line ministries/divisions received 1659 complaints and disposal rate was 94.69%. It was clear that number of complaints received and redressal rate was significantly higher in the ministry level than district level sub-ordinate offices. It is indicated that district level offices were clearly lagging behind in implementing GRS. In other words, grievance redress mechanism found less institutionalized in the district level. In this regard, during interview, top management of Cabinet Division opined that mammoth awareness building program both for service providers and seekers, strict monitoring and continuous feedback by the line ministry/division must be ensured. Hence, it can be said that lack of proper monitoring and evaluation was one of the key causes of poor implementation of GRS in the district level (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Comparison of grievance redress between Ministries/Divisions and District level government offices (2021-22)



Source: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division

Findings of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

To explore the implementation status and its potential challenges the service providers’ views were gathered through FGD. According to the participants of focus group, there were many challenges and bottlenecks associated with the effective implementation of GRS, which were captured in a thematic manner:

Lack of awareness of citizen

It is disclosed that general people were not aware enough about the GRS because of inadequate publicity. Though websites of district administrations were found updated with detailed know-how of GRS but the websites of other district level offices were not updated and found dysfunctional as the GRS service box was incomplete. Online linkage among the departments and sub-ordinate offices also found very weak.

Lack of capacity of service providers

Most of the GRO of district level government offices did not undergo training and orientation about GRS. As a result, majority of them actually had poor knowledge and mostly incapable of handling the GRS perfectly. Frequent changes of GRO due to transfer also found one of the key reasons of weak management of GRS.

Institutional incapacity

Excessive workload and having no dedicated GROs and slow internet were found big challenges. Front desk of the concerned offices did not function properly as of GRS guidelines. Coordination gap among the government organizations, weak monitoring and evaluation also other hindrance should be addressed to make GRS effective.

Findings of the Observations

As a case study, researcher visited the Narsingdi Deputy Commissioner's office to observe the real scenario of GRS implementation process. Web portal of district administration of GRS was found up-to-date. However, it was found that website of the most of the district level offices was not up-to date except district administration and almost all of the offices did not have GRS service box in their portal. It was also found that implementation of GRS agenda was not included in the monthly coordination meeting though it is a mandatory option in the GRS guidelines. It was also observed that as district administration deals with diversified public functions and assigned GRO had a huge workload as a result he could not manage time for grievance redress. It was also disclosed that slow internet was a big problem for timely online grievance disposal.

Findings of Key Informants Interviews (KII)

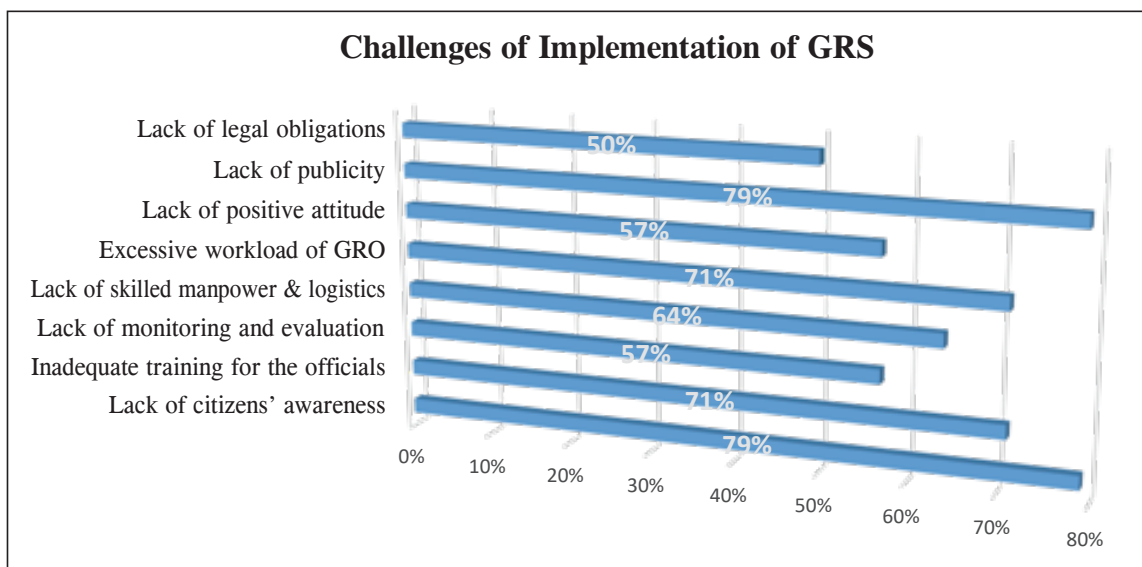
In order to gain overall insight of GRS implementation researcher collected views from concerned senior officials of Cabinet Division as key informants by means of KII. The major findings of KII includes- having no dedicated GRO and frequent changes of them was a big problem of GRS implementation; district level offices were not properly sensitized and did not properly follow the GRS guidelines; GRS activities of district level

sub-ordinate offices were not properly monitored by the concerned line ministry/division; presently, marks allocation for GRS is only 4 in performance evaluation of APA which is not sufficient; however, it can be increased reasonably for sustainable outcome of GRS. Performance of GRS of sub-ordinate offices did not take into consideration while evaluating the performance of the GRS of ministry/division for APA; coordination gap amongst the different govt. officials was also found a problem; Union Digital Centers can be included for the convenience of online grievance submission by the rural citizens; only one branch of Cabinet Division looks after the GRS of whole country which is impossible in real sense. During interview most of the top management of GRS opined that for strengthening the monitoring and effective implementation of GRS, institutional capacity should be increased and it can be done by establishment of separate GRS directorate or division or wing under the Cabinet Division.

Challenges of Implementation of GRS (views of service providers)

To find out the challenges of GRS, opinion of the service providers has been taken into consideration. According to the views of the respondents, lack of awareness of citizen (79%), inadequate training for officials (71%), lack of monitoring and evaluation (57%), lack of skilled manpower and logistics (64%), excessive workload (71%), lack of positive attitude of service providers (57%), lack of publicity (79%) and lack of legal obligations (50%) were found major challenges (Figure 10). Research by Rahman et.al (2020) stated that service receivers were not aware about the GRS. Here, it should be mentioned that multiple responses were provided by the respondents on same statement.

Figure 10: Challenges of Implementation of GRS (views of service providers)



Data source: Field data

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept and practice of online Grievance Redress System in government offices of Bangladesh is not very old. The implementation status of this system was not satisfactory in the field level government offices and in many considerations, it was found dysfunctional in terms of grievance received and rate of redress. However, it is found that this system is functioning in the ministry/division level more efficiently and effectively than district level. The study has disclosed that the number of online grievance submission by the citizen was significantly low and the rate of redress was also very dissatisfactory as many of the complaints were found not mitigated within the time schedule of redress. It was an indication that service seekers were not aware enough about GRS and the service providers, however, were reluctant to implement and expedite the Grievance Redress system. It is also evident from the study that inadequate public awareness as well as lack of institutional capacity and incapacity of the officials were the leading causes of poor implementation of GRS. Similarly, inadequate publicity, lack of positive attitude and accountability of the service providers, inadequate linkage with all district level government offices, lack of proper monitoring and evaluation, were other causes of weak implementation. For addressing the challenges and limitations the study came up with some policy interventions which include undertaking mammoth awareness building program, continuous training program for capacity development of the government officials and result-based monitoring and evaluation. The main objectives of introducing GRS were to ensure quality service delivery, enhancing trustworthiness and accountability in governance. Therefore, strengthening the implementation process of grievance redress system is crucial for establishment of rights of the citizens as well as good governance.

Recommendations

From analysis of the literature review and research findings it is disclosed that many problems were associated with implementation process of GRS where policy action is required. It is also perceived by the researcher that any single intervention would not be sufficient for addressing the multidimensional challenges. Therefore, following specific potential policy options have been made out for making the GRS effective.

1. Institutionalized awareness-building campaigns are needed for understanding of GRS
2. Strengthening the institutional capacity by revitalizing the existing monitoring and evaluation system
3. Capacity development of the officials by ensuring regular training and motivation
4. Establishing a separate legal Authority of GRS under Cabinet Division

5. Development of a mechanism to reflect performance of sub-ordinate offices' GRS in APA performance evaluation of concerned ministry/division.
6. Union Digital Centers (UDC) across the country can be involved for the convenient of online grievance submission by the local people.

Action plan for implementation of the recommendations

Sl. No.	Action required	People/Organization involved	Time-line	Resource required
1. Institutionalized awareness-building campaigns	I. Holding workshop/seminar ii. Communication campaign through leaflet, booklets, bill-board, poster, radio, television and print media iii. Set agenda in monthly coordination meeting	Concerned line ministry, Ministry of information, Cabinet Division, Divisional & District administration, representatives of print & electronic media, civil society and local government representatives	i. 6 months ii. 2 years iii. 1 month	Budget Administrative support, engagement of all stakeholders, Policy support.
2. Strengthening the institutional capacity by revitalizing the existing M&E system	i. Establishment of separate GRS monitoring cell in the ministry level ii. Ensure monthly redressal report iii. Facilitating logistics support and increase manpower v. Ensuring citizens feedback through front desk vi. Strengthening coordination v. Updating website	Concerned line ministry and Local administration, all district level govt. offices, ICT division	1-2 years	Budget, Administrative support Policy support
3. Capacity development of the officials ensuring regular training & motivation	I. Arrangement of quarterly training program, workshop etc. ii. Reward for better performance	Head of the concerned office, Cabinet Division, ICT Division	2 years	Budget needed Training module & policy support
4. Establish a separate legal Authority of GRS under Cabinet Division	Preparation a draft for organogram with function and produce in the cabinet meeting for approval	MOPA Law ministry Cabinet Division Finance Division	18 months	Budget needed, Administrative & Policy support
5. Development of a mechanism to reflect performance of sub-ordinate offices GRS in APA evaluation.	Modification of existing indicators of GRS evaluation format	Concerned line ministries and Cabinet Division.	1-2 year	Administrative support Development of action plan, Restructuring existing format of evaluation
6. UDC involvement for the convenient of online grievance submission by the local people	Issue a circular from Training for the entrepreneurs' of UDC Training schedule formation	ICT division Cabinet Division District Administration, Local govt. organizations	2 years	Budget, Administrative & policy support

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