

# Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

## Right to Information : Regional Workshop

*Date: December 14 - 15, 2004*

*Venue: Hotel Dashmesh Palace, Satna, Madhya Pradesh*

### **Background:**

CHRI has been holding small scale awareness building workshops on right to information in MP and Chhattisgarh since 2001. Mid-2002 onwards, CHRI catalysed the formation of 2 big networks of NGOs and Voluntary Organisations (VOs) in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which work on transparency and accountability issues. The initial goal of the networks was to institutionalise transparency in the electoral arena by informing the voter community about their rights and responsibilities. Actualising the voters' right to know the background of electoral candidates was the main focus of this non-partisan intervention of citizens' groups. CHRI supported this activity in both states by organizing workshops and disseminating public education materials. It also supported citizens' election watch groups to collect, compile and disseminate information contained in the affidavits filed by candidates during the November 2003 State Assembly and April - May 2004 Parliamentary elections.

After the completion of elections, these groups decided to continue working on transparency issues. Though both MP and Chhattisgarh are counted amongst the less developed states of India, citizens living in these states are aware that substantial amounts of public funds are allocated for developmental activity by the State and Central Governments, each year. Yet, the twin factors of corruption and poor governance have ensured that precious funds are either siphoned off or wasted and millions of people in both states are deprived of the benefits of development. The lack of people's participation in the decision-making processes and in the implementation and evaluation of various developmental schemes are held responsible for the poor state of affairs in both states. While some NGOs and VOs have a general idea of the concept of right to information, they are not well informed about the specific provisions of the information access regime put in place by the government. Even where some citizens have tried to access information, using the existing regime, they have been disillusioned by the lack of cooperation and apathy of government officials who have a duty to release information to the public.

### **Objectives:**

CHRI organised a regional capacity building workshop on the right to information in Satna, Madhya Pradesh with the following objectives:

- 1) to identify common problems citizens and VOs face in their attempts to access information from government offices;
- 2) to increase awareness amongst participants about the constitutional and legal framework for accessing information;
- 3) to educate participants about the provisions of executive orders on information access issued by various government departments;
- 4) to share experiences of citizens who have used right to information laws successfully in other states as an inspiration;

- 5) to train participants in the art of drafting application forms to ensure successful access to government-held information.

The workshop was planned to follow an interactive mode from the very beginning, as interest levels tend to plummet when participants are subjected to long monologues. The interactive mode was also chosen because of the sense of equal participation and empowerment it affords to every participant.

### **Participants' Profile:**

About 90 participants including lawyers, teachers, presspersons and representatives of VOs from 18 districts – Katni, Balaghat, Rewa, Shahdol, Umariya, Mandla, Baihar, Unchahara, Jabalpur, Anuppur, Panna, Sihore, Sidhi, Satna (all in MP) Bilaspur, Kawardha, Bastar and Raigadh (all in Chhattisgarh) attended the workshop. Big network organizations like Nehru Yuva Kendra and well known NGOs like Samarthan working in MP also sent their representatives to participate in the workshop. More than 60% of the participants work in rural areas on issues relating to empowerment of Panchayats (local self governing bodies), women's rights, child welfare, health, education and development of tribal communities. Some representatives belonged to self-help groups and NGOs working in the agricultural sector. A handful of them are members of gram sabhas (village body- the basic unit of local government) and elected members of Gram Panchayats (village local self governing body). Participants from Balaghat, Satna, Mandla, Baihar (all in MP) and Raigarh and Bastar (all in Chhattisgarh) work with tribal communities. Representatives from the print and electronic media attended different sessions of the workshop. The workshop was held in Hindi.

These participants were chosen with the objective of building a corps of committed volunteers who would not only spread awareness about RTI and the relevant laws amongst citizens with whom they work in the rural and urban areas of both states but also help them file RTI applications with government offices when required.

### **Resource Persons:**

- ❑ **Mr. Shivaji Raut**, journalist, RTI activist and member of Mahadhikar Group, Satara, Maharashtra
- ❑ **Mr. Sushmit Ghosh**, Parivartan, New Delhi
- ❑ **Mr. Rakesh Ranjan**, Sandhan, Katni, Madhya Pradesh
- ❑ **Ms. Sohini Paul**, CHRI
- ❑ **Ms. Renu Vinod**, CHRI
- ❑ **Ms. Aditi Datta**, CHRI
- ❑ **Mr. Venkatesh Nayak**, CHRI.

### ***Day – I (December 14, 2004)***

#### ***Inauguration***

After the welcome address and the opening remarks, explaining the objectives of the workshop, delivered by **Mr. Rakesh Ranjan**, **Mr. Shivaji Raut** performed the ceremonial lighting of the lamp in keeping with local cultural tradition. In his inaugural address Mr. Raut who has an impressive record of filing more than 80 RTI applications in Maharashtra, successfully unearthing scores of instances of corruption and defalcation, stated that governance and public affairs in society have near-zero levels of

transparency. He believed that sustained use of RTI laws by citizens could ensure that transparency levels reached 100%. Often the lack of transparency resulted in the derailment of the constitutional framework laid down for the protection of the rights of citizens and governmental decisions are influenced by vested interests. RTI was needed for the protection of this framework and common citizens could make this happen. Mr. Raut explained that it was necessary for organisations working on RTI to instill in themselves the values of transparency and accountability. This was crucial while demanding entrenchment of ethics and just principles in public life for the sake of one's own credibility. He exhorted the media to support citizens' initiatives to institutionalise transparency and accountability in public life.

## ***Session I***

### **IDENTIFYING CITIZENS' INFORMATION NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO ACCESS:**

Participants were divided into five groups for a focused discussion to understand their awareness levels and identify citizens' information needs and access related difficulties. Each group was requested to discuss and make a presentation on five questions –

1. Is the right to information a fundamental right or a statutory right or just a concession citizens have by virtue of an order issued by the government?
2. What kinds of information do people need/request from government offices?
3. Which departments/offices are approached most frequently with information requests?
4. Is information easily available from government offices?
5. What kinds of difficulties do citizens face in their attempts to access information?

### **Awareness about the status of the right to information:**

Almost all participants were aware about the status of RTI as a fundamental right and its concomitant – the duty of state actors to give information to applicants. Several participants were also convinced that RTI is key to the realization of other fundamental rights. However there was much confusion about the information access regime as MP has citizen's charters, departmental orders and a newly enacted MP Freedom of Information law all of which provide some degree of access to government held information. As all executive orders and citizens' charters were issued in 1998 covering the undivided state of Madhya Pradesh, they continue to be applicable in the newly carved out state of Chhattisgarh.

### **Information needs:**

Participants expressed their strong desire to access information that is not only relevant to the realization of their own rights and entitlements as individuals (relating to birth, death and income certificates and ration cards) but also what they ought to know as members of the larger community in whose interest the democratically elected government claims to work. Information relating to funds allocation for social welfare, economic development and infrastructural projects, their planning, implementation and evaluation were high priority in the list of needs drawn up by each group.

### **Departments/Offices frequently approached for information:**

Participants identified the following departments as the most important in terms of citizen-government interface and their access to development related information (mentioned in brackets) –

- Education (mid-day meals schemes, appointment of school teachers etc.)
- Health (facilities available at Primary and Community Health Care Centres)
- Social Welfare (SC, ST scholarships and welfare schemes)
- Food and Civil Supplies (ration cards, ration supplies, quality control etc.)
- Women and Child Development (resources allotted and spent on women's empowerment, ICDS, Anganwadi schemes etc.)
- Planning and Statistics (information relating to projects sanctioned and allotments made under Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme – MPLADS and Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development Scheme- MLALADS)
- Forest Department (information relating to all construction, logging and afforestation programmes)
- Panchayats (information about reservation of seats for women and SCs and STs, developmental funds allotted at the village, block and district level, other crucial social and economic data collected by these offices)
- Urban bodies (information about money spent on maintaining infrastructure like roads and schools)
- Police (information relating to rights of citizens and investigation of cases)

#### **Difficulties faced while accessing information:**

The participants identified the following common problems-

- Citizens are not able to draft applications properly which often results in rejection of requests.
- Officials refuse to accept applications or routinely deny information.
- No action is taken on information requests despite submission of written applications and payment of requisite fees.
- Information is denied because it is not directly related to the personal matter of the applicant (some participants said they tried to access information in public interest)
- Information is released after long delays (in one case - after 6 months) – applicants do not know whether this delay is in tune with the time limit set by the information access law or not.
- The procedure for accessing information is too complex (there is no clarity on what steps need to be taken from stage 1 of filing the application)
- It is often not clear who is the competent authority to receive applications.
- There is no clarity on the appellate body whom one should approach when an information request is rejected by the competent authority.
- The rules to the overarching MP access law have not been formulated.
- The District Information Officer who is appointed by the government to provide information to citizens proactively does not divulge much.

- Often officials themselves do not know that they have a duty to give information to citizens upon request as they are unaware about the various information access procedures.

Overall, participants were of the opinion that the governments in both states were interested in keeping all information locked up in their files and access was allowed only to bureaucrats or the powerful who have vested interests. They also blamed the feudal mindset that persists amongst common citizens who accept opacity submissively and dare not question those in positions of power by exercising their right to know. This, participants felt was one of the reasons why transparency and accountability are not high on the agenda of the government. This exercise helped CHRI understand that there were problems both on the demand side and the supply side of information in terms of knowledge, willingness and capability. As group rapporteurs and members were allowed sufficient time to voice their difficulties and concerns about the lack of transparency in both MP and Chhattisgarh, the workshop had little difficulty moving into the learning mode in the next session.

## ***Session – II***

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DEPARTMENTAL ORDERS ON RTI:**

As CHRI has collected the executive orders issued in 1998 by all government departments in the undivided state of Madhya Pradesh, it was able to educate participants about the access procedure. **Venkatesh Nayak** began his presentation by clarifying the constitutional position of RTI as a fundamental right vis-à-vis the existing information access regime established in the two states. This was followed by a detailed presentation on the contents of the executive orders issued by 14 departments such as (copy of presentation attached)–

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1) Food and Civil Supplies Department             | 8) Scheduled Caste Welfare Department    |
| 2) Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Department | 9) Public Works Department               |
| 3) Local Governance Department (Urban bodies)     | 10) Water Resources Department           |
| 4) Women and Child Development Department         | 11) Public Health Engineering Department |
| 5) Social Welfare Department                      | 12) Planning and Statistics Department   |
| 6) Health and Family Welfare Department           | 13) Forest Department                    |
| 7) Tribal Welfare Department                      | 14) Mines Department                     |

The presentation included details about competent authorities, appellate authorities, application fees, inspection procedures, time limits, penalty provisions and application formats. It was encouraging to note that the choice of departments for the presentation matched the list that emerged from the group discussions held earlier.

**Sohini Paul** explained the information access provisions contained in the Panchayati Raj laws of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (copy of presentation attached). These included access rights guaranteed by the law for ordinary members of the Gram Sabha and the elected members of Gram Panchayats at the village, block and district level. The presentation also focused on the kinds of documents and records that are maintained in these offices so that prospective applicants are well aware about the location of various kinds of information and precious time is not wasted on identifying the proper authority competent to receive information requests.

## ***Day II (December 15, 2004)***

### ***Session - I***

Two participants – Ms. Bharti Singh and Mr. Rajesh Kashyap presented a recap of the previous day's sessions. Both presentations voiced common concerns such as lack of awareness about RTI orders within officialdom and amongst citizens and opacity in governmental transactions resulting in corruption and the benefits of welfare schemes not reaching the truly deserving.

#### **USING RTI LAWS – EXPERIENCES FROM INDIA AND ABROAD – PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES:**

***Ms. Renu Vinod*** and ***Ms. Aditi Datta*** presented seven case studies from India and abroad (Chile, Thailand and USA) showcasing citizens' attempts at using RTI laws to bring about change in the way government departments functioned and in the manner of utilization of development funds (copy of presentation attached). These case studies related to issues of corruption and misuse of public funds, educational facilities for the vulnerable sections of society, public health services and spread of GM crops.

***Mr. Rakesh Ranjan*** contextualised the learning from these case studies using the public health care sector as an example. He pointed out that some participants were actively involved in providing health care facilities in their own work areas. While these activities provided some succour to the underprivileged sections of society, they did little to improve the system as a whole. As the existing network of primary and community health centers was financed by the taxpayer, it was every citizen's duty to ensure that these facilities worked. He remarked that RTI was a powerful tool in the hands of concerned citizens who wanted to change the system.

Recounting his experience of using RTI to find out details about the syllabi taught in government aided schools in his home district Katni, he told participants how he had unearthed a text-book sales racket. Several government-aided schools compelled parents to buy expensive textbooks published by private companies thereby imposing a heavy financial burden on them, while those sold by the government at subsidized rates were discarded. Using a third example of corruption relating to the purchase of containers by the local Municipal Corporation which was unearthed as a result of an information request, Rakesh described how citizens upset by this scandal voted incumbent corporators out of power during the ensuing elections. He exhorted participants to pro-actively monitor the performance of public authorities using RTI laws.

***Sushmit Ghosh*** began his presentation with a short film depicting the awareness building and corruption unearthing exercises of Parivartan – the organization with which he works in Delhi. He began by saying that in a democracy every citizen has the right to know how public money is spent as every citizen pays taxes of one kind or the other. He briefly elaborated upon the 3 features which any good RTI law should have if it is to function effectively – **a)** a minimum exclusion clause, **b)** an independent appeals mechanism and **c)** strict penalty provisions. Illustrating his presentation with real life examples he showed how residents of Delhi had used the RTI law to – **i)** secure better public service delivery in individual cases, **ii)** ensure that materials used in the construction of roads were of the requisite quality standards and **iii)** highlight systematic abuse of the public distribution system by ration dealers and corrupt officials. He noted that the mentality of keeping every government document 'confidential' in officialdom and the desire for personal gain (amongst corrupt officials) hindered the free flow of information from public offices despite the existence of RTI laws. He reiterated that the mere existence of RTI laws would not ensure transparency and accountability.

Unless citizens used RTI to make public authorities accountable the objectives of the law would not be met with.

**Shivaji Raut** echoed similar sentiments and began by saying that a law in the statute book is a lifeless entity until citizens start using it to fight corruption and poor governance. He presented a brief overview of the Maharashtra RTI Act (MRTIA) as well as its chequered legislative history. He said that MRTIA was passed because of the pressure of public opinion which crystallised into the movement for transparency and accountability led by Mr. Anna Hazare. He pointed out that one of the progressive features of this law was that it covered public trusts also. He narrated how he had been using this fundamental right to information even before the law was passed and began his information requests by saying he was exercising his right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India (which guarantees freedom of speech and expression including RTI as interpreted in several Supreme Court judgements).

While narrating his experience of securing information in four cases he stated that despite the reluctance of officials to provide information under the MRTIA, the Lok Ayukta (the independent appeals mechanism) had received more than a thousand appeals in the first year alone. He pointed that this was due to the high levels of enthusiasm amongst citizens who were fed up by corruption and poor governance. He cautioned that RTI laws should not be used with the sole intention of vilifying government officials. This would only hurt the demand for accountability and RTI laws would become a tool for blackmail. He advised participants to use RTI laws wisely in order to improve governance and public service delivery. He noted that citizens often lament the absence of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who could lead the movement for good governance. But there was no need to wait for such a leader when a power tool like RTI is available with every citizen. He called upon citizens and organizations to imbibe the values of openness and accountability themselves and use RTI laws in a responsible manner to bring about systemic change.

### **Interactive Session:**

This was followed by a brief discussion where participants wanted several clarifications regarding the provisions contained in the departmental orders of MP and Chhattisgarh vis-à-vis the laws operational in Maharashtra and Delhi. One participant from Rewa wanted to know the difference between application fees and charges for securing copies of documents. Another participant from Raigadh asked whether an applicant could request data that would require to be compiled from different files. Mr. Raut said that this is possible and an easy way of securing the information was to provide a format for tabulation of data in the application itself. A participant from Balaghat wanted to know what option an applicant had when the competent authority refused to accept his/her application. The resource persons replied that applications could be sent by registered post in such cases as the applicant would have documentary proof of sending the information request and this would prove valuable while appealing against inaction or refusal to give information.

A participant from Mandla wanted to know who decided the commencement and ending of the time limit set for inspection of records. Experience had shown that a lot of time was wasted in searching for the records and applicants had barely a few minutes to go through them before their allotted time ran out. Resource persons advised that applicants insist upon the counting of time allotted from the moment the desired record was actually made available to them by officials, so that there is no wastage. Another participant from Mandla wanted to know what option citizens have when no action was taken on the application and no appellate authority was provided for in the departmental orders. Resource persons advised that applicants should first apply for inspection of records in order to ascertain the exact documents they would like to secure copies of. This would prevent officials from

quoting exorbitant fees for photocopying documents *en masse* in their attempt to discourage applicants. Resource persons also advised that the applicant should file a second application seeking details of action taken and concerned officials overseeing the matter contained in the first request. This would help build up documentation which could be used later in the High Court if necessary. Resource persons reiterated the need for maintaining documentation in all cases as all government work was paper-based. Without maintaining copies of all correspondence and documents exchanged it would be very difficult to mount legal challenges against officials or the inefficient information providing machinery.

## ***Session II***

### **DRAFTING INFORMATION REQUESTS – GROUP ACTIVITY:**

Participants were requested to form groups according to the districts they represented in order to participate effectively in this activity. They were asked to follow the steps given below:

- 1) identify the issue(s) which concerned them the most where governmental activity was found wanting
- 2) identify the information required
- 3) identify the department/office which was likely to hold such information
- 4) draft the application form giving the following details –
  - i. applicant’s name, father/husband’s name and address
  - ii. date of the application
  - iii. nature of information required
  - iv. approximate fees payable
  - v. reason for requesting such information (mandatory in almost all departmental orders)

This exercise was undertaken mainly to build confidence in the minds of participants and also equip them with the specifics of making a potentially successful information request. The choice of the resource person from Maharashtra and Delhi was also motivated by this objective.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Applicant’s name</b>	<b>Department/office</b>	<b>Information requested</b>
1.	Jitendra Kumar Singh NavJivan Vikas Samiti, Satna, MP	Officer, Child Development Scheme, Satna	inspection of food materials distribution register at the Anganwadi in Delora village (from 2 <sup>nd</sup> July – 10 <sup>th</sup> December 2004)
2.	Ruchi Singh Parihar	Range Forest Officer,	1) work orders for undertaking rock quarrying within RFO’s



	Vaijayanti Education and Social Service Society, Satna, MP	Satna	jurisdiction and the NOC issued. 2) names and addresses of contractors entrusted with the job and copies of lease (January – December 2004)
3.	Rajesh Kashyap, DARPAN, Raigadh, Chhattisgarh (2 applications)	1) Municipal Corporation of Raigadh  2) Gram Panchayat, Dharamkela village	1) total number of ration shops operating in this area and the names of individuals to whom licenses have been issued 2) allotment of rice, sugar, wheat and kerosene during March 2004 to each ration shop 1) muster rolls relating to the construction of village road
4.	Bharti Singh Gaharwa, Nehru Yuva Kendra, Rewa, MP	CEO, Electricity Supply Office, Rewa	1) number of complaints received from consumers during October-November 2004 2) copies of corrected bills issued to consumers since September 2004 3) list of new electricity connections sanctioned since September 2004 4) Inspection of register relating to electricity consumption and bill books for these new connections
5.	Gulab Sharanagat, Grameen Vikas Mandal, Balaghat, MP	Chief Executive Officer, Janpad Panchayat, Baihar	1) list of beneficiaries under Indira Awas Yojana under all Gram Panchayats in Baihar 2) list of homeless persons living below the poverty line in all villages 3) list of homeless persons be presented in the next Gram Sabha meeting for approval

6.	Dinesh Singh, Samarthan Centre for Development Support Sihore, MP	Chief Executive Officer, Janpad Panchayat, Sihore	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) grants allotted to SHG in Lidiya village during 2003-2004</li> <li>2) amounts disbursed and date of disbursement</li> <li>3) whether payments were made in cash or by cheque?</li> </ol>
7.	Rahul Srivastava, Sadguru Mission, Shahdol, MP	Executive Engineer, Shahdol	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) copies of contracts awarded to private companies undertaking construction activity on the road between Rewa and Amarkantak under the Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) scheme of the MP Bridge Corporation</li> <li>2) copies of the measurement book</li> <li>3) name and designation of officer appointed for ensuring quality control</li> <li>4) report of the officer responsible for ensuring quality control</li> <li>5) copies of lease agreements issued to contractors to undertake related excavation work</li> <li>6) khasra numbers of land leased</li> <li>7) royalty paid till date on these leases</li> <li>8) terms and conditions for collection of toll taxes upon completion of the project</li> </ol>
8.	Pradip Mazumdar, News Editor, Real World, Panna, MP.	District Forest Officer, Panna Appeal to Conservator of Forests	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) list of all construction activity undertaken during the year 2003</li> <li>2) copies of muster rolls, bills and vouchers</li> <li>3) appeal to be filed if application is rejected or information is denied by DFO</li> </ol>

9.	Kumar Shailabh, Samarthan, Panna, MP	Block Development Officer, CEO, Janpad Panchayat Ajaygadh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) list of doctors with MBBS degrees appointed in the Primary Health Care Centers in Ajaygadh since 2002</li> <li>2) list of medicines provided free</li> <li>3) list of priced medicines</li> <li>4) any investigation facilities available</li> <li>5) any other information that may be volunteered by the competent authority.</li> </ol>
10.	Ramlakhan Tiwari, Jagruti Yuva Manch, Panna, MP.	District Women and Child Development Officer, Panna	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) item-wise allocation made under ICDS in Shahnagar for the year 2003-2004</li> <li>2) copies of documents (bills vouchers etc.) relating to materials purchased</li> <li>3) payments made under the Balika Samriddhi Yojana to girl children in Shahnagar village during the same period.</li> </ol>
11.	Harigovind Pratap Singh, Vaijayanti Co-education Society, Nagaudh, Satna	CEO, Janpad Panchayat, Nagaudh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) details of fund allocation to SHGs under the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana</li> </ol>
12.	Anup Singh Baghel, Yuva Jagran Manch, Satna	Manager, Cooperative Society,	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) details of food grains distributed to BPL card holders in Satna during the 2003-2004</li> <li>2) copies of ration card register, sales register, stock register for the same period.</li> <li>3) details of appellate authority if application is rejected</li> </ol>
13.	Raj Lallan Singh, Yuva Jagran Manch Satna	District Women and Child Development Officer, Satna	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) names of schemes and services provided by the office since September</li> <li>2) quantity of Dalia distributed to malnourished mothers during this period</li> </ol>

Each application was presented before the plenary, discussed in detail and resource persons commented upon them making suggestions for improvement. Resource persons repeatedly advised participants to fine tune their applications so that they are not faced with demands for exorbitant fees from officials citing the volume of the records requested as the reason.

#### **PRESENTATION ON THE MP FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT, 2002:**

**Venkatesh Nayak** presented a brief introduction to the overarching RTI law passed by the MP Assembly (*MP Freedom of Information Act- MPFOIA*) in 2002 (copy of presentation attached). It was pointed out that unlike the Departmental order which were applicable to government offices only up to the district level, the new law applied to all state government offices, boards, corporations and trusts at all levels. Participants were also informed that technically speaking this law was operational as it did not specify a date from which it would be enforced. However rules which lay down the procedural details for implementing this law had not been formulated yet. Therefore government offices have not begun operationalising this law. It was pointed out that this law provides for penalties against erring officials who refuse to honour information requests without legally valid justification. Another plus point of this law was the 3 year time limit for accessing records which applied to all offices unlike the departmental orders where one could access records that were only a few months old. However the absence of a State Coordination Council like that provided for in the Maharashtra, Goa and Delhi laws to oversee the implementation was pointed out to be one shortcoming.

#### **PLANNING FUTURE COURSE OF ACTION:**

All participants presented a summary of the action points they would concentrate upon in the coming months in order to put the learning they picked up to use in their areas of work. Most of the action points involved filing information requests with government offices. Apart from those drafted at the workshop participants agreed to help citizens in their own villages and towns who wished to file similar applications. 3000 copies (2000 in MP and 1000 in Chhattisgarh) of pamphlets explaining the value of RTI and the contents of departmental orders (11 main departments with which people interact most often) in simple language were distributed to participants. They agreed to disseminate awareness about RTI in their own work areas using these pamphlets. Some press photographers volunteered to visit all public offices in their area to check out compliance levels vis-à-vis display of RTI related information on public notice boards. **CHRI agreed to host a follow-up workshop around March – April 2005 in order to document stories of successful information requests as well as difficulties which people might face despite clarity on the RTI orders.**

#### **VALEDICTORY SESSION:**

The valedictory session was attended by the Satna City Superintendent of Police Mr. Sunil Pandey who evinced a keen interest in the workshop. He appreciated the fact that such a workshop was held in Satna. He noted that information was the life-blood of all bureaucracies. However due to various reasons information blockage or overflows might occur. He urged participants to use RTI laws responsibly as they have a great potential to bring about systemic change. He stated that he had ordered the placement of public notice boards on the outer walls of all police stations containing the main points of the Citizen's Charter issued by the Police Department. He urged participants to put the knowledge gained at the workshop to real use. He stated that citizens well informed about the prevalent laws could act as a check on corruption and poor governance. The workshop ended with Mr. Mahanand Bagh spokesperson of the Chhattisgarh Citizens' Initiative presenting a vote of thanks to all individuals and groups that had helped in planning and holding the workshop.

## **EVALUATION REPORT:**

Of the 24 participants who filled up the evaluation form prepared by CHRI, there was unanimity that the learning from the workshop was useful and could be put to immediate use in their area of work. Many participants have stated that there was a need to disseminate knowledge about RTI in a campaign mode starting at the level of the residential colony. Participants indicated a desire to work with CHRI on this public education campaign. A few participants have suggested that private companies and organizations must be brought within the ambit of the RTI orders and the MPFOIA. One participant believes that it is important to start spreading awareness about the RTI orders, amongst people at the village and Block level, before advocating with the government to operationalise MPFOIA. (As the evaluation forms were distributed at the end of the workshop several participants left without handing over the sheets. They have promised to send them back by post.)

## **PRESS CONFERENCE:\***

A press conference was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2004.

The following media persons attended the press conference-

- 1) Mr. Gyanendra Singh – *Navbharat*
- 2) Mr. Vishnu Kant Tripathi – *Dainik Bhaskar*
- 3) Mr. Rajesh Tiwari – *Siti Channel*
- 4) Mr. Onkar Nath Tiwari – *Dainik Jagran*
- 5) Mr. Chandrakant Pandey – *Sahara Samay Channel*
- 6) Mr. Amit Singh S. – *Nav Swadesh*

Press persons were briefed about the objectives and the contents of the workshop including the participants' profile. They raised specific questions about the provisions, jurisdiction and shortcomings of the RTI orders and MPFOIA. They sought suggestions for improvement in the law. The resource persons pointed out the positive features in other RTI laws applicable in Maharashtra, Goa and Delhi. They said that the MPFOIA should be amended to include features like an independent appeals mechanism and a State Council to monitor the implementation of the Act. Resource persons urged the media representatives to start using the RTI orders themselves as is being done in countries like USA, Jamaica, Canada and Australia. This would not only improve the credibility of their investigative stories but also help them evaluate compliance of government offices.

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\* Sahara Samay and local cable channels – Siti Channel and Supre Channel – telecast snippets from the proceedings of the workshop on both days. Sahara Samay interviewed Mr. Venkatesh Nayak and Ms. Sohini Paul apart from 1-2 participants about the objectives and expected outcomes of the workshop.

### List of Workshop Participants

SI. No.	Name	Organization/ Address	Tel No./ Mob
1	Gulab Chandra Sharanagat	Grameen Vikas Mandal, (GVM), Balaghat	Tel: 07632-244390
2	Yogesh Kumar Garg	Sandhan, Katni	9826326708
3	Kamlakar B.	Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK), Rewa District.	240359
4	Bharati Singh G	NYK, Rewa District	987663, 237251
5	Durga Prasad Yadav	Vasudha Mahila Manch (VMM), Bilaspur, Chattisgarh	957753, 231166
6	Shailendra Kumar Pandey	Sandhan, Association for Advocacy and Development, Katni	9826326708
7	Nikesh Kumar K.	Wainganga Samudayik Vikas Kendra (VSVK), Balaghat	
8	T. Saav	VSVK, Balaghat	248395
9	Vinay Kumar Patel	Gramudyog Sansthan, Mandla District	253157
10	Sanjeev Ranjan Kumar	Parmeswari Seva Sansthan, Balaghat	
11	Sanjay Santosh Prasad	Social Bharatiya Kalyan Parishad, Mandla District	
12	Rahul Srivastav	Sadguru Mission, Shahdol	
13	Lokchandra Dashare	VSVK, Balaghat	
14	Sunil Kumar Singh	Manav Kalyan Gramudyog Sansthan (MKGS), Bhopal	
15	Ravi Shukla	Sadguru Mission, Shahdol	
16	Pradeep Majumdar	'Real World', Rewa Road, Satna	9827386102
17	Kumar Shailabh	Samarthan,, Bhopal/Panna, Panna	
18	Bishwajit Maity	Sandhan, Katni	
19	K.D. Gawar	'Hitavada'	238324
20	Vinod Singh Parihar	Yuva Jagran Manch (YJM)	9425173782, 232945
21	S. Mishra	YJM, Satna	226707
22	S.K.Mishra	YJM, Satna	
23	Dinesh Singh	Samarthan Centre for Development Support, Sihaur	
24	Dr. Sanjay Kuldip	Kavdha,	07740-253492
25	Hari Agarwal	Mitra Champa Village, Chattisgarh	Res: 245182, Off: 244305
26	Prakash Pandey	NYK, Satna	
27	Dr. K.P.Tiwari	Secretary, Adarsh Lok Kalyan Sansthan, Satna	07672-500478/251002. Mob: 9425172648, 9303310930
28	Mohananda Bagh	Social Education and Basic Awareness (SEBA), Jagdalpur, Bastar District	Off: 07782-223074, Res: 221395 Mob: 09437045024

29	Rajesh Kashyap	'Darpan', Jan Chetna Samiti, Raigarh District, Chattisgarh	07762-240499 Mob: 9827177805
30	Shivaji Raut	'Express Initiatives', Social Activist, Satara, Maharashtra-415001	02162221556
31	Anup Singh Waghel	President, YJM, Satna	9303321676
32	Kumar Shailendra Singh	Vaijanti Education Society (VES), Satna,	94250-68391
33	Pushpraj Singh Parihar	VES, Satna	
34.	Jitendra Kumar Singh	Navjivan, Satna	076727228718 navjeevanjitendra@ sancharnet.in
35.	Dayaram Kushwaha	Khuja Village, Uchchera, Satna	
36	Vinod Kumar Kewat	Adarsh Lok Kalyan Sanstha (ALKS), Satna	
37	Rajendra Prasad Kushwaha	IRMA, Satna	
38	Sandeep Kumar Bunkar	Bandarha Village, Satna	
39	R. Sharma	Satna	
40	Vijay Kumar Kushwaha	Satna	
41	Pradeep Shukla	ISAC, Jabalpur	Tel: 07624-231735 Mob: 9826659266
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43	Sushmit Ghosh	Parivartan, Delhi	011-51730168
44	P. Singh	Vaijanti Education Society, Satna	Mob: 9425174252
45	Rishi Singh Parihar	YJM	9827332225
46	R.L.Tiwari	Jagruti Yuva Manch, Panna	95773476
47	Mukesh Srivastava	Naveen Bharati Seva Samiti Mandala, Chatarpur	
48	Akhilesh Kumar Shukla	YJM, Satna	
49	Pankaj Urmaliya	YJM, Satna	
50	Mukesh Kumar	Anupama Education Society (AES), Satna	
51	Sadhna Tripathi	AES, Satna	
52	Indrapal Sharma	NYM, Satna	
53	Sunil Kumar Parauha	Satna	
54	Prahlad Kumar Mishra	Vaijanti Education Society, Satna	232945
55	Sanjeev Tiwari	Nirmala Mahila Evam Bal Utthan Samiti, Satna	
56	Ruchi Singh Parihar	Vaijanti Education Society, Satna	232945
57	Vinod Singh Parihar	Gram Mitru Samiti, Satna	
58	Rachna Patel	Mahila Mandal, NYK, Satna	
59	Sarita Singh	Ehsaas Seva Sansthan, Satna	
60	Bharat Tripathi	Vaijanti Education Society, Satna	
61	Vishnu Kant Tripathi	Dainik Bhaskar, Satna	
62	Baikunt Tiwari	Dainik Bhaskar, Satna	

63	Raj L. Singh	YJM, Satna	
64	Ganga Prasad Kushwaha	Yuva Mandal, Satna	
65	Narendra Singh Bais	Lakhan Seva Samiti, Satna	
66	Akram Khan	Navbharat Press, Satna	
67	Barkha Sharma	NYK, Satna	223378
68	Sunil Kumar Chaurasia	Shahdol Koilanchal Seva Samiti, Anup Pur	Off: 07658-268514, Res: 269332
69	Hari Govind Pratap Singh	Vaijanti Education Society, Satna	
70	Amit Singh Baba	Super Channel and Pahal Sanstha, Satna	9303310918 amit_reporter@yahoo.com
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72	Kamlendra Singh	NYK, Satna	9302821223
73	Ajay Singh	City Channel, Satna	
74	Chandrajit Singh	Yuva Jagran Manch, Satna	
75	Tarunendra Pratap Singh	Deep Shikha B.K., Satna	9303321983
76	B.P. Tripathi	Gurukul Sanskriti Shiksham Samiti, Sidhi, Satna	07822- 253132/250599
77	Rizwan Ahmed Siddiqui	Sahara Samay, Satna	98226121786
78	Prakash Pandey	NYK, Satna	
79	V.S. Mishra	NYK, Satna	
80	Sanjay Mishra	Gram Sudhar Samiti, Sidhi, Satna	
81	Dashrat Singh Walke	Nirman Vikas Sanstha Mandala, Mandla District	
82	Ramesh Dwivedi	SMTA- Society for Motivation, Training and Action, Satna	
83	Narendra Singh	NYK, Satna	
84	Pankaj Kumar	Nehru Yuva Mandal, Satna	
85	Arjun Prasad	Gramudyog Sansthan, Mandla District	
86	Gyanendra Mishra	Vaijanta Education Society, Satna	
87	Avinash Singh	Yuva Jagran Manch, Panna	
88	B.S. Walkey	Nirman Vikas Sansthan, Mandla District	289488
89	K.S. Rautela	CHRI, Delhi	
90	Venkatesh Nayak	CHRI, Delhi	
91	Sohini Paul	CHRI, Delhi	
92	Aditi Datta	CHRI, Delhi	
93	Renu Vinod	CHRI, Delhi	
94	Rakesh Ranjan	Sandhan, Katni	07622-235782.