

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON KARNATAKA RIGHT TO
INFORMATION ACT HELD AT HAVERI ON 29th AUGUST 2004

The Second workshop under the CREAT/CHRI campaign on Right to Information (RTI) was held on 29th August 2004 at the Rotary Hall, Haveri. The workshop was organised with the assistance of Rotary Club Haveri and Consumer and Environment Protection Group, Haveri.

The objective of the workshop was to create awareness among the rural citizens about the basic concepts of RTI in general and the Karnataka Right to Information Act (KRIA) in particular. The program was started with a welcome and introductory remarks by Smt.Madhuri Devdhar, President of Rotary Club. Haveri. She explained the need for right to information in a democracy and explained the difficulties in getting information from Government departments, particularly on environmental issues. She said that the KRIA has come at a right time for social activists to get the information and make use of it to create a better society.

The workshop was inaugurated by Mr.S.S.Koth, SP, Haveri. He said that very few people are aware of KRIA and the police department needs to be educated on the need for right to information. He said that his department will be happy to provide whatever information the public needs. He mentioned that the police department has changed the procedure of furnishing First Information Report (FIR) and now anybody can ask for a copy of the same.

Mr.Y.G.Muralidharan, CREAT, made a presentation on the provisions of KRIA and also the various areas where it can be used. He said that unless people have information about the working of the Government they cannot participate effectively in the decision making process. He said that representative democracy is being replaced by participatory democracy and people have to make use of KRIA to participate in all developmental activities.

Mr.Muralidharan said that Karnataka was one of the first states to make an attempt to bring in the legislation on RTI. He said that Karnataka Government prepared the 'Freedom of the Press Bill' way back in 1988 but it did not see the light of the day. Twelve years later, KRIA was enacted in 2000 and the rules were framed in 2002. Explaining the provisions of KRIA he said that KRIA is applicable to all government departments, offices, institutions and also all those which have been funded by the State Government. Mr.Muralidharan said that there is a need to include some private institutions using government money in the KRIA.

Mr.Muralidharan explained the various concepts used in KRIA and also the procedure to be followed for obtaining information. He said RTI was intended to bring in more transparency and accountability in government working. He

explained the concept of Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) and urged the participants to make use of KRIA for their benefit.

Explaining the background in which the workshop is held, Mr.Muralidharan said that the CHRI has been campaigning for right to information for many years in India and the campaign would be more important with the enactment of KRIA. He said CHRI and CREAT have identified some of the towns in Karnataka wherein workshops will be held to create awareness and thereby establish a network of activists, NGOs, journalists, advocates etc. who will work on right to information.

Mr.Muralidharan said that the campaign also includes activities like publications, filing applications, follow up with the government, holding public hearings, conducting implementation audit etc. He said that CREAT is in the process of establishing a depository on right to information. Mr.Muralidharan asked the participants to file applications under KRIA and follow it up with the concerned departments. In case no reply is received, they can approach CREAT, which will take up the matter from Bangalore.

Before concluding his address Mr.Muralidharan answered several questions from the participants. Most of the questions related to the procedure for filing applications, the issues that can be raised and the method of using the information received for the benefit of the public.

Mr.Sadashivareddy, advocate, made a presentation on 'Operationalising KRIA'. He explained the Rules framed under KRIA and also the method of filling up the application. He quoted several instances wherein the applications were rejected because the application was not filled up properly. Mr.Sadashivareddy said that KRIA can be used by individuals and the community as a whole. Quoting the examples of Parivartan, MKSS and Nagarika Seva Trust, he said that even individual grievances can be tackled by the use of KRIA.

Mr.Basavaprabhu Hosakeri, an advocate from Dharwad, explained the legal and constitutional background to right to information. However Mr.K.N.Venkatgiri, another speaker from Sagar, could not attend.

The participants agreed to meet again and form a committee under the leadership of Mrs.Madhuri Devdhar.
