

**CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP**  
**FOR**  
**CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ON**  
**THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT, 2005**

**21-22 May**  
**Gram Vikas Parishad, Madhubani,**  
**Bihar**

**WORKSHOP REPORT**



**Workshop report prepared by:**

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)

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## **Background**

From 12 October 2005, the Right to Information Act (RTI Act), 2005 became fully operational across India. The Act provides people in India the right to access government-held information and requires systems to be set up for ensuring transparent and accountable government. The Act covers 'public authorities' at the national, state and local levels – duty holders who have obligations to deal with citizens' information needs. The Act includes institutions of self government such as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and municipalities within the definition of the term 'public authorities'. The purpose of the Act is to create an informed citizenry capable of participating in the decision-making processes of government at all levels.

A concomitant objective of this law is to empower people to hold government and its instrumentalities accountable to their decisions and actions. Participation in the absence of information about the policies, programmes and processes of decision making is next to the impossible. In this context, the right to information becomes a key tool for ensuring that public authorities more effectively meet their goal of promoting participation and entrenching accountable government at the grassroots level.

It has been nearly two years since the RTI act has been enacted, yet its use has been limited to the larger towns and cities. Its use, especially in the rural areas has been very low, mainly due to the fact that there has been hardly any training or orientation programmes or large-scale awareness generation campaigns amongst the rural masses. Lack of awareness and training are the main reasons why people find it difficult to access information from various government bodies. Civil society organizations, especially those working at the grassroots in rural areas need to be aware about this landmark legislation in our country. More importantly they have the specific responsibility to spread awareness about this Act amongst the people and monitor its implementation. Therefore, in order to strengthen the implementation of RTI Act and spread awareness about it the two day capacity building workshop on RTI Act 2005 was conducted by CHRI for civil society organizations who are also partners in the PACS programme in Bihar. The CSOs were primarily from the Mithila (Tirhut) cluster of the programme. (Please see Annex 1 for participants list).

## **Workshop Objectives**

The primary objectives of the two-day workshop were:

- Strengthen the understanding within civil society, regarding the key provisions in the RTI Act and the relevant operational rules and guidelines;
- Discuss in details the challenges and issues for entrenching openness in the functioning of PRIs and other public authorities with special focus on the information needs of the poor and the marginalized;
- Develop detailed follow-up action plans by the CSOs in using the RTI Act, monitoring its implementation and spreading awareness about it in the rural areas.

## **Participants Profile**

The workshop brought together about 29 participants representing civil society organizations from 4 districts, namely Madhubani, Darbhanga, Saharsa and Patna.

## **Learning materials distributed**

The following materials were distributed to each participant:

- CHRI's publication: Your guide to using the Right to Information Act 2005 (Hindi);
- Photocopy of CHRI's power point presentation on the RTI Act 2005;
- Bihar's RTI fee Rules;
- Pamphlets on RTI for Bihar

Besides these the English version of the User Guide as well as copies of the RTI Act in English were distributed to those participants who wanted English copies.

## **Sessions**

The workshop was designed with a focus on maximising discussion amongst participants with a particular emphasis on group work. During the course of the conference various problems arising out of the poor implementation of the *Right to Information Act*, (RTI Act) 2005 were discussed. The views and perceptions about the ground reality of the implementation of this Act were discussed based on which a detailed action plan was drawn up by the participants.

## **Day One**

### **Introductory Session**

The two-day workshop began with a welcome address by Mr. Shashtinath Jha, Secretary, Gram Vikas Parishad. He welcomed all the participants saying that everyone should take active interest on RTI and work on spreading awareness about it in the rural areas. After this a lamp was lit by the resource persons and participants. In his introductory remarks Mr. Brajesh Singh of CPSL said that in the last two years several training workshops have been held for PACs partners on various issues, including RTI. Some people know about RTI and are using it for their benefit as well as for public benefit. Many are unaware about the key provisions in the RTI Act. This workshop will help all partners to come together and understand the issues around RTI and draw up action plans to work on the issue. After the introductory remarks all the participants introduced themselves, their work and especially spoke about their expectations from the workshop which has been listed here:

### **Participants' expectations from the workshop**

- Develop a good understanding about right to information;
- Get information and understand the issues around implementation of the RTI Act;
- Gain knowledge about the detailed provisions in the RTI Act;
- To understand about RTI and spread this knowledge among the poor;
- Understand our rights and also the limitations in using the RTI Act;
- To know how RTI can be used in the context of NREGA;
- To know about the rules framed by the Central government regarding RTI;
- To know about the methods by which we can take RTI to the community we are working with, namely, the PRI members and the SHG members and develop an action plan to take RTI to the grassroots;
- To understand the applicability of RTI on NGOs;

### **Working Session I: Understanding the main provisions of the RTI Act**

After the introductory session, the resource persons namely, Sohini Paul and Rakesh Ranjan gave a brief overview of the history of the RTI movement in India, highlighting the role that civil society had played to pressure the government in enacting this important legislation. A summary of the RTI movement in India is given below:

### **Overview of the RTI movement in India**

Though the right to information is not explicitly stated in the Constitution of India, there have been several judgments of the Supreme Court of India that have stated that this right to access

information is implicit in the constitutionally enshrined right to freedom of speech and expression (Article 19(1) (a) and the right to life and liberty (Article 21). The first Supreme Court ruling dates back to 1975. However, no attempt was made by either the central or the state governments to enact legislation until the launch of a RTI movement by civil society.

The first and the most well known right to information movement in India was that of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), which began its work in Rajasthan during the early 1990s. The struggle of the poor labourers and landless farmers for access to village accounts and transparency in administration is widely credited with having started the RTI movement in India.

From the mid 1990s, a national campaign for the enactment of a central law on right to information gained momentum, especially after the formation of the National Campaign for Peoples Right to Information (NCPRI). After much struggle, the Central Government enacted the Freedom of Information Act 2002. However, since a date for the Act coming into force was never notified, such that it never actually came into operation.

While the campaign for the national legislation was going on, several states enacted their state-specific RTI legislations. Tamil Nadu was the first State to enact a right to information law, in 1997, followed by Goa in the same year. After that seven other States have passed legislation – Rajasthan (2000), Karnataka (2000), Delhi (2001), Maharashtra (2002), Assam (2002), Madhya Pradesh (2003) and Jammu and Kashmir (2003).

In May 2004, a new UPA (United Progressive Alliance) Government came into power at the Centre. The national campaign for right to information received a major boost when the UPA Government's Common Minimum Programme promised that: "The Right to Information Act will be made more progressive, participatory and meaningful." The National Advisory Council (NAC) was set up to oversee implementation of the Government's Common Minimum Programme. Since its inception, the NAC took a close interest in RTI and submitted draft NCPRI recommendations regarding amending the Freedom of Information Act 2002. The RTI Bill was approved by the Lok Sabha on 11 May 2005 and by the Rajya Sabha on 12 May. On 15 June President APJ Abdul Kalam Azad gave his assent to the Right to Information Act 2005. With presidential assent the Central and State Governments had 120 days to implement the provisions of the Act in its entirety. The Act formally came into force on 12 October 2005.

### **Overview of the RTI Act**

Following the introduction on the RTI movement in India, Sohini and Rakesh Ranjan made a power-point presentation on the salient features of the RTI Act 2005, the details of which have been given below: (see Annex 2 for the agenda)

The RTI Act came into force on 12 October 2005 (120<sup>th</sup> day of its enactment on 15 June 2005). Some provisions came into force with immediate effect viz. designation of Public Information Officers (PIOs) and Assistant Public Information Officers (APIOs) [s.5(1) and 5(2)]; constitution of Central and State Information Commissions [s. 15 &16]; non-applicability of the Act to Intelligence and Security Organizations [s.24]; and power to make rules to carry out provisions of the Act [s.27 &28].

### **Coverage**

The Act purports to cover all "public authorities". These have been broadly defined to include any body established or constituted by a law of the Central or State Governments (which serves to cover PRIs and municipal bodies). Public authorities also include any body owned, controlled or substantially financed by a Government and any non-government organization substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by a Government.

The Act confers a right to “information” rather than just “records” or “documents”. Information has also been broadly defined to permit the inspection of public works including taking samples of materials. The definition also includes “information relating to a private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any law”.

### **Proactive disclosure**

The list of information to be proactively published by public authorities is very broad (16 items as given in s4 1(b)). In addition to the standard provisions commonly contained in access laws, public authorities must publish: the budget allocated to each agency, including plans, proposed expenditure and reports on disbursements; the manner of execution of subsidy programmes, including the amounts allocated and beneficiaries; recipients of concessions, permits, licenses; and relevant facts while formulating policies or announcing decisions.

### **Processing applications**

Public Information Officers (PIOs) have been appointed “in all administrative units/offices... as may be necessary to provide information to persons requesting it”. Assistant PIOs are also to be appointed at each sub-divisional or sub-district level, and these Assistants are tasked with receiving applications and appeals and passing them on to the relevant PIO/Appeals body. These provisions combined are designed to bring access closer to people, by ensuring that applicants can submit requests in their local area, rather than having to rely on the post or travel to the administrative headquarters.

Most applications must be processed within thirty days, although the time limit is extended to 40 days where third party submissions are to be called for. These time limits are reduced to a mere 48 hours where the information sought “concerns the life and liberty of a person”. Any fees must be “reasonable” and no application fee shall be charged for persons who are below the poverty line. Where a public authority fails to comply with time limits under the Act, the information shall be provided to the applicant free of charge.

When processing an application a PIO must release the information requested unless it is covered by one of the exemptions contained in the law, which are intended to protect particularly sensitive information.

In Bihar, as per “The Bihar Right to Information Rules 2006”, the application fee is Rs. 10 and the photocopy charges are Rs. 2 per page for A4/A3 size papers as well as for printed publications. For bigger sized pages the actual cost will be charged from the applicants. The cost for seeking information in a floppy or CD is Rs. 50. There is no fee for the first hour of inspection after which the fee is Rs. 5 for every hour. The mode of payment of fees is either by cash, bank draft, pay order or non-judicial stamp.

### **Processing appeals**

The Act contains a two-step appeals process. First, if an applicant is aggrieved by the actions of a PIO, he/she can appeal to an Appellate Authority, which is defined as an “officer senior in rank to the PIO”. If the applicant is still unhappy after making a complaint to the Appellate Authority, he/she can either send a second appeal or a complaint to the Central/State Information Commissions. If the appellant is still unhappy with the outcome of his/her complaint, he/she can appeal to the High Court or the Supreme Court.

### **Penalties**

Every PIO (or officers from whom the PIO requested assistance) can be penalized Rs. 250 per day up to a maximum of Rs. 25,000 for not accepting an application; delaying information release

without reasonable cause; denying information in bad faith; knowingly giving incomplete, incorrect, misleading information; destroying information that has been requested or obstructing furnishing of information in any manner. Disciplinary action under the relevant service rules may be initiated against officials for persistent violation of this Act.

### **Monitoring and Education**

The Act requires that each Central/State Information Commissioner produce an annual report on the implementation of the Act, which is to be presented to the Parliament/Vidhan Sabha respectively. In support of this, each Ministry or Department is required to collect and provide such information to the relevant Information Commission as is required to prepare the report. The Information Commission may also provide recommendations to any authority specifying the steps that, in its opinion, ought to be taken to promote compliance with the Act.

The Act also specifically requires that Governments must, to the extent of available financial and other resources, organize educational programmes for the public, in particular for disadvantaged communities and encourage public authorities to do the same; produce a User's Guide on the Act for the public; promote timely and effective dissemination of accurate information by public authorities; and train PIOs and produce other relevant training materials.

A question-answer session on the law was done after a presentation on the salient features of the law. The participants also shared their experiences in using the Act and some of the difficulties faced by them in accessing information have been given here:

- Lack of awareness and preparedness among officials about their roles and duties re RTI;
- Non-availability of PIOs and concerned officials;
- Attitudinal difficulties and non acceptance of applications;
- Non-availability of data base with government departments;
- Lack of adequate resources for proper implementation of RTI;
- Information Commissions have not been set up in several states due to which many departments are not complying with the law;
- Several instances of harassment and threat faced by the citizens;
- Several cases of overcharging of fees by the PIOs i.e. more than the prescribed amount.

### Question-answer session on RTI Act

1) Can an applicant ask questions in his/her RTI application?

As per a decision of the Central Information Commission an applicant cannot ask the public authority questions about the nature or quality of their actions under the guise of information. "The RTI Act does not cast upon the public authority any obligation to answer queries as in this case, where the appellant attempts to elicit answers to his questions with prefixes such as why, what, whether, when." An applicant's right extends only to seeking information as defined either by pinpointing the file, document, paper or record, etc., or by mentioning the type of information that is available with the public authority. The Central Information Commission observed on an applicant's request that it "was not so much a request for information, but was a set of questions regarding why the public authority had not taken certain actions, and when, if at all, would take those actions." In another decision, the Commission concurred with the interpretation of the public authority that information relating to future course of action which is not in any material form, is not "information" within the definition of Section 2(f).

2) What do we do if the PIO does not receive the RTI application?

In case of information related to central government applications can be sent to the Assistant Public Information Officers specially appointed for the purpose in 846 post offices throughout the country. Moreover, as per the RTI Act, every department must put up a board with the names of the PIOs, APIOs and the Appellate Authority in the department. If RTI applications are not received by the PIOs, then the application can be sent by registered post, speed post or by under certificate of posting. In all these cases the applicants will have proof of the fact that they had sent the application by post. Alternatively the applicant can send a complaint (under s.18) directly to the State Information Commission stating the fact that the application is not being received by the PIO.

### **Working Session 2: Drafting Information Requests under the RTI Act and tips for improving quality of applications**

In the afternoon session on the first day the participants worked in groups and drafted applications for information requests. The application format- Form A as prescribed by the Bihar RTI Rules 2006 (see Annex 3) was given to each group to refer to. At the end of each group presentation tips for improving the application letter was suggested by the resource persons as given below.

#### **Points to be kept in mind while framing an application for information request**

- Every application under Section 6(1) of the RTI Act must be addressed to the PIO of the concerned department. It is not necessary to mention the name of the PIO as that person can get transferred to another department;
- All RTI applications must be written in the format as given in 'Form A' as per Bihar RTI Rules otherwise there are chances of the application being rejected;
- Avoid using abbreviations while writing an application. For example, SHGs must be written as "self-help groups";
- Before writing the application, the applicant must be clear about the purpose for which he or she is seeking information. The purpose however, must not be stated in the application letter. It is important for the applicant to identify the problem to be addressed by seeking information under the RTI Act;
- The information request must be as precise as possible and the duration for which information is being asked for must be clearly stated. It is always more helpful to ask for information which is close to the current period, so that the information can be verified;
- Ask for information which can be verified and cross-checked. The method of verification must be decided beforehand;
- Getting information from the public authority is not an end in itself. The citizens must be sure as to what they will do with the information received. Presently citizens are filing two kinds of RTI applications: a) for solving individual problems and b) for benefiting society at large such as reducing corruption, increasing public participation in governance etc.

### **Working Session 3: Presentation of case studies on the use of RTI by citizens**

After tea on the first day, the resource persons shared real life stories on the successful use of RTI. In this session, Ashok Kumar Singh and Rakesh Ranjan shared successful case studies on how ordinary citizens have used RTI for personal benefits as well as to unearth corruption. The case studies presented in this session were mainly from Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (see Annex 4 for details on case studies).

## **Day Two**

The second day's session began with a recapitulation of the previous days' sessions by two participants. Both participants gave detailed presentations on the first day's proceedings.

### **Game on RTI**

In order to revise the key provisions of the RTI Act and to discuss in details some of them, the participants played a game on RTI in groups. All the participants were divided into 5 groups and each group was given a set of cards with provisions of the Act written. With the help of this game participants discussed the key sections of the Act and found it a useful and enjoyable method of learning.

### **RTI and the Public Distribution System**

After the game on RTI, Rakesh Ranjan spoke briefly about the role of RTI in improving the public distribution system since the participants had a number of queries on the problems people, especially the poor face in procuring food grains and other essential commodities from the 'ration shops'. Some of the problems include: non-availability of food grains, poor quality food grains, ration shops remain closed, notice boards stating the stock available and prices not put up, wrong entries in ration cards etc. Rakesh gave some basic information about the public distribution system and then spoke about how RTI could be used to remove some of the deficiencies in the system. He said that the public distribution system (PDS) is a scheme of the central government as per the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. The public distribution system is a means of distributing food grains and other basic commodities at subsidized prices through "fair price shops". Every family is supposed to have a ration card. In 1997, the PDS was targeted: different ration cards were issued to households "Below the Poverty Line (BPL)" and to those "Above the Poverty Line (APL)" and each category has different entitlements. Today, both APL and BPL households are entitled to 35 kgs of grain per month, but the issue price is higher for APL households. In practice however, the PDS is restricted to BPL households. In 2001, Antodaya cards were introduced as a sub-category of BPL cards. However, the Supreme Court later stated that the Antodaya programme should not be restricted to those with BPL cards. Thus, antodaya cards have become a separate card, distinct from either BPL or APL. Some households also have other cards such as Annapurna cards.

Generally at each ration shop three types of registers are kept: card register, stock register and sales register. These can be inspected or photocopies of these registers can now be obtained by the people using RTI to find out the discrepancies in the system. Moreover, in order to check the quality of the food grains and other commodities being sold in the ration shops citizens can collect samples of stock from the shops as well as from the Food Corporation of India warehouses. Every ration shop should keep samples for people to inspect. Rakesh Ranjan ended his presentation with a case study on how RTI was used in the PDS system (Annex 4)

### **Working Session 4: Future Action Plan of the Participants**

In this session, the participants outlined their Action Plan over the next few months. The action plans were made for each participating organization by the representatives present in the workshop.



**Sri Jan Bihar,  
Jainagar, Madhubani  
9631628325, 9630469330  
Project Coordinator: Shyam Kumar Singh**

Sri Jan Bihar, Jainagar, 9631628325, 9630469330 (Project Coordinator: Shyam Kumar Singh)	Activity	Resources	Time Period	How	By Whom
	Awareness	Vehicle, I.E.C Material, Manpower, communication, facilities, fund (provided by funding agency)	June – Dec 2007	By arranging workshops and seminars at grassroots level & government offices posters/pamphlet, wall writing, street plays	By organization
	RTI Application	Vehicle, I.E.C Material, Manpower, communication, facilities, fund (provided by funding agency), Application format	June 2007 onwards	Identification of public interest problems & help applicant draft applications and appeals and run a help line centre	By organization
	Training	Vehicle, I.E.C Material, Manpower, communication, facilities, fund (provided by funding agency)	June 2007 – June 2008	Selection of venue and fixing of date. Inviting multi-stakeholder (PRIs), Government officials, social activists and other CSOs	By organization
	Case Study	File applications and provide information/action taken by PIO	Aug 2007 onwards	Follow-up with applicants and document case studies	By organization
	Advocacy	Fund	June 2007 – Dec 2007 and onwards too	By arranging orientation workshops of govt. officials and media	By organization
	Monitoring	Fund/Budget	Sep 2007 onwards	Regular follow-up	By organization
	Implementation of RTI	Fund/Budget	Since Aug 2007 onwards	By regular follow- up. By proper orientation to Multi stakeholders	By organization

**Abla Siva Ashram, Madhubani**

<b>Abla Siva Ashram, Madhubani (Project Coordinator :)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>By Whom</b>
	Awareness	Poster, Pamphlet, phone, fax, stationary, travel expenditure (inclusion of additional expenses) for two employees	June 07–Dec 08	Street play, wall writing, and seminars at grassroots as well as other higher levels	By organization
	RTI Application	Form, Stationary	June07 – Dec 08	Help with making RTI request, by identifying issues	By organization
	Training	Training material and application forms	June07–Dec08	Workshops with Panchayat representatives, and Government officials	By organization
	Case Study	Filed applications and provided information/action taken by PIO	June07-Dec08		By organization
	Advocacy	Funding	June07 – Dec08	Workshops with government officials and media representatives	By organization
	Monitoring	Funding	Oct07-Dec08	Regular follow-up	By organization
	Implementation of RTI	Funding	Sep07-Dec08	Regular follow-up and workshops	By organization

**Bihar Sewa Samiti, Red Cross Road, Madhubani, Lead CSO  
Point of Contact: Prakash Chandra Lal**

<b>Bihar Sewa Samiti, Red Cross Road, Madhubani, Lead CSO (Project Coordinator: Prakash Chandra Lal)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>By Whom</b>
	Awareness	Manpower, IEC, material, vehicle, communication etc	June 07–Dec 07	Workshop, seminar, leaflet, poster, wall writing, street play	By organization
	RTI Application	Form, Application Format	June07 – Dec 07	To locate problems, apply in concerned department	By organization
	Training	Resource person, community, IEC materials, Fund	June07 – Dec07	Locate target groups, arranging training camps	By organization
	Case Study	Filed applications and action taken by PIO	August 07 onwards	By applicants	By organization
	Advocacy	Funding	June07 – Dec07	Orientation workshop with government officer and media	By organization
	Monitoring	Funding	August 07 onwards	Regular follow-up	By organization
Implementation of RTI	Funding	August 07 onwards	Regular follow-up and proper orientation to stakeholders	By organization	

**Ghorghordiha Prakhand Swaraj Vikas Sangh**  
**Gagatpur, Madhubani. Ph: 9334970984**  
**(Project Coordinator: Hari Narayan Mehta)**

<b>Ghorghordiha Prakhand Swaraj  Vikas Sangh  Gagatpur, Madhubani. Ph:  9334970984</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>By Whom</b>
	Awareness		June 07 onwards	From door to door	Worker
	RTI Application		June 07 onwards		Beneficiary
	Training NGO/Govt		In July (NGO)		CSO/NGO
	Case Study		In July		Secretary
	Advocacy	Funding	Lead Co	Block ghoghordila	Director

**Mandan Bharti Jagriti Samaj, Saharsa**  
**Phone: 06478-232846**  
**Point of Contact: Manoj Kumar Singh**

Mandan Bharti Jagriti Samaj, Saharsa Phone: 06478-232846 (Manoj Kumar Singh )	Date	Orientation (Level)	No. Of Participants	Resource Person	Participants
	May 28, 2007	Block Level	25	Self (P.C)	B.D.O, C.O, and officials
	June 30, 2007	PACS Staff	04	Self (P.C)	PACS Staff
	June 6, 2007	Panchayat	30	Self and Staff	PRI and group leaders
	June 8, 2007	Panchayat	30	Self and Staff	PRI and Group Leaders

Note: Application will be collected during training  
Block: Mahisi, Nauhatta

**Right to Information  
Grameen Seva  
Madhubani, Bihar: 847408  
Point of Contact: Devnath Devan  
Ph: 9431467943**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Place/Venue</b>		<b>Responsible Person</b>
Wall writing,	One month	Village	Design will be based on budget allocated and available funding	Devnath Devan and program workers
Poster, Pamphlet	Two months	Panchayat		
Workshops for village level activists and citizens	Three to six months			
Identifying issues/problems, writing application, making appeals, to spread awareness, advocacy activities	Full year			

**Grameen Samagra Vikas Parishad  
Shibipalti, Madhubani  
Ph: 9431402370, 06276-273209**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Responsible Person</b>
30/05/07	Rahika Block	Meeting of Staff Org. Level	Awareness Programme on RTI	Kanhaiya Jha
03/06/07	Rahika Block	Wall Writing	Issue of RTI Awareness	Field Level Staff
05/06/07	Rahika Block	Street Play (nukkad natak)	Awareness	Kanhaiya Jha
10/06/07	Panchayat Level	Workshop	All multi stakeholder on RTI	Kanhaiya Jha
12/06/07	Block Level	Workshop	All multi stakeholder on RTI	Kanhaiya Jha

**Mahila Vikas Aashram, Rahika, Madhubani**  
**Lead Organization: Gram Vikas Parishad, Madhubani**  
**Point of Contact: Manoj Kumar Mishra**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Resources</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>How/by Whom</b>
Awareness	Petrol, phone, fax, stationary	5 June 07 – 5 July 07 at Panchayat level	Naveen Kumar Mishra/ Vishwanath Singh
Training NGO/Government		10 July 07 – 15 July 07	Naveen Kumar Mishra/ Vishwanath Singh
RTI Application	Note: The program could be modified depending on resource availability	15 July – 15 August at Panchayat level	Naveen Kumar Mishra
Case Study		25 August onwards	Naveen Kumar

**Abhigyan Disha**  
**Madhubani. Bihar**  
**Point of Contact: Santosh**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Resource Person</b>
5 June 07	Madhubani Office	Workshop	Meeting with All staff to make a field level action plan	Santosh
11 June 07	Bawipalti, Block Camp	Workshop/Meeting		
18 June 07	Kalwahi Block Camp	Workshop		
5 June – 10 June	Madhubani	Wall Writing	Awareness	
25 June 07	Madhubani	Workshop	For students, Lecturers, Media, NGOs, Govt and other stake holder	

**Gram Vikas Parishad  
Madhubani  
Point of Contact: Rakesh Jha**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Resource/</b>	<b>Responsible Person</b>
29 May – 25 June	Rainagar Block	Meeting with community panchayat level	Awareness for activity		Rakesh Jha
16 June onwards	Rainagar Block	RTI Application	Filling RTI application	Funds	Rakesh Jha
October 07	Rainagar Block	Advocacy	Advocacy with stakeholder and community	Funds	Organization
December 07	Rainagar Block	Monitoring	Monitoring Community Level of RTI program	Funds	Organization

**Grameen Samagra Seva Sanstha  
Pragati Nagar, Madhubani  
Point of Contact: Sangita Singh**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Responsible Person</b>
26 May 2007	Office Mdb	Meeting	All Staff	
10 June 2007	Pandaul	Meeting, Wall- Writing, Pamphlet	Awareness Program	Sangita Singh
22 July 2007	Rahika	Fill RTI application	RTI application	Sangita Singh
5 August 2007	Pandaul	Workshop	Advocacy with all stakeholders of RTI issue	Sangita Singh



## **Workshop evaluation by the participants**

The participants evaluated the workshop by filling up an evaluation form which have been analysed and summarized as given below. The points given below are based on the evaluation done by 18 participants.

### **Suggestions for improvement in the workshop:**

- There should have been a LCD projector;
- Audio-visual training aids such as songs and films should be shown;
- Exposure visit to a government department to understand their functioning better;
- Increase the duration of the workshop;
- Films on the experiences of using RTI by different groups should be screened;
- Considering the number of topics covered, the workshop should have been held over three days;
- The time available for the workshop was not enough, it could be extended;
- The RTI help line number should have been given to the participants;
- After the theoretical discussions on RTI in the workshop it is the responsibility of all the participants to use RTI and develop a better understanding of its value and functioning;
- The training module could have included some more skill building exercises;

### **Feedback on the learning materials distributed and their usefulness:**

- The learning materials would be useful for other colleagues and will help in understanding the RTI Act and related issues. They are very useful guidance notes for us;
- All the materials and the User Guide were very useful. They can be easily understood by grassroots NGO workers and will help in the organisation's work;
- The materials will help us in spreading awareness about RTI;
- These can be used as training materials in our training programmes;
- The materials contain a lot of information on RTI which are very useful, especially the RTI application format as given in the rules made by Bihar government;

### **Sessions appreciated with reasons:**

- The session on RTI and newspaper clippings based on which RTI applications were drafted in small groups. This helped in deepening our confidence on the RTI Act; it gave us practical experience;
- All sessions were useful;
- Appreciate the ways in which the resource persons trained us;
- The session on drafting RTI applications in small groups helped in our skill building;
- The session on drafting appeals and complaints under RTI;
- The session on understanding RTI Act with the help of the card game<sup>1</sup> was liked. This helped in understanding the various steps involved in accessing information from government departments;
- The session on RTI in the context of the public distribution system was found to be useful and informative as there is a lot of corruption in this particular department and RTI could be a useful tool in curbing corruption;
- The interactive sessions and understanding the Act with the help of the card game was appreciated;
- The session on the history of the RTI movement in India was liked;

### **Session which was not much appreciated with reasons:**

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<sup>1</sup> Card ka khel aur suchna ka adhikar has been developed by PRIA, New Delhi.

- The session on analyzing newspaper clippings in the context of RTI – Too much time was spent on this session making it boring;

**Use of RTI in the organisation’s work in future:**

- Use RTI for the effective and successful implementation of NREGS;
- Use RTI to reduce corruption in the public distribution system;
- Spread awareness about RTI in the rural areas;
- Organisation will contribute to better implementation of RTI;
- Take RTI to the masses and inform them about RTI Act and the rules;
- Orient and train government officials on RTI;
- Set up Information Resource Centres;
- Organise a workshop on awareness generation regarding RTI;
- Based on the resources available with the organization we will work on RTI;
- Organise awareness generation camps at the community level;
- Motivate people to understand and use RTI Act;
- Provide support to the community members in drafting RTI applications;
- Use RTI for the benefit of the poor;
- Use RTI to reduce corruption as there is a common complaint from the community members that there is a lot of corruption in the implementation of development schemes;
- RTI would help in solving problems of people living in the organisation’s field area and this would increase people’s confidence and faith in the NGO;
- RTI could be used to solve people’s problems in the rural areas;
- Organisation will take up the issue of RTI on a campaign mode for which a detailed action plan would be drawn up and implemented;
- Efforts would be made to spread awareness about RTI to all people in the organisation’s field area;

**Rating of the workshop:**

<b>1 : Bad</b>	<b>2: Not so bad</b>	<b>3: Satisfactory</b>	<b>4: Good</b>	<b>5: Very Good</b>
		3	6	7

## ANNEX 1

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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<p>3) Ramashish Raman Abla Sewa Ashram Village and Post: Khajauli Dist: Madhubani – 847228</p> <p>Mobile: 9430084440</p>	<p>4) Prakash Chandra Lal Project Coordinator Bihar Sewa Samiti Red Cross Road Madhubani – 847211</p> <p>Tel No: 0676- 225869 Mobile: 9234786887</p>
<p>5) Surendra Thakur Mithilanchal Samagra Vikas Sanstha Village: Bhogalpura, Post: Lalbagh Dist: Darbhanga</p> <p>Mobile: 9431086091</p>	<p>6) Rakesh Jha Programme Coordinator Gram Vikas Parishad Babu Saheb Dyodhi Madhubani – 847211</p> <p>Tel. No: 06276-227083; 222559 Mobile: 9939437381 E-mail: <a href="mailto:shasthi_gvp@rediffmail.com">shasthi_gvp@rediffmail.com</a>; <a href="mailto:Pri_rakesh_jha@yahoo.com">Pri_rakesh_jha@yahoo.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.gvpindia.org">www.gvpindia.org</a>.</p>
<p>7) Raghavendra Jha Coordinator Gramin Samagra Vikas Parishad Village &amp; Post: Shibipatti Dist: Madhubani – 847211</p> <p>Tel. No: 06276- 273209 Mobile: 9431402370</p>	<p>8) Hari Narayan Mehto Community Organiser Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh Vill. &amp; Post: Jagatpur, via Phulparag Dist: Madhubani</p> <p>Mobile: 9334970984</p>
<p>9) Bhairab Nand Jha Sathia Samang Saharsa Block Coordinator Gautam Nagar Dist: Saharsa Mobile: 9304165048/ 9304073704</p>	<p>10) Suman Kumar Das Coordinator Gram Vikas Parishad Babu Saheb Dyodhi Madhubani Tel. No: 06276 – 222559</p>

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<p>17) Devnath Dewan Project Director Grameen Sewa Dist: Madhubani</p> <p>Tel. No: 847408</p>	<p>18) Shyam Kumar Singh Project Coordinator Srijan Bihar Ward No. 11, Garhi Tola, Jaynagar Dist: Madhubani – 847226</p> <p>Mobile: 9431628235/ 9430469330/ 9430084441 E-mail: <a href="mailto:srijanbihar_org@sify.com">srijanbihar_org@sify.com</a></p>
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<p>23) Shankar Choudhary CRDI, Vill.&amp; PO. Sukhet Via Jhanjharpur Dist: Madhubani</p>	<p>24) Binod Kumar Thakur CRDI, Vill.&amp; PO. Sukhet Via Jhanjharpur Dist: Madhubani</p> <p>Tel. No: 06273-282296 Mobile: 9939650638</p>
<p>25) Chandra Shekhar Thakur Advocate Shri Sitaramji Mandir Trust Brahmoha, P.O. Pandaul Dist; Madhubani</p> <p>Mobile: 9430038171</p>	<p>26) Tej Narayan Brahmaji Bihari Khabar Gangasagar Chowk Madhubani</p> <p>Mobile: 9431654180</p>
<p>27) Santoshi Kumar Journalist – “Kewal Sach” (Hindi monthly magazine) District Bureau Madhubani</p> <p>Mobile: 9931360716</p>	<p>28) Dr. Surendra Mishra Town Club Road Madhubani</p> <p>Mobile: 9430282614</p>
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## **ANNEX 2**

### **Capacity Building Workshop on Right to Information Act 2005**

**Bihar**

**20-21 May 2007**

**Organised by: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), New Delhi & PACS  
Programme, Bihar**

**Venue: Gram Vikas Parishad, Madhubani**

### **AGENDA**

#### **Day 1: Wednesday, 20 May 2007**

**9:00 – 9:30 am Registration**

<b>9:30 – 10:00 am</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Welcome</li><li>▪ Introduction of the event and its objectives</li><li>▪ Introduction of the Participants and expectations from the workshop</li></ul>	Gram Vikas Parishad CHRI
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**11:00 – 11:15 Tea**

#### **Session: The Right to Information Act 2005**

<b>11:15 – 12:00 pm</b>	Presentations on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Importance of using the RTI law and the history of the RTI movement in India</li><li>▪ Presentation on the Right to Information Act, 2005</li><li>▪ Open discussion</li></ul>	Rakesh Ranjan and Sohini Paul, CHRI
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**1:00 – 2:00 pm Lunch**

#### **Session: RTI Act 2005 and case studies**

<b>2:00 – 2:30 pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Screening of a film on RTI</li></ul>	
<b>2:30 – 3:00 pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Continuation on the presentation on the RTI Act</li></ul>	Sohini Paul and Rakesh Ranjan
<b>3:00 – 3:30 pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ RTI fee rules in Bihar</li></ul>	Ashok Kumar Singh

<b>3:30 – 5:30 pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Presentation of case studies on the use of RTI</li> <li>▪ Open Discussion</li> </ul>	Ashok Kumar Singh and Rakesh Ranjan
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**Day 2: Thursday, 21 May 2007**

**Session: Drafting RTI applications**

<b>9:30 – 9:45 am</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recapitulation by the participants</li> </ul>	
<b>9:30 – 11:00 am</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Group presentations on</li> </ul>	

**11:00 – 11:15 am                      Tea Break**

<b>11:15 – 1:00 pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants work in small groups to draft RTI applications</li> <li>▪ Presentation on draft applications and feedback</li> </ul>	Moderated by CHRI and Bihar Rajya Suchna Adhikar Prahari
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**1:00 – 2:00 pm                      Lunch**

<b>2:00 – 3:00 pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ RTI and proactive disclosure</li> </ul>	Rakesh Ranjan
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**3:00 – 3:15 pm                      Tea Break**

**Session: Presentation on case studies and developing a future action plan and strategy**

<b>3:15 – 4:00 pm</b>	Sharing of case studies on the use of RTI in Bihar	Ashok Kumar Singh
<b>4:00 – 5:30 pm</b>	Formulation of future plan and strategy & Workshop Evaluation	CHRI

**ANNEX 3**

**FORM A**

[See Rule 3(1)]

Application form for obtaining information

I.D. No.

(for office use)

To,  
The Public Information Officer,  
(Department Office)

1. Name of the applicant:
2. Full Address:
3. Particulars of information required (in brief):
4. I, hereby, state that the information sought is not covered under the categories which are exempted from disclosure of information under section 8 or under section 9 of the Right to Information Act, 2005 and to the best of my knowledge; it is pertaining to your Department/Office.
5. \*(1) I have paid the fees Rs..... in word rupees..... On dt.....vide receipt no.....in the Department/Office of.....  
\* (2) I enclose herewith Demand Draft/Pay Order No.....Dt..... drawn in favour of.....Officer, issued by .....Bank towards the fees payable.  
\* (3) Non-judicial stamp of Rs.....is affixed on this application.  
\*(4) I belong to B.P.L. family, Xerox copy of my card required/Certificate is enclosed herewith.

Place:

Signature of the applicant

Date:

E-mail address, if any:

Telephone No. (office):

(Residence):

*N.B. Person belonging to B.P.L. family need not pay any type of fees.*

*\*Strike out whichever is not applicable.*



## **ANNEX 4**

### **CASE STUDIES ON USE OF RTI BY CITIZENS IN BIHAR**

#### **Case Study 1: RTI helps Majloom in getting his house constructed**

Majloom Nadaf is a rickshaw puller who lives in Macdhi village (Gram Panchayat Sukesh, Jhanjharpur block) in Madhubani district of Bihar. He is 70 years old and belongs to the BPL category. Majloom did not have a house to live in, because of which the Gram Sabha had included his name in the list of beneficiaries for the Indira Awas Yojana scheme five years back. In spite of this Majloom did not get the money to construct his house under this scheme as he did not pay Rs. 5000 as commission to the Mukhiya and the Panchayat Secretary. Over the last 5 years Majloom made several complaints to the BDO who did nothing except for telling him to meet the Gram Panchayat Mukhiya. Ultimately, Majloom came in contact with a RTI helpline centre which had been set up at Jhanjharpur and was being run by an organization called Society for Awareness and Development. On 7 April 2006 Majloom filed a RTI application with the Civil SDO at Jhanjharpur. In his application he asked for the following information:

- 1) Why did I not get my allotment for a house under the Indira Awas Yojana?
- 2) Provide me a list of beneficiaries of Indira Awas Yojana for the last 5 years
- 3) Provide me a certificate stating that I am economically better off than the person who benefited in my Gram Panchayat

The Civil SDO at that time had not heard about Right to Information Act. After being oriented about the Act by the local organization, the SDO referred Majloom's case to BDO, Jhanjharpur asking him to take immediate action and provide the information requested to the applicant. However, the BDO did not get any cooperation or response from the concerned Gram Panchayat Mukhiya. As a result he decided to allocate money to Majloom to help him build his house. The first installment was paid to him on 27 April 2006. It was given by the BDO who visited him in his village and handed him the cheque. This was the first case in Bihar where the Right to Information Act helped a poor person in getting the de benefits from the government.

#### **Case Study 2: Laxman Mandal gets benefits of Indira Awas Yojana**

Laxman Mandal is 55 years old and suffers from tuberculosis. He lives in Simera Gram Panchayat, Jhanjharpur block, Madhubani district. It was because of his ill health that he had to give up his work as a rickshaw puller sometime back. He has three young children who are all deaf and dumb. In spite of the fact that his family is one of the poorest in the village, and they live in a *kutch* house, Laxman did not get benefits of the Indira Awas Yojana. Ashok Kumar Singh a RTI activist based at Jhanjharpur happened to meet with Laxman Mandal at the Mukhiya's house. Laxman had come there to request the Mukhiya to allot money for him to construct a house under the Indira Awas Yojana. The Mukhiya however, refused to talk to him and treated him quite badly. It is then that Ashok Singh asked Laxman to meet him the next day at the Free Legal Aid Centre set up by him in the Court Complex at Jhanjharpur. On 1 November 2006 a RTI application was filed by Laxman Mandal at the office of the Block Development Officer, Jhanjharpur. After getting the application, the BDO himself verified the status of Laxman's eligibility for the scheme and ordered the Mukhiya to release the money for constructing the house. Currently his house is under construction.

### **Case Study 3: Kaayam churna or Gaayab churna? RTI unearths corruption in the procurement of medical supplies in a PSU**

Rumours of corruption in South Eastern Coalfield Limited (SECL) are neither rare nor recent. Until the coming of the RTI Act people had no way of verifying these allegations. After all SECL has been proudly announcing on its website its unique record of earning profits ever since its inception in 1986. This public sector undertaking is the single largest producer of coal amongst the eight subsidiaries of Coal India Ltd. In 2005-06 alone SECL extracted 83.02 million tons of coal from its mines situated in the districts of Shahdol, Umaria and Anuppur in Madhya Pradesh and Bilaspur, Korba, Korla, Raigarh and Surguja in Chhattisgarh. SECL has claimed total sales worth Rs. 7127.19 crores during the same year, and earned a pre-tax profit of Rs . 1,286 crores (post tax profit = Rs. 264.67 crores). One would hail a company with such an impeccable earning record as a shining example of the robustness of the fast shrinking public sector in India. But a team of committed citizens have begun shining the torch of RTI on dark deeds within SECL seemingly buried away underneath mountains of coal dust.

Sunil Chaurasia and Narendra Devangan both belonging to Anuppur , Madhya Pradesh and Satish Gupta of Manendragarh from Korla district of Chhattisgarh filed RTI applications with the PIO of SECL situated at its head office in Bilaspur during the months of February – April 2006. They sought the following information–

- 1) Names of all medicines procured by SECL for distribution through its primary health centers and its OPD clinics in the Hasdev coal mines area during the financial year 2005-06. (They cater exclusively to the employees of SECL and their families)
- 2) Quantity of medicines procured during the same period.
- 3) Supply price of each item.
- 4) Copies of all purchase orders issued by SECL for these medicines.
- 5) Name and contact details of suppliers who bagged the purchase order.

All three applicants received the requested information within the 30 day deadline stipulated in the RTI Act. The records showed that SECL had issued two purchase orders worth a total of Rs. 4,47,422/- to a certain R S Trading Company on 02 November 2005 for supplying ayurvedic medicines such as rajwadi chyawanprash, basant kusumakar ras, svarna bhasm, massage oil, divya hair oil, sona-chandi chyawanprash, shilajit capsule, paurush jeevan capsule, chintamani ras, makardhani vari and many other ayurvedic items :

(P.O.#SECL/HSDArea/MMW/SO/05/06/Ayurvedicmedicines/479 and P.O.#SECL/HSDArea/MMW/SO/05/06/Ayurvedicmedicines/480).

Two more purchasing orders were issued on the same day to two more companies namely, Messrs. Sampath Kumar Lakshminarayan of Manendragarh in Chhattisgarh (P.O.#SECL/HSDArea/MMW/SO/05/06/Ayurvedic medicines/482 ) and Soni Medical Store of Dhanpuri in Madhya Pradesh ( P.O. SECL/HSD/MMW/SO/O5/06/Ayurvedic medicines/481) for supply of ayurvedic medicines worth – Rs. 99,786.90 and Rs. 1,20,387.50 respectively. Apart from the medicines mentioned above these companies were asked to supply jhandu soap herbal, trishul tablets, kamoddeepak churna (can it be any more explicit than this), sundari kalp forte, rose water

and the commonly used disinfectants like savlon, dettol and phenyle. All P.O.s had been signed by the Chief General Manager.

Armed with these documents our RTI trio worked for several weeks crosschecking the data along with a team of about 25 committed volunteers. The P.O.s issued to R S Trading Company mentioned its contact details as a shop situated behind State Bank of India at Manendragarh , Chhattisgarh. Satish scoured the entire area but did not find any trace of the supplier. Soni Medical Store turned out to be a small retailing store operating on a floor space of 10ftx10ft and the salesperson had no clue about the supply of such a huge order. Fictitious companies were shown as suppliers of luxury items in the name of procurement of medical supplies.

Next, the volunteers cross checked the rates at which the medicines had been supplied only to find that the retail outlets sold the same items a lot cheaper. Given below is a comparative table of the retail rates and the rate at which the medicines were supplied to SECL:-

Item	Size	Retail rate in Rupees	SECL Supply Rate in Rupees
Amrutanjan balm	10gm	15/-	20/-
Kayam churna	100gm	33/-	46/-
Paurush Jeevan capsule	Strip of 10	20/-	28/-
Sesha hair oil	100ml	88/-	185/-
Sona chandi chyawanprash	1kg	185/-	280/-
-do-	1/2kg	105/-	155/-
Rose water	30ml	10/-	15/-
Banphool oil	200ml	68/-	96/-
Noorani oil	100ml	30/-	44/-
Jaitul oil	50ml	30/-	35/-
Rajwadi chyawanprash	1kg	340/-	440/-
-do-	1/2kg	187/-	250/-
Aglari	100ml	33/-	47/-
Savlon	100ml	23/-	25/-
Dettol	100ml	17/-	21/-
Phenyle	500ml	33/-	56/-

Only one item, namely, Trishul tablets were supplied at a price lower slightly lower than the retail price ( Rs. 8/- and Rs. 10/- respectively). During 2005-06, SECL had allocated Rs. 99,78,690/- for its medical budget. The total value of the four purchase orders released under the RTI Act was Rs. 6.67 lakhs. The extent of money lost due to corruption remains to be calculated.

Sunil published the details of these findings in the Koylanchal Times a current affairs magazine popular in the coal mining belt of MP and Chhattisgarh that he published every month. In August, officials of the Vigilance unit of SECL contacted him to hear learn first hand, the story of the findings of the RTI team. Nothing much was heard for a few months afterwards. Upon making informal enquiries with SECL about the progress of the case Sunil found out that the Vigilance unit had instituted a formal investigation. The Chief Finance Manager and the Materials Manager seem to have been chargesheeted in the case and inquiry proceedings are said to be going on.

Sunil, Narendra, Satish and their team of volunteers are elated at these developments. Their painstaking efforts have awakened potential whistleblowers within SECL. An employee of the

company in the Hasdev mines area, who spoke with the activists on condition of anonymity, told them that they had merely succeeded in scratching the surface. Corruption in the procurement of medical supplies is deeper and murkier than what has been unearthed. It has been alleged that several batches of medicines supplied to the OPDs and PHCs are well past the expiry date or will become useless in less than six months. The activists are now planning to request spot inspection of the stock of medicines to verify the facts themselves. They are also planning to apply to the Vigilance unit of SECL under the RTI Act seeking a progress report of action taken on the basis of their findings.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Case study 4: For Ration Cards - Everyday is a Saturday**

Kalol taluka in Panchmahals district belongs to one of the less developed parts of vibrant Gujarat. Panchmahals is home to fairly large sized communities of adivasis who have not benefited from the economic development that has made the Patels and the Shahs well known across American and European business houses. Additionally, several hundred of families belonging to the minority community live below the poverty line (BPL). The public distribution system set up by the government is an indispensable means of securing food grains at subsidised prices for these families. However securing a ration card is a herculean task for them unless they are willing to bribe officials or middlemen or both.

The Deputy Mamlatdar at the taluka level is responsible for issuing ration cards of all kinds in rural areas. Printed application forms are available free of charge which people can use to apply for a new ration card, get a duplicate made, have the names of new family members added or that of the deceased deleted or get a card divided if a joint family wishes to have separate cards for its members. One would expect that any citizen would be able to walk into the Deputy Mamlatdar's office and submit an application any time of the day provided he/she has put together copies of all necessary supporting documents.

In Kalol, however, a large computer printed sign pasted prominently on the walls of the Mamlatdar's office warned people to visit the office only on Saturdays for ration card related work. State government offices in Gujarat work on the first and third Saturday every month. The other two Saturdays are holidays. In effect this meant that applicants from more than 60 villages of Kalol taluka had only a window of two days every month to put in their applications for ration cards every month. Even here those who cobbled up money to bribe touts got priority treatment. Those who could not simply had to wait their turn to arrive and if it did not come before closing time, they were simply chased away. They would come back the next working Saturday and go through the process of waiting for a darshan of the Dy. Mamlatdar all over again.

Fed up by this system, Aslambhai, a resident of Kalol decided to find out if the two Saturday limit had any legal basis. He had recently learnt about the Right to Information Act and knew that as a citizen he could ask almost any information from government offices and get it within a deadline for a small fee. Aslambhai drafted an information request asking for the Government Resolution (GR) that said that applications for ration card related matters would be received only on Saturdays.

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<sup>2</sup> Narrative is by Dr. Rakesh Ranjan of Madhya Pradesh Suchna Adhikar Abhiyan and Venkatesh Nayak, CHRI. Sunil, Narendra, Satish and their team of volunteers are all active members of the Madhya Pradesh Suchana Adhikar Abhiyan (MPSAA). CHRI works with the Abhiyan to spread awareness about RTI in Madhya Pradesh.

Besides he also requested for all GRs that listed the procedural requirements for ration card related work.

The Mamlatdar is the designated Public Information Officer at the taluka level in Gujarat. When Aslambhai visited his office to submit his RTI application in person, the Mamlatdar refused to even read it let alone accept it. He told Aslambhai that there were no orders for giving information to people at the taluka level. People would get whatever information they wanted from the district level. Aslambhai knew that the Mamlatdar was lying. He also knew that he could send the application by post. He sent his application to the Mamlatdar by Registered Post with Acknowledgement Due (RPAD). Needless to say the application was delivered to the Mamlatdar's office.

Fifteen days later Aslambhai was asked to visit the Dy. Mamlatdar to discuss his information request. Aslambhai refused to meet him as he saw no reason for doing the same. The Dy. Mamlatdar then pressurised Aslambhai's father to advise his son to withdraw that part of the application which inquired about the Saturday limit. He was assured access to all other GRs. He was told that there was no GR requiring them to do ration card related work only on Saturdays. It was only an informal arrangement they had adopted for administrative convenience. If this matter reached his superiors the Dy. Mamlatdar was afraid he might lose his job. Aslambhai stood his ground and refused to concede. He advised the Dy. Mamlatdar to issue a rejection letter if he did not want to give the information as he could then go on appeal or send a complaint to the State Information Commission.

Ultimately, the Dy. Mamlatdar was forced to issue a reply on his letterhead clarifying the matter. Aslambhai was told that there was no GR as such and that Saturdays were fixed for summoning applicants to collect their ration cards. This was done so that applicants would be free from work on Saturdays and would not have to forego a day's wages by visiting the office on a working day. Aslambhai was assured that henceforth they would receive applications for ration card related work on all working days at all working hours.

Aslambhai and his friends say that the working of the Dy. Mamlatdar's office has really improved since this little adventure of theirs. People are able to visit the office whenever they wish and submit their applications any time during working hours. Aslambhai believes, the RTI Act has finally changed the power equations for the underprivileged people. They have in their hands a tool for making government offices work according to the law.