

E-Newsletter, RTI (Issue-2)

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RTI e-newsletter

তথ্যকণিকা

Editorial

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The first volume of e-newsletter was published on 1 June and the response received so far from peers and different stakeholder has been very encouraging.

The barriers to implement RTI in our country are embedded in the context of lack of initiatives, illiteracy, culture of secrecy and other determinants. In spite of these constraints, there are many success stories of how RTI is working to bring about positive changes in the lives of people. However, these are scattered and uncoordinated. With this backdrop, the necessity of compiling these stories is of huge importance. We want to know what others are doing and let others know

what we are doing. This sharing will lead to more use of the RTI ACT. We expect our peers, co workers and others in the sector to send us their updates and stories on RTI use. In turn they will have the opportunity to learn about the work of others and the different initiatives taken by them.

This is only the second volume. We are confident that with your support and participation the newsletter will become a strong voice advocating the use of the RTI Act and monitoring its implementation.

Shaheen Anam

RTI in Bishwo Shahitto Kendro adda

Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, a partner organization of Manusher Jonno Foundation, arranges monthly gatherings for its readers and members of Mobile Library Cultural Groups which is known as Adda. The regular activities of such gathering include film show and discussion on a particular book or topic of contemporary importance. On May 29 there was an adda in Bishwo Shahitto Kendro premises but was different from the previous

regular gatherings. It was for the first time that Right to Information was discussed as a topic. The objective was to let their readers and members know about RTI. Readers, members and volunteers from 6 units (MJF-supported Mobile Library Project) participated in the gathering. Also readers, members and volunteers from 3 units under Danish Embassy supported project participated in the 'Adda'.



RTI issue was quite new to the audiences. Md. Iftakher Hussain from MJF delivered a lecture on the basics of RTI. This dialogue allowed the audiences to have understanding on RTI relevance with personal and collective benefits which finally lead towards good governance and the claiming of citizens' right to information. Formats and forms used in seeking information under this Act was also presented at the meeting.

Information is Power: A Case Story of BRAC

What does information include (RTI Act, 2009)

According to RTI Act, 2009 Information refers to an authority's constitution, structure and official activities and includes any memo, book, design, map, contract, data, log book, order, notification, document, sample, letter, report, accounts statement, project proposal, photograph, audio, video, painting, film, any instrument prepared through electronic process, machine readable documents and any other documentary material regardless of its physical form or characteristics.

Minara Begum, an ultra poor woman from Kakchor Village, Mymensingh, faces constant financial insolvency in her family life. As a result, Minara expressed interest to village elite, Shamsunnaher, to receive the local government's Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) safety net scheme for the 2011-2012 cycle. Taking advantage of the situation, Shamsunnaher collected voter ID, photos, and required documents from Minara, promising her a VGD card. However, when the Union Parishad (local government) allocated a VGD card to Minara, Shamsunnaher kept Minara's card, withdrawing the benefits herself every month, while

misinforming Minara that no safety net was allocated in her name.

In the mean time, Minara attended a meeting of her local community based organization, *Polli Shomaj*, convened by BRAC Community Empowerment Programme. At this meeting, she learnt about the RTI Act from BRAC's RTI Infomediary, Kulsum, under the Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment Project of BRAC, with support from The World Bank.

In this regard, Minara approached RTI Infomediary Kulsum for help regarding her VGD card situation. Upon Kulsum's advice and help, Minara used the RTI Act to apply to the Union Parishad's

Secretary for information regarding the list of people who received VGD card allocations for the 2011-2012 cycle.

When the VGD card allocation list arrived with Minara's name on it, Minara and Kulsum collectively approached the Chairman of the Union Parishad to seek resolution. As a result, the Chairman took prompt action, and Minara will now be receiving the benefits of the VGD card safety net scheme till December 2012.



Rural citizens of BRAC's Polli Shomaj hold discussion on RTI



RTI theme in YES capacity building camp 2012

An Annual Review and Capacity Building Camp 2012 was organized from 5-8th April for YES members of Dhaka. YES advisor and TIB focal person coordinated the discussion and group-work. The YES members devised a comprehensive plan with a mandate to filing RTI application. This camp was organized at HRDC, Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra, Koitta, Manikganj.

The following activities were planned to carry out on RTI for Dhaka YES in their campuses.

- ☐ Organizing study circle on RTI in each YES group;
- ☐ Filing RTI application and its follow up;
- ☐ Organizing Satellite Advice and Information Desk (AI-Desk) activities at Dhaka Medical College Hospital and National Orthopedic Hospital & Rehabilitation Center;
- ☐ Drama Script/Feature Writing Competition on RTI



Three meetings took place in Information Commission with three ministries- Ministry of Information, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs on June 18, 19 and 21. The meetings were jointly arranged by Information Commission and Manusher Jonno Foundation. The meetings were arranged with a hope that the concerned ministries and the respective departments will be able to develop their own annual report as described in the RTI Act 2009, upgrade their website and develop guideline to create mechanism for proactive disclosure.

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