

RIGHT TO INFORMATION CAMPAIGN, UTTER PRADESH/BIHAR

A – REPORT



The Right to Information Act initially came to force in Rajasthan and Delhi under the pressure of some people organizations and social workers. It was later enforced as law in the entire country (except Jammu & Kashmir) on October 13, 2005. This law capable of bringing transparency and accountability in working of the government has proved to be the most effective tool for the general public since Independence.

For many years, activists of Asha and other organizations were active in seeking information on corruption by demanding income and expenditure of Panchayats, disseminating the information to general public, lodging complaint, and demonstrations before the senior administrative officers and thereby getting solutions for the problems and complaints. Right to Information Act came as a definite weapon in the hands of these activists which facilitates reaching the roots of the problems of general public and finding their solution easily.

After the enforcement of law the biggest problem was to contact the Information Officers appointed in different departments because the bureaucracy was still not serious about this law and it was not easy to get the RTI application accepted in any department.

In many Development Blocks of the country a campaign 'blow to corruption' was launched by 'Parivartan' 'Kabir' and other organizations during 1 July to 15 July 2006. This campaign was launched successfully by Asha Parivar in 14 districts of UP with the help of other associated organizations. After the initial campaign, RTI camps were organized in many stages at the headquarters of other cities, tehsils and block headquarters and are now organized regularly.

The primary results of this intensive campaign are as follows:

1. Information Officers were appointed in various departments.
2. General public became aware of this law.
3. Departments started accepting RTI applications.
4. After intense pressure some departments made arrangements for cash deposit of RTI application fee.
5. Administration became active after the knowledge of cases of corruption.

6. Files declared lost or in disuse became available and active emerging from their dusty graves.

Despite the above successes the condition is not very satisfactory. Information is not given by various departments due to prior corruption or because the records were not kept safely. State Information Commission constituted for ensuring the compliance of the RTI does not appear very serious about making the information available to the applicants. Under the circumstances the role of the activists devoted to spreading public awareness about the RTI act and its provisions is very important.

It is important to state that activists working in 30 districts of UP and 15 districts of Bihar have given campaign the name “RTI campaign” and are active in their areas to the maximum extent for creating awareness about it. Number of such activists is more than 100 (a list will be sent separately) out of them many are such who do not get any financial support but still they are working whole heartedly in this mission of awareness.

A proposal for help of 20 such activists for meeting their minimum requirements, local allowance and telephone expenses was made to Association for India’s Development. Our colleagues at A.I.D whole-heartedly considered the application and provided help, and these fellows definitely got sufficient help and could work actively (up to date details of financial expenditure is given separately).



RTI campaign activists and others who received the financial help of A.I.D or not, normally meet at one location to discuss their work and efforts once every two months to understand the efforts and difficulties of each other .We are receiving the reports and

paper cuttings of efforts made by these activists in their respective areas (which are about 200 pages). Based on their regular reports I am trying to make precise district-wise report keeping in mind that the work of enforcement of law such as RTI Act is a huge task in itself in which these activists are successful to a great extent because under the continuing bureaucratic mentality of last many years establishment can not be transparent in such a short time but efforts continue.

Moradabad- RTI camps are being organized from the time of start of the campaign in various tehsils and blocks and through them more than 10,000 peoples have become aware of this law and more than 2000 applications have being filed to different departments. Many cases of corruptions and irregularities came to light and from among them the following are important:

- 1.** State Bank of India, Bilari branch- Since filing the appropriate applications for information the difficulties faced in opening the bank accounts by widow pensioners, old age pensioners and student scholarship recipients were resolved.
- 2.** Development block Bilari- Irregularities in the free-of-cost boring scheme were removed after the application for information.
- 3.** There is improvement in the condition of Anganwadi (childcare center) and Midday meals since the RTI applications were filed.
- 4.** On Oct. 7, 2007 BDO was called for public hearing of grievances and his commitment was received for resolving various problems. Further an application for information has been filed to build pressure for implementation on the promises.

In this district team is continuously working on awareness through writing on walls and distribution of pamphlets. In this campaign Prem kumar, Suresh, Rajpal, Indarpal, Ramkuwar, Brijpal, Chandrapal, etc. are active and among them Suresh and Rajpal are receiving RTI fellowship from A.I.D.

Unnao - In Unnao district many RTI camps have been organized. In the beginning it was difficult to file applications for information. The boards with names of Public Information Officers have not yet been installed in the offices. Under the circumstances

the activists of RTI campaign are working to build pressure. In this Development Block there is large scale corruption in the implementation of NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) due to which for last six months the BDO of development block Miaganj has not made the file relating to this scheme available. This case is now with the State Information Commission. Mr. Yashwant Rao, fellow of the campaign, who was earlier helping the applicants in State Information Commission, has now returned to Unnao and is active in awareness campaigns. He is getting help from A.I.D. Other activists - Neelkamal, Virendra Singh, Karan Singh etc. are also working here.

Hardoi – Regular camps and awareness rallies on RTI are organized in Hardoi Development Block. For solution of problems many times dharna, demonstration were organized at Hardoi headquarters and Bharawan, Sandila and Behender development blocks due to which definite improvement is visible in the arrangements of primary schools, ration distribution, midday meal and allotment of land etc. Social audit of works done under NREGA was conducted in three Development Blocks of this district and wide irregularities were found. Now continuous pressure is being organized for audits and action. Wide irregularities have been found in public distribution system of the Development Block. Some improvement is observed after the suspension of six supply inspectors and four dozen allottees of PDS quota. Regular 3 days camps are being organized in Kothawa, Bharawan blocks. In Malihabad Tehsil level regular consultation camp is organized and simultaneously in Sadila block a full time consultation centre has been started where Ashok Bharti remains available. There is a big team of activists connected with the campaign in Hardoi. On filing application for information activists have achieved especial success on the following aspects:

1. Desiring persons are getting job cards
2. Below Poverty Line cards have been made for eligible persons.
3. There appears control on the black-marketing of ration and there is improvement in the distribution of ration.
4. Improvement is observed in Anganwadis in Bharawan Block.

5. Eligible persons are getting possession of the allotted land.
6. Janata Inter College Bharawan started accepting the prescribed admission fee.
7. In the entire region it has become easy to get caste certificate, residential certificate, or certificate of agricultural land from Govt. Department for which earlier up to Rs 300 had to be paid.
8. There is improvement in the quantity of midday meal and efforts are being made for the improvement of quality.
9. Corruption has been found in the construction of building of the Govt. Primary School and action has been taken against the persons responsible.
10. During social audit of NREGA in Bharawan, Behender, and Sandila development blocks case of financial irregularity came to light (Report is available on Asha Parivar website) which is reducing the irregularities in further work.

In Hardoi various colleagues of RTI campaign and Asha Parivar are active which include RTI fellow Gayadin Bharti, Ram Bharose, Jitendra Dixit, Jagdish Verma, Ashok Bharti, Bhagwandin & Munna Lal Shukla, besides other activists - Ramsagar, Chandralekha, Rambabu, Neelkamal, Ram Naresh, Gangasagar Awasthi, Ram Prakash, Sugam Rani etc. Large scale public contact, regular meetings with villagers, distribution of pamphlets and writing on walls is being carried out in the whole region. People are contacting these activists for their small problems also due to their devoted participation.

During this period about 3 dozen villages were surveyed and discovered the real condition of Primary School and midday meals. Efforts are made for opening Education Centers under the Sarva Sikhsa Abhiyan (Education for All) campaign by obtaining positive resolutions from Gram Sabha (village meeting). Activists of Hordoai are also carrying out the RTI awareness campaign in neighboring districts of Behraich and Sitapur.

Kanpur – In Kanpur work relating to RTI is going on systematically. The Report of which is sent by Maheshji regularly. Hence I am not including it here. Still it is worth

stating that through mobile camps and arranging department-wise camps at regular intervals, campaign has been achieving comparatively great success. Here Mahesh, Kuldeep Saxena, Rambabu, Deepak Malviya, R.K. Tewari are actively working with RTI fellow Abdul Kalam, William Paul and Shanker Singh. Corruption scandal worth crores of Rupees has come to light in Kanpur Vikas Pradikaran (KDA), Transport Department, Health and Electricity Department. Here one office of campaign remains open daily. Kanpur activists organize camps regularly in Unnao & Banda also.

Lucknow Regular camps could not be organized in Lucknow but two hearings have been organized on RTI and there is direct interaction of activists with the State Information Commission. Activists from all the districts remain in contact with these Lucknow associates working at the Commission. Mr. Akhilesh Saxena, active in this campaign, is regularly available at the Commission. His role is to remain available for duration of hearing, locate copy of judgment, pursue court date etc. Numerous unknown persons arriving in Lucknow from distant places take help from Akhleshji every day. For some time Ashok Bharti, Yashwant Rao, and Munnalal Shukla have also played the role of assisting at the Commission but due to high expenses on residence in Lucknow, they went back to their districts and are now working there. Due to active role of these RTI activists at the commission, financial penalties have been levied in dozens of cases.

Varanasi – In Varanasi, since the initial campaign of July 2006, weekly camp is organized every Thursday at district headquarters through which 1670 applications have been filed so far and in more than 1000 cases first appeal and in 600 cases appeal has been filed with the Commission. To our knowledge, in 75 cases financial penalty has been levied on Information Officers. Although commission has been unsuccessful in collecting this penalty, still it has put definite pressure on Information Officers. Besides the weekly camps at district level, 2 to 5 day camps were organized in two stages at all the 8 block headquarters of the Development Block. Due to intensive distribution of pamphlets on tehsil day, very large numbers of interested people attend the weekly camps. During last one year 15 awareness programs were conducted in different localities where people obtained information about this Right.

Success in some cases like matter of appointment in Nagar Nigam, matter of fake appointment of Sikshamitra, unearthing of a dozen cases of corruption in banks involving lakhs of rupees, matter of non-payment of scholarship to students of Class I of all the primary school in district (all students from Class I to V should receive scholarships but only Class II to V were receiving them) are main achievements and worth describing. Irregularities in about 2 dozen Gram Sabhas and ration shops came to light. There is improvement in the condition of street lighting and street cleaning in many areas of Varanasi.



Irregularities in the selection of widow pensioners at Development Block level came to light. Bribe of Rs. 10 per election introduction card was stopped. Delivery of about 200 pending passports was arranged. On the basis of information demanded on SEZ Bhadohi through RTI application, the campaign has received new direction.

In Varanasi due to continuous pressure, now the notice boards listing the Public Information Officers have been installed at all the departments and applications are now accepted. In this district a few organizations are working together in this campaign. In the weekly camp Anjali, Nageshwar Prasad, S. Gupta, Rajkumar, Hari Prasad, Sunita, Pradeepvallabh etc contribute their efforts especially with RTI fellow Ajay Patel. Many literacy workshops on RTI have been organized at the Asha Kathi centre.

Mirzapur – Work has picked up here since the one week long RTI awareness camp in July 2007 and three days camps have been organized in Chunar and Ahrora Tehsils. For last three months camps are regularly organized at district headquarter on every Wednesday. Some training workshops have also been organized at regular intervals. Penalty has been enforced against the Information Officers of Majhwa and Sidhi blocks. In Hatiya block land worth Rs 6 lakhs was recovered through RTI application after it was illegally possessed by declaring the owner dead.



Large numbers of applications are being filed demanding muster rolls of NREGA and village funds. Information on proposed Ganga Express Way Scheme has also been received. A check has been imposed by RTI on the irregularities in Ahrora Nagar Palika and Jaihind Inter College. Ajay Patel, Manoj, Sandhaya, Pradeep Shukla etc. were active in the RTI campaign at Mirzapur.

Chandauli/Sonbhadra – Chandauli and Sonbhadra are Naxalite affected districts. Crores of Rupees are received here in the name of development. RTI campaign activists were being discouraged by labeling them as naxal supporters. But still due to the efforts of activists attached to RTI campaign there is improvement in the condition of primary schools. Due to their immense participation about 500 workers received NREGA wage payment of more than 5 lakhs. The matter relating to sale of nutritive meals in the market, which was meant for distribution among the Anganwadi, was caught red handed. Here the work relating to RTI awareness campaign is being carried out by distribution of pamphlets, drama at road crossing, writing on walls, singing of folk songs in villages by visiting them regularly. Camps are organized regularly at Nayamlabad, Naugarh development block and head quarters of chakiya Tehsil. Janata Soochna Kendra (Public Information Center) was started in Chakiya but has been closed for time being due to shortage of funds. In Chandauli and Sonbhadra district Jay Shankar, Ram Awadh, Jay Prakash, Shirawan, Hargovind, Hosila Prasad, etc. are active and among them Harigovind, Jay Prakash and Hosila are RTI fellows.

Gazipur – RTI camps have been conducted in Khanpur, Sadat, Manihari, Devkali development blocks, Sedpur Tehsil and district headquarter due to which general public has started filing applications themselves. Corruption in panchayat funds and a huge scandal in misuse of MLA funds have come to light where the associates of MLA have

benefited from lakhs of rupees in the name of grant to colleges. A matter relating to irregular allotment of land of Navodaya Vidyalaya has also come to light. Black-marketing of ration available on the ration card of the beneficiaries of Musahar caste has also been detected. In Gazipur many organizations are working for RTI awareness in which Vishvesh, Savitri, Brijbhushan Dubey, Kanhaya etc are the main ones.

Kushinagar/Deoria – Activists in Khushinagar and Davaria are conducting RTI awareness programs in Basti, Maharajganj and Sidharthnagar Development Block. By organizing camps at regular intervals in Bhatpurrani, Salampur, Barhaj Tahsil headquarters average 200 applications per camp are submitted. Corruption in scholarship has been brought to light in Bhatpurrani. In Deoria Development Block after pressure from activists the water tanks dry for years are now supplying water to public. Dozens of Shikshamitra could be selected who were ignored due to irregularity. Scam of Rs 45 lakhs in scholarship came to light in Madan Mohan Mahavidhyalaya. Scam of crores of rupees was found in the free-of-cost boring scheme. Many dozens of cases of delay in the preparation of passports have been resolved. Severe irregularity in Intensive Plantation program came to light. Activists here are engaged in the active opposition of loss to farmers due to Maitreya (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maitreya_Project) project besides other different programs of public awareness. Here Keshev Chand, Sanjay Singh, Udai Bhan, Barister Sahani, Ranjeet Singh, Bhim Chand etc. are actively associated with RTI fellows Dr. Janardan Singh and Bhiragunath Yadav.

Balia – Here 3 days camps were organized on two occasions at district headquarters. In addition, pamphlet distribution work is going on in Bansdih development block and Baria



Tehsil head quarters.

In Balia due to lack of organizational pressure it is still difficult to deposit the RTI applications but the efforts continue. Some cases of irregularities in ration card, Indira Awas, widow pension, primary schools, anganwadi have come to light. Here Vijay Bhai, Baliram, Kamlesh etc are active with RTI fellow Manav Tewari.

Mau – In Mau district under the pressure of dozens of meetings and workshops deposit of applications has become easy. Many big corruption cases have come to light. Health department has been shaken up with findings of grave irregularities in the procedure of grant and renewal of licenses for pharmacy shops. 1100 home guards who were sufferers of corruption could be recruited. Scam of Rs 50 lakhs came to light in Panchayat Raj Department. Enquiry against many officers continues on the matter of the use of tractors under NREGA. In Mau Akhlesh, Ram Bhawan, Basant, Ajai etc. are actively working with Arvind Murti.

Jaunpur – In Jaunpur Development Block irregularities in NREGA of about Rs 30 lakhs have come to light. Here applications have been submitted by organizing camps at Tehsil and block levels. Hariram Banvasi submitted number of applications on the problems of Musahar society which facilitated the solution of problems. Various scams relating to

Purwanchal University Jaunpur, Chief Medical Officer, Panchayati Raj Deptt and social welfare department have been disclosed. Here Nisar Ahmad, Gopalji, Daulat ram, Sachin etc. are active.

Bihar - Campaign activists are engaged in Gopalganj, Siwan, Khagadia, Begusarai, Samastipur districts and State Information Commission Patna in Bihar state. In all these districts RTI awareness camps are organized regularly. Appointment of Public Information Officers in Bihar could be possible due to the pressure of activists but it is not easy to get information from corrupt officers. Forged cases were imposed on activists and they faced bad behavior from officials. But conditions are changing under the pressure of organization. Due to the pressure built by raising questions on the working of Information Commission, decisions have started coming in favor of applicants. Scam in the work of Flood Relief, heavy irregularities under NREGA, collection of money in the selection of Anganwadi workers, exposing of about 200 cases of corruptions in the selection of beneficiaries of ration card and Indira Awas have put pressure on the officers. In Gopalganj district bribe in the distribution of loan in the employment office has been controlled. In Siwan district fellow Prafull Chand Gosh is active as mobile information supplier. He is trying for submission of applications by roaming in the city and villages on his motorcycle exhibiting pamphlets of RTI. Officers have tried to discourage the work of Ranjan activist from Begusarai, and Khgaria activist P.C. Gosh by filing the case of harassment of schedule caste, collection of Gondra Tax, interference in Govt. work etc. In Bihar activists of other organizations P.C. Gosh, Vandana, Ranjan, Rupesh, Jitendra, Arsad, Motilal Pd, Nagandra Pandey, Vineet, Manoj, etc. are active with RTI fellow Mahendra Yadav and Manoj Misra.

Possibilities

Due to continuous programs organized for awareness about RTI, general public has started filing applications which will increase accountability of administration and transparency in the working of the government. There appears possibility of reduction in the cases of corruption in future due to exposing of big economic scams. Irregularities in the selection of beneficiaries in the schemes of primary education, midday meals, public

distribution, and different social welfare schemes will be reduced. Working of the program has been partially facilitated by the collection of donation, sale of published material etc. by the members of campaign.

Problems

A group of colleagues are associated in this campaign in various districts but some of them are not getting any help and are facing problem of livelihood. This is reducing their confidence. Since regular help is not available for workshops, training, wall writing, discourses, etc. expected results are not available. Sufficient material like pamphlets, books etc are not available due to lack of resources which is naturally affecting the publicity.

Expectations

1. Support of fellows working together for RTI should be continued next year.
2. In both the states together 30 fellows should get help @ 3500/- per month out of which Rs 2500/- should be honorarium and Rs 1000/-for telephone, local conveyance and stationary.
3. Based on the extent of work in each district, Rs 1000/- to Rs 2000/- per month additional help should be made available for workshops evaluation meetings, camps discussion, training, wall writing etc so that they may be organized well and regularly.
4. There should be separate provision for pamphlets & banners in sufficient numbers for UP and Bihar.
5. Some experienced associate should give at least one month time for unbiased evaluation of whole program and give suggestions and guidance based on the description, merits and demerits so that campaign may get new direction and achieve its objectives.

(Vallabh)

16/02/08

(Original Hindi document is available at ashaparivar.org. Translated by K.P Agarwal, in Lucknow on 26/02/08)

Supporting Documents:

1) Kanpur RTI Campaign progress report (attached and on above website)

2) Pictures of the Campaign:

<http://gallery.aidindia.org/gallery/gallery2/v/RTI/UP+and+Bihar/>

3) Video of Public hearing at Lucknow in March 2007 (285 MB file in .wmv format)

www.ashaparivar.org/cms/files/UP_NREGA_Public_Hearing_Part1.wmv

4) Site visit reports:

a) Three day visit by Indian Friends Association President Mr. Prithvi Sharma to Chandauli district. He has also visited Hardoi district in the past.

http://www.indiafriendsassociation.com/cgi-script/csNews/news_upload/Projects_2edb.A::07Progashaashram%5B1%5D.pdf

b) Below is a brief site visit report by Ashish Ranjan Jha and AID Saathi Kamayani Keki from the site of Bihar effort. It is notable that Ashish has now left his full time job to join the effort whole heartedly.

Dear Sirish,

I have got in touch with Mahendra who is one of the RTI fellows in Patna. i had written about it to Somu and i am inline texting my mail to Somu below. In addition spoke to Vallabh ji a couple of days ago and he seems to have sent a report to AID already (i have a copy of the report and will also go thru it) so i assume we should be all set to send the next batch of funds and would not need us to visit for a report.

Let me know if i can be any help

Ashish

Hello Somu,

hope you are doing well. Kamayani and I are also doing good in Patna. Here we met few people working on RTI. Unfortunately not many groups are working on RTI . We met Mahendra Yadav though sandeep pandey. He along with few other students/volunteers are working seriously on RTI. Mahendra Yadav works with Asha and is supported by AID. Every friday this group puts up a RTI stall outside the DM's office in Patna. Kamayani and I have also started to participate in this activity and last friday we had a fruitfull experience. It was encouraging to see the response this group gets every friday. In addition to spreading awreness Mahendra's major work has been to assist individuals get information and follow up on applications. As you know, the campaign was started with much fanfare last year but could not hold steam. There is a dire need to do this work seriously in this part of the country. We are impressed with Mahendra Yadav's work and we intend to rejuvenate the campaign here in Patna. We need to setup a small office for this work. We are approaching few people we know to get free office space..lets see how

that works out.. thought i will give you some update on the rti work that is going on here...

thats all for now,
ashish