

E-Newsletter, RTI (I-3)

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RTI e-newsletter

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Editorial

We are pleased to present the third issue of e-newsletter. Civil society, NGOs along with media continue to raise their voice in favor of enactment of the RTI Act. As we know, there are huge issues and challenges towards implementation of the RTI Act in Bangladesh. The most prevalent one is the culture of secrecy which is still a barrier to proper implementation of the Act. Although different organizations have undertaken various programs to this end, these are often sporadic and not well disseminated.

It is our responsibility as concerned citizens and also as development organizations to ensure that this Act is implemented in order to ensure

peoples rights to information and ultimately to establish a corruption free democratic state. We must learn from each other and share our plans and experiences. Through this news letter I am requesting you to send your articles, comments or thoughts on how the implementation Act can be made possible and effective.

Your thoughtful criticism will enrich the content and quality of this e-newsletter. We appreciate your involvement and once again requesting you to send us your updates.

Shaheen Anam**Workshop on RTI in Faridpur**

RACINE and Manusher Jonno Foundation arranged a workshop on Right To Information on June 7, 2012 at Hotel Raffles Inn, Faridpur. This was arranged to let the audience have understanding on RTI Act to benefit from it. RACINE and Manusher Jonno Foundation are going to arrange a public hearing targeting the Government-led 40-day Employment Generation Program. The training was arranged considering the importance of having relevant information on that particular safety net program from

the concerned authorities. 30 participants (RACINE beneficiaries) from upazila and ward level joined the meeting and 8 among them were women. The basic of RTI Act 2009 was discussed in a session. An RTI related documentary was exhibited. 40-day Employment Generation Program was discussed in the context of the remaining scopes of using RTI Act. RACINE declared to work on the implementation of RTI Act. 10 possible requesters were selected who would apply for information

on 8 selected issues related to that particular safety net program. Asma Aktar Mukta, Executive Director, RACINE chaired the workshop.



Necessary support for Designated Officers

Last year Manusher Jonno Foundation undertook a pilot project on RTI across Manikganj District. 59 Designated Officers from different government offices received training on RTI under this piloting. This was arranged in BPATC, Savar. All DOs were found to have limited understanding of their duties and responsibilities under this Act. On July 3, 2012 I visited two offices in Ghior, Manikganj and found the same situation. It seems similar situation exists across the country. The offices were Upazila Cooperative Office and Upazila Youth Development Office. Both offices were not equipped with computer, hard copies containing information or not even a name plate. Both Designated Officers received training from BPATC under the pilot project. One of them said it is tough to serve the people as Designated Officer in the existing set-up. Even there is no convenient place for installing Citizen Charter. The result is the following:

- poor data management
- inefficient service from the information providing unit
- dissatisfaction from the demand side



A female requester is talking with the Designated Officer at his office

An officer is appointed as Designated Officer without preparation which is an additional responsibility for him/her. Citizens usually do not come for information as the (DO) cannot handle the request due to lack of preparations. As they do not go through the Act they take time for getting permission from his/her superiors though this is not required. This finally results in harassment of the requesters. Recently we experienced this in Faridpur. As data management is poor despite being sincere they often fail to provide information ..

Information Commission, the guardian body, can take measures so that the authorities will nominate the DO with due importance. Along with orientation of DO's on RTI, Data digitization process should be started. Generally citizens across the country are yet to feel the importance of RTI in their lives. Designated Officer is the key person as far as the implementation of RTI Act is concerned. This has to be taken under consideration with due emphasis.

Realizing Value of RTI - Adv. Fayazuddin Ahmad



To me- ensuring rights in form of 'services' for all- RTI is not the answer itself. It's actually a sign of a promise for a much better-quicker and more responsive people-centric service delivery. RTI has different value to different people. Considering the "growth" and "access"- to means of getting information- is "the answer" at this moment in Bangladesh. This journey for establishing peoples access to information- is not at all an easy one especially when we're expecting a mind shift!

By now, for last few years, there are significant changes in search of means to access information. For example, the farmers of all sugar mills in Bangladesh now receive purchase orders for sugarcanes through mobile text messages. Roughly two third of them could not read the English message, and rest of them are totally illiterate – they could not read even Bangla. And yet 100% of them are able to act on the mobile message in lieu of 'indirect

literacy' ... There are other similar examples too!

At this stage, we need to be very careful about striking the right balance of even-handedness vs. escalation. There is a danger of adopting only western-led concepts which may contribute to speedy escalation but will miss the evenness parameter. If truth be told, it may lead to further monopoly in the form of 'information divide'. It is up to us to make the right choice.

I am in no dilemma that I found the "answer" in RTI Act! This is merely not any legal instrument but a window for all who are struggling to establish RTI. Being a part of this struggle I am thrilled. Not with the challenges but the way RTI Commission is utilizing this for greater purpose making duty-bearers accountable. I am happy to see that the Commission already put the first stone to develop a eco-system within and beyond the 'powerful'. I'm/ we're with them in this journey...

(Fayazuddin Ahmad is an Advocate. At present working with Action-Aid Bangladesh. He is active member of RTI Forum.)

New Members in RTI Forum

Right To Information Forum has got eight new members. A meeting was arranged in Forum Secretariat on July 9, 2012 where new membership related requests was raised. The convener, in consultation with the other members, decided to give membership to requester organizations in the Forum. Pragati, a new member, is a project of USAID. Apart from this the rest organizations work on different issues mainly in rural areas.

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