

# Baseline Survey Report

**Under project**

Promoting citizens' access to information

**Prepared by**



**Supported by**



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## **Executive summary**

Baseline assessment of the PCAI project has been completed with the aim to identify the situation of the trend of demand and supply aspects of the RTI Act and assess its implementation status.

Focus group discussion (FGD), questionnaire based interview, key informant interview (KII) and document review methodologies have been applied in carrying out the study. A total number of 12 FGD sessions were conducted and 60 key informants interviewed in Barisal and Jessore districts. Questionnaire based interviews of a total of 285 respondents from the two districts were taken. Reports of two studies on RTI perception and implementation conducted by MRDI were reviewed.

### **Findings and recommendations of these exercises may be summarized in the following four areas.**

1. **Conception level and practice of the Right to Information Act:** Common people are hardly aware of the law. Insufficient publicity, illiteracy and inadequate awareness campaign have been identified as the reasons for low awareness level. Even those who heard the name, do not use the law. They are reluctant to apply it because of the complicated and time consuming procedure. Another reason for low level of practicing the law identified by the study suggests that designated officers do not have clear idea about their responsibilities. They have little motivation to do the job and they think they are just carrying out an office order. However, government officials, journalists, NGO activists and civil society members are more or less aware of the law. Participants from CSO/NGOs have also been found slightly aware about section 7 of the Act wherein disclosure of information is not mandatory.
2. **Potential benefits of RTI Act:** Most of the stakeholders think that implementation of the law will promote better flow of information and thus ensure transparency, accountability and good governance in all sectors. Almost all of them think that it is important for them. They further add that it will reduce corruption, increase access to services provided by the government and speed up social development.
3. **Practicing the Act:** Number of applications submitted by the respondents of study is quite low. However, a high percentage of the applicants reported to have received information.
4. **Opponents and supporters of RTI Act:** All the groups are of common opinion that corrupt officials and political leaders who have vested interest in any deal are the main barriers in implementing the law. Obstacles are much more in govt. offices and high NGO officials are also barriers mainly to provide financial information like budget or expenditure. Common people, civil society, journalists, sufferers, honest officers and honest elected representatives have been mentioned as supporters of the law.
5. **Ways and means of awareness building:** Common suggestion to build awareness is to arrange seminar, workshop, courtyard meeting with different groups to publicize the law. Other suggestions include using electronic and print media and cable network for publicity, making the teachers and students aware to use the law, creating awareness and a positive mindset among the information providing authorities and creating awareness among the public representatives so that they can aware general people.

**Some comments and observations:**

- There are some confusions and misconceptions among the bureaucrats and users about the section 7 of the RTI Act, 2009 which exempts some information from the mandate of disclosure for which this section needs to be revised or simplified.
- Expectation from the use of the law is very high which may remain a far cry if not practiced by the citizens over the authorities to compel them to do the needful under the law.
- Awareness building for the general mass is extremely necessary. Information providers at the upazilla level need be trained.
- Information providers are more powerful than the information seekers.
- Government officials claim they have a positive attitude to the law. But other respondents gave the opposite views.
- Keeping the NGOs under the purview of RTI Act is an opportunity for ensuring transparency and accountability.
- Website, citizens' charter and billboards are successful interventions for proactive disclosure of information.

## **Objective and methodology**

The present scenario of citizen's access to information and status of RTI Act 2009, it is strongly felt that more sensitization and capacity building efforts are needed for promoting easy flow of information that will lead to greater transparency and accountability at all levels of development and service deliveries.

To identify the situation of the trend of demand and supply aspects of the RTI Act one baseline survey was conducted. The survey aims at analyzing the political commitment facilitating citizens' access to information and assessing the implementation of the RTI Act 2009 provisions both from the demand and supply ends.

Focus group discussion (FGDs), questionnaire based interview and key informant interview (KII) have been applied as the prime methodology of this study. Besides these, document review was also used as a methodology. Finally, accommodating all feedbacks from overall methods report of the study was prepared. Detailed flow of activities in conducting the study is given below;

**Site selection:** 12 upazillas under Jessore and Barisal districts have been selected for this study.

*Six upazillas of Barisal;*

1. Barisal Sadar
2. Banaripara
3. Ujirpur
4. Bakerganj
5. Babuganj
6. Gournadi

*Six upazillas of Jessore;*

1. Jessore Sadar
2. Keshabpur
3. Jhikargachha
4. Chowgachha
5. Bagharpara
6. Monirampur

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** 12 FGDs were held on 12 upazilla under Jessore and Barisal district. To assess the knowledge level of different groups of people regarding the RTI Act 2009 was in main focus. At the same time getting their suggestions and opinions to popularize and proper implementation of this law was identified. Government officials, NGOs, Community leaders, Journalists, Professional groups, Mixed groups took part in these FGDs.

**Questionnaire based interview:** One to one interview was taken using a set of questionnaire involving a total of 285 respondents from twelve upazillas of Barisal and Jessore districts. The respondents included farmer, labourer, employee, professionals, businessmen, housewife, student and other segments of population.

**Key Informant Interview (KII):** Under this study 60 KII were taken involving the community gatekeepers, government officials, NGO authority and journalist. The purpose of such interview was to assess their views about present situation of RTI Act 2009 and recommendations to improve and successful implementation of this law.

**Document review:** Reports of two studies on RTI perception and implementation conducted by MRDI were reviewed

**Report preparation:** Based on the findings of the FGD, KII and documents review, a report was prepared.

### **Summary of Focus Group Discussion**

As a part of the baseline assessment of Promoting Citizens' Access to Information (PCAI) project Focus Group Discussion was held with 6 groups of participants including the service recipients, journalists, community leaders, professionals, civil society members and govt. officials of 12 upazillas of two selected districts namely Jessore and Barisal on different dates. In total 136 participants including 20 female participants took part during the discussions. In those meetings attempts were undertaken to have an idea of the groups about their conception level on the Right to Information Act, whether they have practiced the law and what is their experience, problems and potentials of the law and use of VIPP (Visualization In Participatory Programmes) cards with respect to probable changes in the service delivery by concerned authorities in implementing the RTI Act. Major findings of the FGDs are mentioned below:

#### **Conception level and practice of the Right to Information Act:**

- Some of the service recipients have only heard the name of the RTI Act, but they never practiced it as yet. They do not know how to use the law.
- Journalist group have some idea which includes the organizations covered under the law, time line allowed to provide information, cost of information, submission of appeal and complaints to the Information Commission, but not the penal provisions made under the law. They are of opinion that collection of information is time consuming and hence they are reluctant to use the law. One of the journalists had to pay several visits to get required information.
- About one-third of the community leader group participants have heard the name of the RTI Act. They agree that everybody has the right to have required information from concerned offices. But their understanding about the law is confusing or misleading or targeting other groups. None of them ever practiced the law.
- Only a few of the professionals have some idea about the Act. Some of them know the process of seeking for information and are of opinion that provided information may not be correct. General information may be given, but they will not give confidential ones.
- All the participating CSO/NGOs have average knowledge of the RTI Act. They know that information is available from the office of the government, local govt., NGOs, public representatives etc. They are also aware about section 7 of the Act wherein disclosure of information is not mandatory.

- Most of the government officials have average knowledge of the law, but not in complete details. They know the procedure of application for information, but do not know the time line of providing information. Some of them are also aware of the submission of appeal in case of failure. Only two officials know the penal provisions of the law. They are confused on how to collect the cost of information. They can provide information preserved under his jurisdiction, but not all information like budget and expenditure of different heads, question papers, note sheets etc. None of the officers knows the provision of inspection of files under the law.

### **Problems and potentials of RTI Act:**

All the groups are of common opinion that corrupt officials and political leaders who have vested interest in any deal are the main barriers in implementing the law. Others include:

- Obstacles are much more in government offices and high NGO officials are also barriers mainly to provide financial information budget or expenditure
- Designated officers do not have clear idea about their responsibilities. They have little motivation to do the job and they think they are just carrying out an office order.
- Those whose interest will be hampered will stand as obstacles that include contractors, chairman, vested interest group, officials and politicians.
- Friendly side includes the general public, journalists, the media, conscious people, some of the NGOs and the newspaper readers.
- Information providers are more powerful than the information seekers.

### **Ways and means of awareness building:**

Common suggestion to build awareness is to arrange seminar, workshop, uthan baithak (courtyard meeting) with different groups to publicize the law. Other suggestions include:

- Audio visual publicity including drama, local jari/sari etc;
- Making the teachers and students aware to use the law;
- For the government officials effective training as well as installing signboards with information regarding the process of application and delivery of information;
- Publicizing the law in the form of short drama through the local cable operators;
- Including the RTI law in the text books;
- Publicity in hats and bazaars in the forms of songs, drama and video;
- Publicity through mass media and
- Publicity of success stories of RTI users will encourage others to use the law.

### **Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:**

Common expectation from all the groups is the better service delivery from the service providers. Important among others include:

- mass people will be aware of the law;
- the law will decrease unjust activities like offences, corruption and misuse of govt. expenditure;
- rights of the general people and the marginalized will be implemented;
- transparency and accountability will be established in govt. and non-govt. organizations;
- corruption and irregularities will decrease and thereby people from all strata of the society and the country will be benefitted;
- supply of basic necessities and human rights situation will improve;
- public interest will be strengthened and preserved;
- misconception in the minds of the public about the government and NGOs will be minimized.
- friendly relations between the public and the govt. officials will help develop the country.

**Comment:** From the above findings it felt that the service recipient group is the least aware group. Journalists feel the law not suitable for their day to day business. Community leaders and professionals are a bit aware of the law, but never practiced it. NGO and govt. officials have average knowledge, but there are gaps in understanding and using the law. Expectation from the use of the law is very high which may remain a far cry if not practiced by the citizens over the authorities to compel them to do the needful under the law.

**Felt needs:** Awareness building for the general mass is extremely necessary. Information providers at the upazila level need be trained.



## Report on Focus Group Discussion

As a part of the baseline assessment of Promoting Citizens' Access to Information (PCAI) project Focus Group Discussion was held with 6 groups of participants including the service recipients, journalists, community leaders, professionals, civil society members and govt. officials of two selected districts namely Jessore and Barisal on different dates. In Jessore district total number of participants from all the groups was 63 which includes 14 female and 49 male participants. In Barisal district total number of participants from all the groups was 73 which includes 6 female and 67 male participants. Total number of participants of both the districts was 136 including 20 female participants. In those meetings attempts were undertaken to have an idea of the groups about their conception level on the Right to Information Act, whether they have practiced the law and what is their experience, problems and potentials of the law and use of VIPP (Visualization In Participatory Programmes) cards with respect to probable changes in the service delivery by concerned authorities in implementing the RTI Act. Major findings, comments and felt needs arising out of the FGDs are enumerated below:

### Group: Service Recipients

Location	Date	Male	Female	Total
Bagharpara, Jessore	22 November 2013	8	3	11
Gournadi, Barisal	3 December 2013	12	2	14

Twenty five service recipients including 5 female participants attended during the discussions. Findings are as follows:

Conception level and practice of the Right to Information Act:

- Out of 25 participants only 13 have heard the name of the RTI Act.
- They did not get any copy of the law and none had the opportunity to read the law. They are completely unaware about the provisions and usefulness of the law.
- None of the participants has yet practiced the law for getting any information from any authority.

### Problems and potentials of RTI Act:

- They are of opinion that corrupt officials and political leaders who have vested interest are the main barriers in implementing the law.
- If anybody wants to have information about financial budget or expenditure, they think it will be obstructed.
- Obstacles are much more in govt. offices and high NGO officials are also barriers.

- Those whose interest will be hampered will stand as an obstacle. For example, contractors, chairman, vested interest group, officials and politicians.
- Friendly side includes the general public and conscious people.
- Information providers are much more powerful than the information seekers.

**Ways and means of awareness building:**

- Arranging seminar, workshop, uthan baithak, drama, local jari/sari etc;
- Informing the members in `micro-credit groups and NGO community groups;
- Audio visual publicity
- Teachers and students should be made aware.

**Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:**

The participating service recipients expressed some sort of optimism over the use of VIPP. They include:

- mass people will be aware of the law;
- rights of the general people and the marginalized will be implemented;
- quality of the delivery of services will increase and the beneficiaries will get better services from the concerned providers leading to reduction of poverty;
- transparency and accountability will be established in govt. and non-govt. organizations;
- corruption and irregularities will decrease and thereby general public will be benefitted.

### Group: Journalists

Location	Date	Male	Female	Total
Jessore Sadar, Jessore	22 November 2013	7	3	10
Barisal Sadar, Barisa	3 December 2013	9	0	9

Nineteen journalists, including 16 male and 3 female, took part in the discussions. They are all aware about the constitutional provision that all powers of the republic belong to the people and as such the authorities are bound to provide information as and when requested by any citizen under the Right to Information Act. Findings are as follows:

Conception level on the Right to Information Act:

- They have some idea about the Act which includes authorities who are responsible to provide information and the govt. and non-govt. organizations covered under the law.
- However, they are not aware of the Designated Officers of the particular offices.
- Most of them partially know the time line allowed to provide information. But most of them are not aware of the cost of information to be paid for receipt of information.
- They all know that if anybody does not get information from the concerned authority, he/she has the scope to submit appeal. Only one of this group is aware of the provision for submission of complaint to the Information Commission.
- But none of them know about the penal provisions as enumerated in the law i.e. the imposition of fines and compensation and initiation of departmental proceedings.

**Practicing the RTI Act and experience gathered:**

- The journalists are of opinion that this law is not for the journalists and it creates some sort of barriers in urgently having required information.
- This law is not suitable for journalists' day to day business, but it is effective for investigative reporting.
- Some of the participants feel that if they use RTI Act for collection of information, those organizations will not provide further information in cases of urgent necessity.
- While responding to the question on practicing the RTI Act in performing their professional activities, only one replied in the positive. He was able to collect some information, but not all, by giving several visits to that particular office. He collected rest of the information from other sources.

### **Problems/challenges faced and potentials in implementing the RTI Act:**

- While responding to another question on the problems of implementation of the RTI Act they are of opinion that those officials, public representatives or political leaders who are involved in corruption are the main barriers.
- While responding to the potentials they opined that and the journalists, the media, conscious people, some of the NGOs and the readers of the newspapers are in favour of implementing the law.
- Culture of secrecy of the authorities is one of the important challenges.
- The Journalists also felt that the RTI Act is particularly helpful in investigative reporting, but not in daily activities.

### **Ways and means of awareness building:**

- They opined that for proper sensitization of the public Uthan Baithak may be organized.
- For the govt. officials effective training as well as installing signboards including the process of application and delivery of information is necessary.
- They suggested to publicise the law in the form of short drama through the local cable operators and
- They also suggested to include the RTI law in the text books.

Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:

The participating journalists expressed some sort of optimism. They include:

- the law will decrease unjust activities like offences, corruption and misuse of govt. expenditure;
- quality of the delivery of services will increase and the beneficiaries will get better services from the concerned service providers;
- transparency and accountability will be established in govt. and non-govt. organizations;
- corruption will decrease in discharging responsibilities and thereby general public will be benefitted.

### **Group: Community Leaders**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Keshabpur, Jessore	23 November 2013	8	2	10
Uzirpur, Barisal	3 December 2013	14	1	15

Twenty five community leaders, including 22 male and 3 female leaders, took part in the discussions. Findings are as follows:

#### **Conception level on the Right to Information Act:**

- Out of 25 participants only 8 participants have heard the name of the Right to Information Act and two of them have the copies of the law.
- They know all govt. offices, NGOs and foreign organizations may be asked to provide information to the citizens.
- They opined that the selection process of VGD beneficiaries and recruitment process of teachers cannot be disclosed. As the shops are organizations, so the price of the commodities may be known.
- Information providing officers will provide information. There exists a list of information providing officers in each office.
- As a citizen of the country everybody has the right to have required information from concerned offices.

#### **Problems/challenges faced and potentials in implementing the RTI Act:**

- This group opined that those who are involved in corruption are the main barriers of implementation of the law. For example, govt. officials and NGO high officials, political leaders, public representatives, journalists etc.
- Publicity for popularizing the law is a little and hence mass people are not aware of the law.
- If a common man seeks for information he may not be given the required information, but if it is done in a group it will ease the situation and it will be done in a transparent way.
- Some of the participants in this category think there will be no obstacle in providing information.

#### **Ways and means of awareness building:**

- Arranging seminars and symposiums
- Sensitizing people from all strata of the society
- Publicity in hats and bazaars in the forms of songs, drama and video

- Publicity through mass media
- Those who are aware of the law should help others.
- Publicity of success stories of RTI users will encourage others to use the law.

**Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:**

The participating community leaders expressed some sort of optimism over the use of VIPP. They include:

- corruption and irregularities will decrease and thereby people from all strata of the society and the country will be benefitted;
- mass people will be aware of the law;
- supply of basic necessities and human rights situation will improve;
- anything done against the country or development could be known;
- rights of the general people and the marginalized will be implemented;
- quality of the delivery of services will increase and the beneficiaries will get better services from the concerned providers leading to reduction of poverty;
- transparency and accountability will be established in govt. and non-govt. organizations;
- misunderstanding in the minds of the public about the government and NGOs will be eliminated etc.

### **Group: Professionals**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Manirampur, Jessore	23 November 2013	7	3	10
Babuganj, Barisal	03 December 2013	14	1	15

Twenty five professionals, including 21 male and 4 female leaders, took part in the discussions. Findings are as follows:

#### **Conception level on the Right to Information Act:**

- Only 3 of the participants were somehow aware of the law. They did not read the law or possess any copy of the law.
- Some of them know the process of seeking for information and are of opinion that provided information may not be correct.
- One of the participants stated that on having any request from anybody he would seek permission from his higher authority.
- If anybody seeks information under the RTI Act, general information may be given, but not the confidential ones. Confidential information includes ACR, personal information, public interest issues etc.
- Information is available with the office of the Chairman, public representative, all govt. offices and NGO offices.

#### **Problems/challenges faced and potentials in implementing the RTI Act:**

- If wanted, govt. and NGO offices, member and chairman will not provide information;
- There is no friend in favour of the law.
- Those who are deprived of their rights are in favour of the law, but they are powerless;
- So everybody should be made aware.
- The opposite party is more powerful and organized.
- Culture of secrecy must be changed.
- Lack of awareness of the law;
- No accountability;
- Records are not preserved properly etc.

**Ways and means of awareness building:**

- Every authority should publicize the law.
- Arrangement of meetings and seminars;
- Everybody should help implementation proactively.

**Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:**

The participating community leaders expressed some sort of optimism over the use of VIPP. They include:

- transparency and accountability will be established in govt. and non-govt. organizations;
- corruption and irregularities will decrease and thereby good governance will prevail;
- society, people and the country will be benefitted and harassment of the public will decrease;
- quality of the delivery of services will increase and the beneficiaries will get better services from the concerned providers leading to reduction of poverty;
- transparency and accountability will be established in govt. and non-govt. organizations;
- Public interest will be strengthened and preserved.



### **Group: Civil Society/NGO**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Chougachha, Jessore	23 November 2013	10	1	11
Banaripara, Barisal	3 December 2013	12	0	12

Twenty three civil society officials, including 22 male and 1 female, took part in the discussions. Findings are as follows:

#### **Conception level on the Right to Information Act:**

- Most of the participants know the name of the Right to Information Act and the meaning of RTI. Two of the participants have the copies of the Act.
- All of them have average knowledge of the RTI Act. They know that information is available from the office of the government, local gov., NGOs, public representatives etc.
- Those who preserve information in their custody are bound to provide information. However, information related with the security of the state or the army is not mandatory to be provided.
- Information related to common and public interest like tender documents, micro credit, NGO agreements, accounts etc may be provided.
- Information which may cause harm to the state should not be disclosed.

#### **Practicing the RTI Act and experience gathered:**

- None of this group practiced the law as yet. So they do not have any such experience.

#### **Problems/challenges faced and potentials in implementing the RTI Act:**

- Vested interest group like the govt. and NGO high officials, politicians, upazila chairman are the barriers in providing information as free flow of information will lead to the disclosing of their misdeeds, irregularities and corruption.
- Persons who are not involved with any corruption and mass people may act in favour of this law. But it is difficult to have such personalities.
- Media can play a vital role in favour of the law. But sometimes they are divide considering place, time and parties.

#### **Ways and means of awareness building:**

- Educating the new generation in favour of RTI
- Awareness building by increasing rate of education

- Arranging/holding seminars, uthan baithak, drama, gambhira etc.
- Holding meetings with Micro-credit groups and NGO communities etc.

**Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:**

- Change will take place from primary to higher education and in culture.
- Service delivery will be improved.
- Decrease corruption in all sectors and increase transparency and accountability leading to both urban and rural development within the country.

### **Group: Govt. Officials**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jhikargachha, Jessore	23 November 2013	9	2	11
Bakerganj, Barisal	4 December 2013	8	3	11

Twenty two officials including 17 male and 5 female participants took part in the discussions. Item wise findings of the discussions are as follows:

#### **Conception level on the Right to Information Act:**

- Majority of the participants have average knowledge of the law, but not in complete details. They have not yet got the copies of the law which was negated by the UNO.
- As the citizens have the right to know, the RTI Act has been promulgated. But they do not know all such organizations that are covered under the law or who are responsible for providing information.
- They know the procedure of application for information, but do not know the time line of providing information correctly. Some of them are also aware of the submission of appeal in case of failure. Only two officials know the penal provisions of the law. They are confused on how to collect the cost of information.
- Govt. officers can provide information preserved under his jurisdiction, but not all information like budget and expenditure of different heads, question papers, note sheets etc.
- None of the officers knows the provision of inspection of files under the law.

#### **Practicing the RTI Act and experience gathered:**

- None of the officers received any application in writing for information from any citizen as yet.
- If anybody seeks information, it is given orally.

#### **Problems/challenges faced and potentials in implementing the RTI Act:**

- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of logistic facilities
- One of the participants opined that this law will create problem for the government officers and the NGO officials. But it was negated by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer saying like this “If we steal it will create problem, otherwise not.”

#### **Ways and means of awareness building:**

- Preservation of information shall be computerized / digitalized.

- E-mail access to be provided
- Mass publicity required

**Use of VIPP in respect of probable changes in the service delivery:**

- Transparency and accountability will increase which will lead to better service delivery.
- Corruption will decrease and misuse of govt. resources will be minimized.
- Public harassment will decrease and they will get improved services from concerned offices.
- Members of the public will have clear ideas about govt. offices and gaps between the two will minimize.
- Friendly relations between the public and the govt. officials will help develop the country.

**Comment:** From the above findings it felt that the service recipient group is the least aware group. Journalists feel the law not suitable for their day to day business. Community leaders and professionals are a bit aware of the law, but never practiced it. NGO and govt. officials have average knowledge, but there are gaps in understanding and using the law. Expectation from the use of the law is very high which may remain a far cry if not practiced by the citizens over the authorities to compel them to do the needful under the law.

**Felt needs:** Awareness building for the general mass is extremely necessary. Information providers at the upazila level need be trained.

## Summary of questionnaire based interview

A total of 485 people of multiple segments, 241 from Jessore and 244 from Barisal have been interviewed to collect numerical data as a part of this baseline survey. 88% of them were male and 12% female. Five questions were asked to the respondents to know their understanding and practice of the RTI Act.

Responses are as follow:

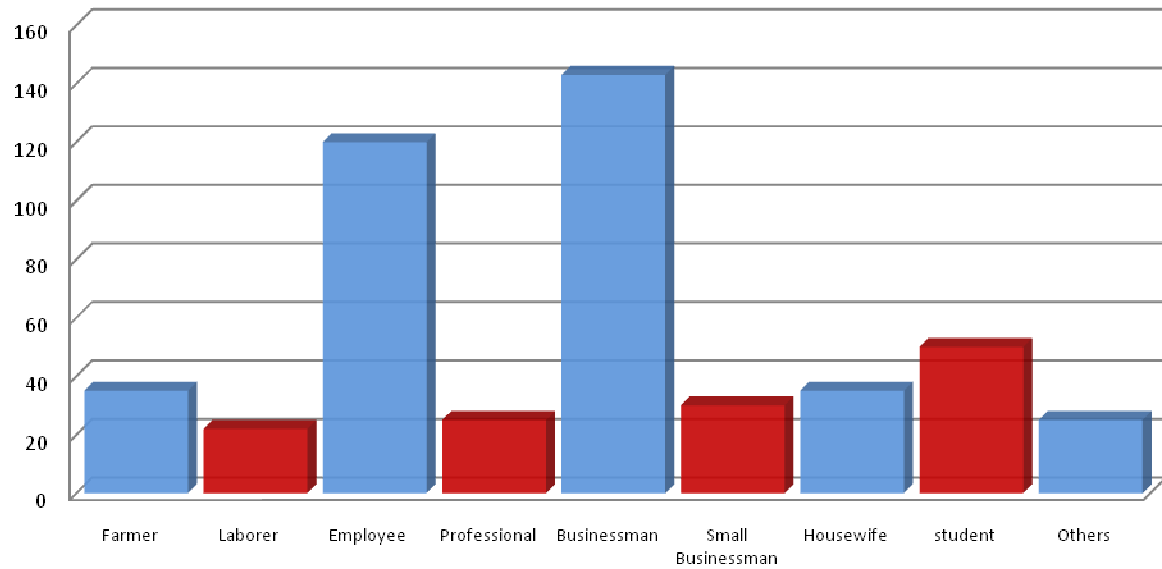
- Majority of the respondents (56%) have never heard about the RTI Act, whereas 44% heard it.
- Those who had heard about the Act came to know it from different sources. 57% knew it from media, 23% from mobile SMS, 16% from NGO circulation and the rest from other sources.
- Almost all (99%) of those who heard about the Act considered it as important for them.
- Very low percentage, only 8% of these respondents have ever used the Act for seeking information.
- Among those who applied, 59% got full information, 35% got it partially and 6% were refused.

## Interview responses

Total 485 people are interviewed for collecting numerical data as a part of baseline survey under the project of Promoting Citizen's Access to Information. Two hundred and forty one (241) interviewees are from Jessore Sadar, Keshabpur, Jhikargachha, Chowgachha, Bagharpara, Monirampur upazila in Jessore District and 244 interviewees are from Barisal sadar, Banaripara, Uzirpur, Babuganj, aghailjhara and Gouronodi Upazila in Barisal District. Profession of the interviewees are farmer, labourer, employee, professionals, businessman, housewife, student and others. Among them 425 are men and 60 are women.

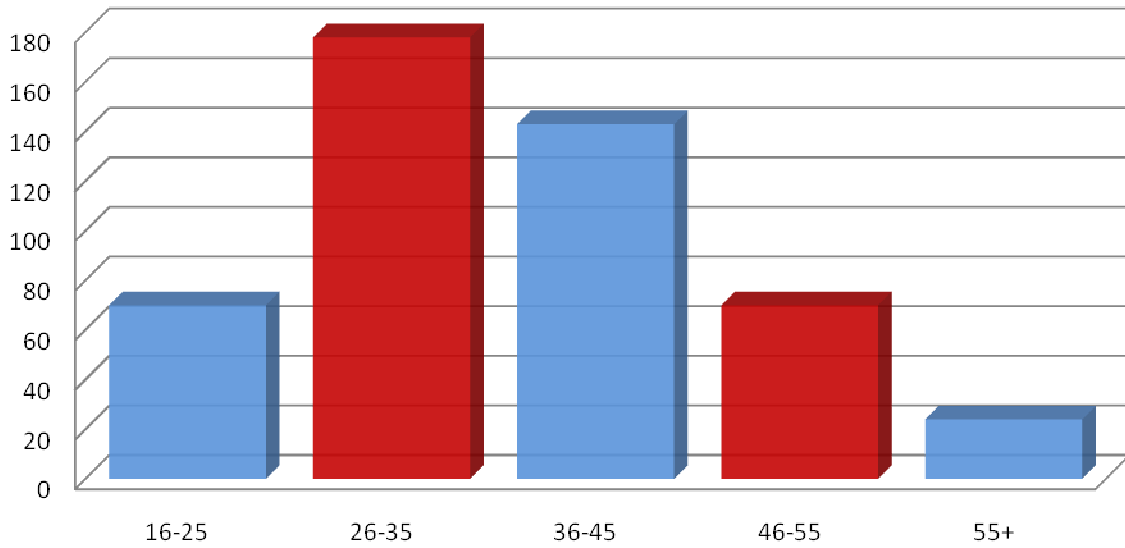
Occupation of the Interviewee			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Farmer	18	17	35
Laborer	15	07	22
Employee	51	69	120
Professional	17	08	25
Businessman	68	75	143
Small Businessman	20	10	30
Housewife	22	13	35
student	12	38	50
Others	18	07	25

## Occupation of the Interviewee



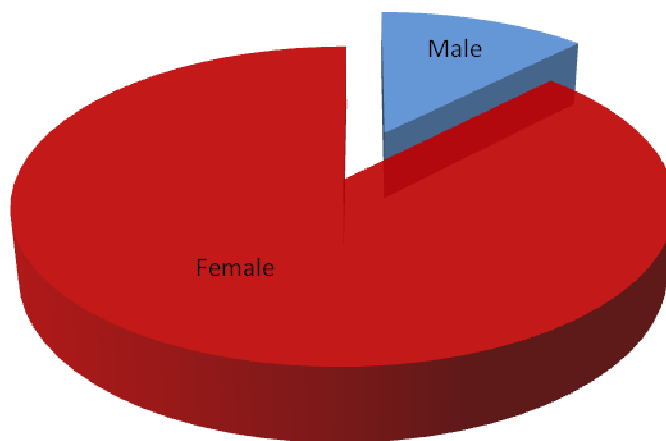
Age of the Interviewee			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
16-25	30	40	70
26-35	89	89	178
36-45	78	65	143
46-55	34	36	70
55+	10	14	24

**Age of the Interviewee**



Sex of the interviewee			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Male	29	31	60
Female	212	213	425
Other	00	00	00

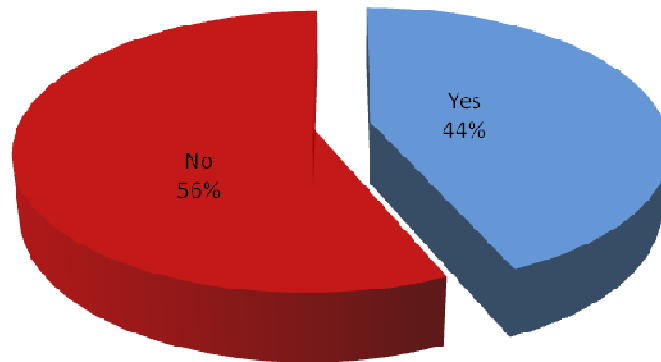
**Sex of the interviewee**



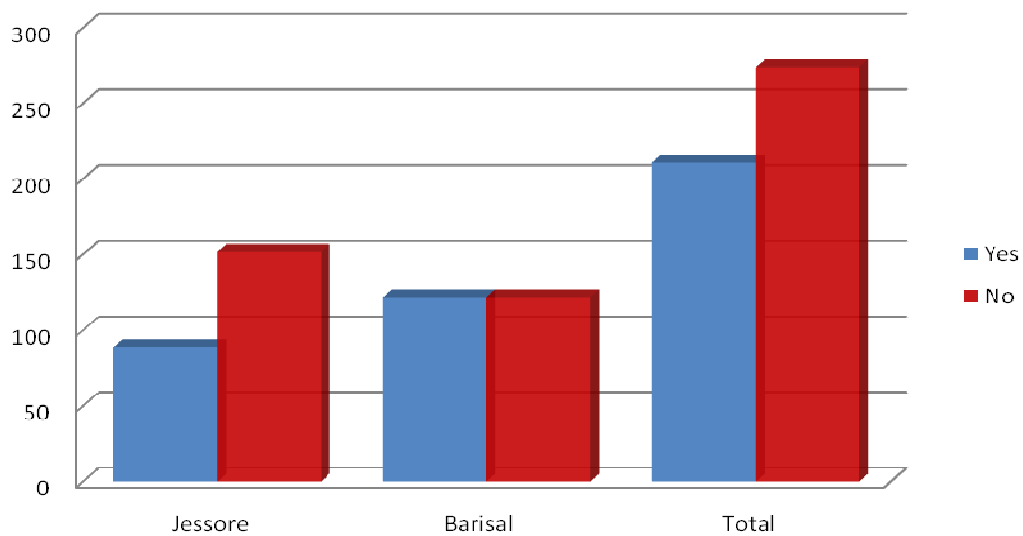
1. At first ask the interviewee did you hear about the RTI Act 2009? In response to the question 211 said “yes” and 274 said “No”. If answer is ‘no’ then interview ended here and if it is ‘yes’ then continued the question.

1. Did you hear about Right to Information Act, 2009? (If no, interview ends here)			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Yes	89	122	211
No	152	122	274
Total	241	244	485

**Did you hear about Right to Information Act, 2009?**



**Did you hear about Right to Information Act, 2009?**

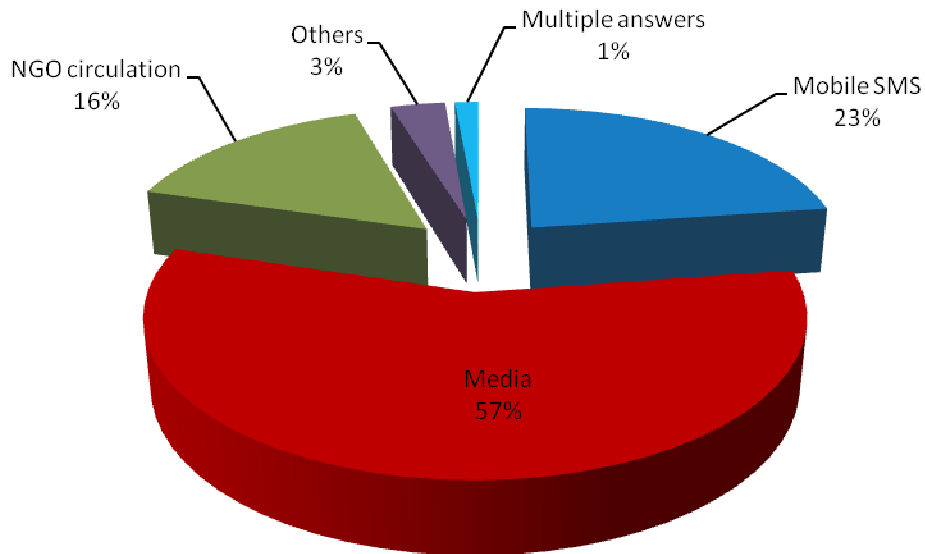




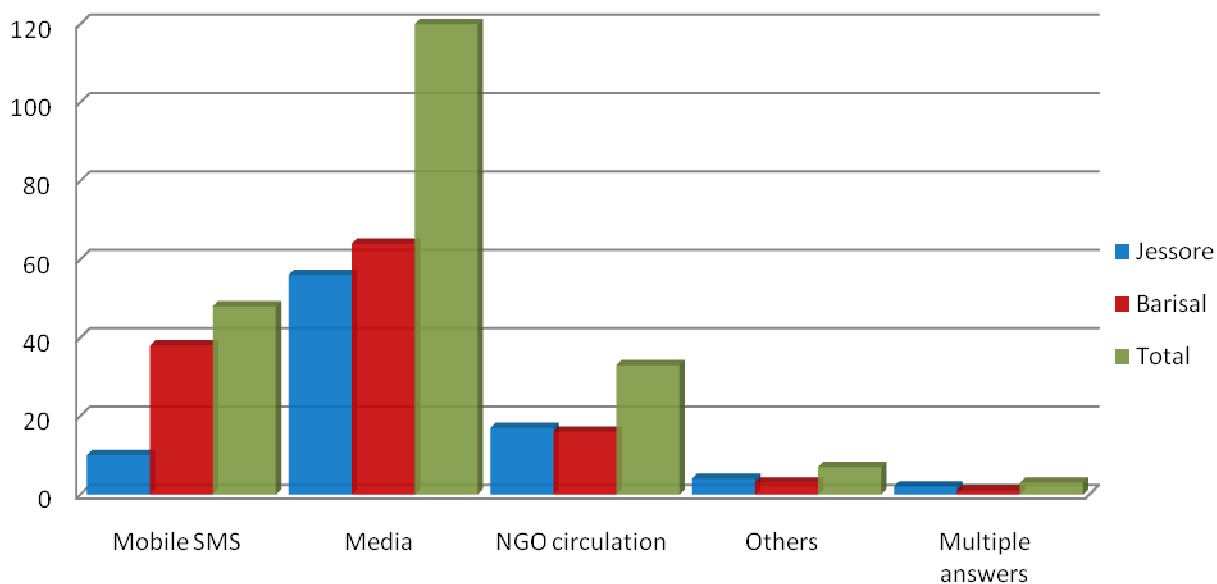
2. Ask this 211 people who answered 'yes' in first question, how did they come to know about RTI. In replied this question 48 people came to know from mobile SMS, 120 from media, 33 from NGO circulation. Besides, 7 people were known from other sources and 3 gave multiple answers.

2. How did you come to know about Right to Information Act?			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Mobile SMS	10	38	48
Media	56	64	120
NGO circulation	17	16	33
Others	04	03	07
Multiple answers	02	01	03
Total	89	122	211

### How did you come to know about Right to Information Act?



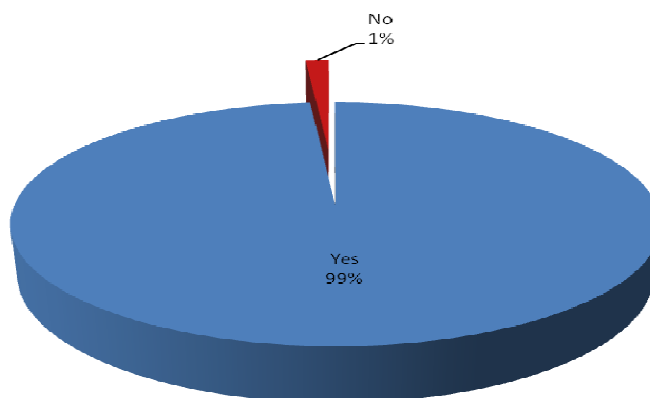
### How did you come to know about Right to Information Act?



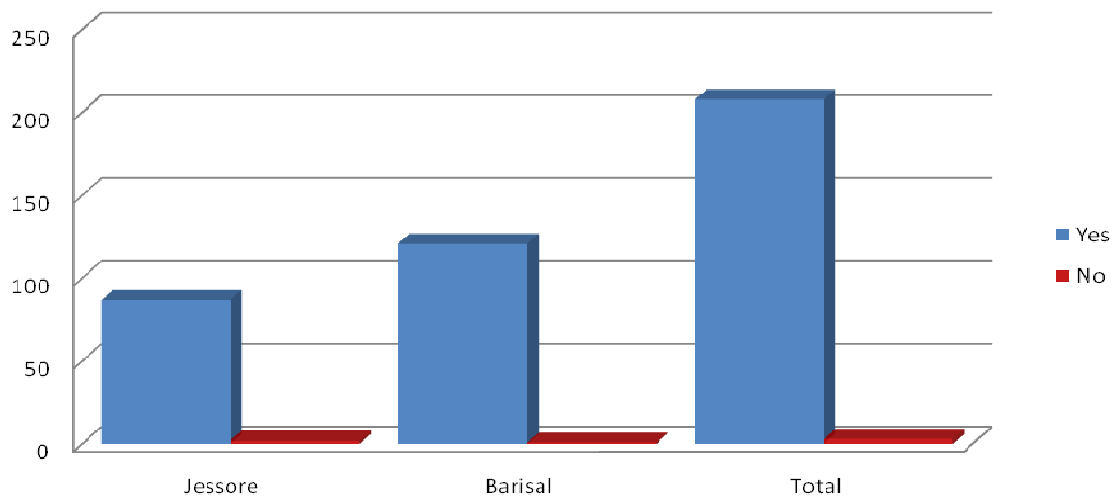
3. Then asked the interviewee do you think that the Act is important for you? 208 out of 211 think that the act is important for him/ her but 3 people think it is not important for him/her.

3. Do you think the Act is important for you?			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Yes	87	121	208
No	02	01	03
Total	89	122	211

### Do you think the Act is important for you?



### Do you think the Act is important for you?

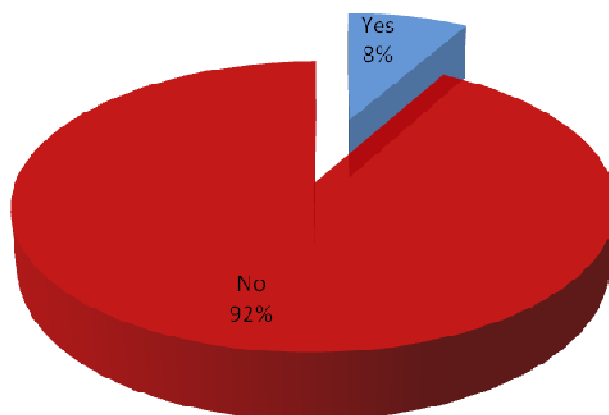


4. Seventeen people (17) out of 211 used the RTI act and 194 people didn't use the law. Continue to the next question which people used the law or ended the interview here.

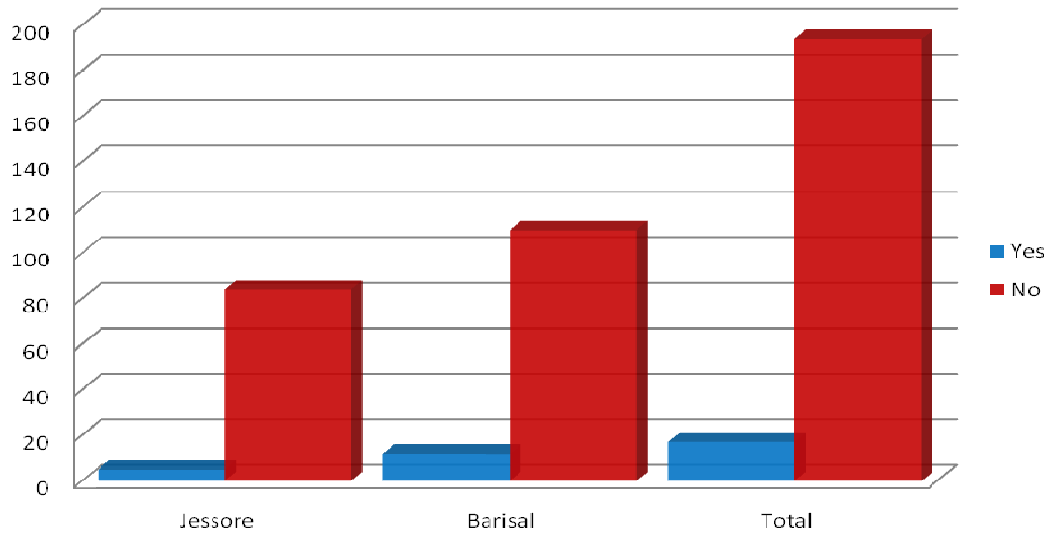
4. Did you ever use the Act?			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Yes	05	12	17
No	84	110	194
Total	89	122	211

(If yes, continue to next question or end the interview here)

### Did you ever use the Act?



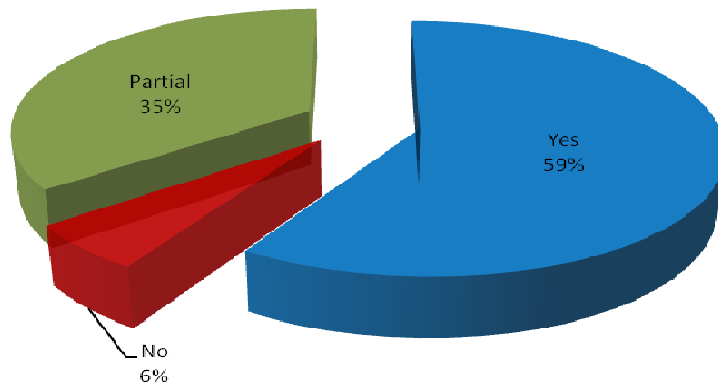
**Did you ever use the Act?**



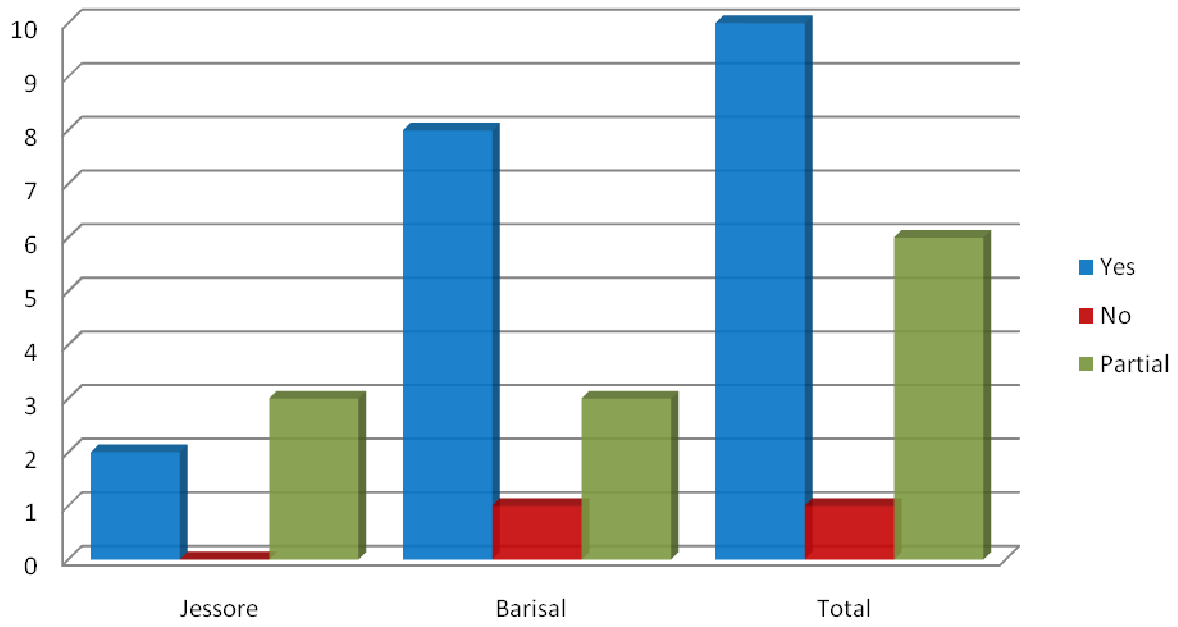
5. Among the 17 people who wanted to get information using RTI act, 10 people received information, 6 people received partial and 1 people received no information.

5. Did you get the information you applied for?			
	Jessore	Barisal	Total
Yes	02	08	10
No	00	01	01
Partial	03	03	06
In process	00	00	00
Not relevent	00	00	00
Total	05	12	17

**Did you get the information you applied for?**



### Did you get the information you applied for?



## Summary of KII

Interviews of 60 key informants were taken to assess the understanding and practice of RTI Act as a part of the baseline assessment of Promoting Citizens' Access to Information (PCAI) project. The respondents of four categories include 24 upazilla level government officials, 12 journalists, 12 NGO representatives and 12 community leaders. The assessment was conducted in 12 upazillas of Barisal and Jessore districts.

Some common questions and some specific questions on conceptual and implementation scenario of RTI Act were asked to the informants.

Responding to the common question why RTI Act was enacted, highest number of respondents said -- To ensure citizens' rights and access to information. Other responses were

- to remove barrier to free flow of information
- to reduce corruption
- to establish people's constitutional rights
- to establish transparency, accountability and good governance

Regarding people's awareness on the RTI Act more than half said people are not aware. Insufficient publicity, illiteracy and inadequate awareness campaign have been identified as the reasons for low awareness level. Even those who know about the law are reluctant to apply it because of the time consuming procedure.

Most of the local upazilla level journalists do not know the law. Very few of those who know do not apply it for reporting because they feel comfortable using their personal relations in collecting information.

Most of the government officials know the law, but not in details.

Government officials claim they have a positive attitude to the law. But other respondents gave the opposite views.

Most of the respondents mentioned corrupt and vested interest groups as opponents to the law. Other opponents as they mentioned are government officials, politicians, public representatives and people in financial management.

Common people, civil society, journalists, sufferers, opposition political parties, honest officers and honest elected representatives have been mentioned as supporters of the law.

When asked about the challenges to implementation of the law -- corruption, negative mindset of the government officials, lack of political commitment and creating people's awareness were mentioned.

Keeping the NGOs under the purview of RTI Act was appreciated by almost all the respondents from NGOs. They took it as an opportunity for ensuring transparency and accountability.

Mixed opinion came out on the information management system of the government. While expressing satisfaction over digitalization of the system, some concerns were expressed about regular updating and proper functioning of the system.

Website, citizens' charter and billboards were mentioned as successful interventions for proactive disclosure of information.

Regarding section 7 of the RTI Act, NGOs said they have no information exempted from disclosure. Almost similar view was given by government officials, because upazilla offices hardly have any issue related to state security. However they mentioned question of public examination, names of participants in tendering as secret information.

The key informants suggested following measures that need to be taken for better functioning of the RTI Act:

- Awareness campaign and meetings at the community level (Highest number of respondents suggested)
- Using electronic and print media and cable network for publicity
- Workshop, seminar and rally
- Involvement of youth and educational institutes
- Create awareness and a positive mindset among the information providing authorities
- Create awareness among the public representatives so that they can aware general people

## KII responses

### CSO / Community Gatekeeper

Sl. no.	Question	Answer	Frequency
01.	Why the RTI Act was enacted in your opinion?	No response	5
		Every citizen has the right to know everything. People are the source of all power.	1
		General people have legal and constitutional right to know about the state property and its actions. There were no obligations of government officials to provide information but now they are obliged to provide information	1
		To establish people's right to know	4
		To promote people's access to information	3
		To make people aware of their rights	1
02.	How far the people of this community are aware about the law? To what extent are they using it? What is the reason?	No response	1
		People don't use this law because they don't know how to apply it and not much awareness has been created among them.	5
		General people are not aware of the law.	3
		People are less aware to apply in writing but orally want information.	1
		General people are not aware due to lack of publicity.	2
03.	Who are the opponents to this law in your opinion?	People who are involved in corruption, will oppose the law.	6
		Officials with hidden interest will oppose it.	1
		Vested interest groups	3
		People involved in financial management	1
		Dishonest people	1
04.	Who are the supporters / friends of this law?	Journalists and civil society members are friends of the law.	3
		Mass people and public representatives will be the friend of RTI.	3
		Honest officers	3
		Sufferers will support.	1
		3rd and 4th grade employees	1
		Difficult to comment	1
05.	What are the challenges to implementing the law?	No response	4
		Main challenge is corruption.	2
		Lack of political commitment	1
		Negative attitude of government officials	2
		Illiteracy	1
		Lack of people's awareness	2
06.	What steps should be taken for effective	No response	3
		More awareness must be created among people	3



	implementation of the law in this community?	through workshop in Union Parishad so that they know about their rights and law.	
		Create awareness among the public representatives so that they can aware general people.	2
		Journalists can aware people.	1
		Seminar, workshop	3
07.	What is the attitude of government officials to this law?	No response	4
		Honest officers take it positively but corrupt officers don't.	1
		Government officials don't take it positively except few and many times misguide general people.	2
		Not supportive	2
		They have trend of hiding information.	1
		Negative attitude	2
08.	In your opinion what is the situation of present pro-active information disclosure and information storage system of government and non-government offices?	No response	5
		Information should be properly kept in all offices but many information are not available.	2
		Information management system is not appropriate.	2
		Information management system is vulnerable.	3
09.	Which information at the government offices at the upazilla level and NGO offices are exempted from the mandate of disclosure according to the section 7 of RTI Act?	No response	8
		Information at upazilla level is not related to state security. So all information should be disclosed.	1
		All information should be available	2
10.	What steps should be taken for effective implementation of the law in this community?	No response	5
		Change is needed to ensure transparency and combat corruption.	1
		Meeting, rally, workshop	4
11.	What changes can take place in government and private service delivery if the law is implemented properly?	No response	2
		This law empowers citizen to seek and receive information. If people are aware of their right and public- private offices ensure transparency and accountability then we can see change in all services.	1
		People will be aware of their right and get better service.	4
		People will be benefited.	3
		Behavioral change will take place.	1

**Government officials**

<b>Sl. no.</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
01.	Why the RTI Act was enacted in your opinion?	No response	4
		Disclose different departmental, social, political information to people and ensure transparency and accountability.	3
		Ensure citizen's rights and access to information.	8
		Ensure good governance	1
		Right to Information Act, 2009 has given people more opportunity to participate in public affairs and hold duty bearers accountable for their action.	1
		Empower people	1
		To help people get information from government office	2
		To remove barrier to free flow of information	2
		To reduce corruption	2
02.	How far the government officials are aware about the law? To what extent are the people using it? What is the reason?	No response	3
		Many govt. officers know this law in brief but don't know in details.	7
		People are aware about this law through media but they don't apply to get information.	3
		People are mostly unaware.	5
		Aware as a designated officer	
		This is a law and gazette, so government officers aware of this law and they are obliged to give information.	1
		They didn't know earlier but now are aware by TV programme, message of mobile and different programme.	2
		Officers are aware of the law, but they need to practice it properly.	3
03.	How have the government officials taken the law? Has it created problem or advantage for them? How can they use it for their profession?	They accept positively but it varies from department to department. I think it grows transparency because they try to work transparently in the concept of freedom of information.	10
		I accept it cordially but don't know about others.	3
		They faced problem earlier but now they try to give information as per law.	1
		It is an opportunity for those who are committed to disclose information.	3
		They have taken it positively, but many do not know the procedure.	2
		They are compelled to provide information according to the law.	1
04.	Give your comments on	No response	4

	information storage system in the government offices.	File management exists by government file management policy. Now it is digitalized and has e-file system in district office.	6
		Proper file management is vital in all aspects. At present file management is digitalized in many offices which is a positive sign but old documents are not properly managed.	3
		Almost all office are digitalized to conserve information and website are open to get information.	3
		File management already exists and information are available but it should be digitalized	3
		File management system is not satisfactory. It should be modified.	1
05.	In your opinion what is the present pro-active information disclosure situation of government offices? What should be the ideal situation?	No response	7
		Departmental website are open for all and people could know what services they get through citizen charter.	5
		Implementation report is given to related authority and every Upazilla has web portal but there are no skilled operators.	2
		UNO office maintains pro-active information disclosure system by billboard and website.	3
		Situation is far better now. Info is disclosed through citizen's charter, bill board and website.	3
		Pro-active disclosure situation in government offices is not satisfactory. Website should be updated with information.	1
06.	Who are the opponents to this law in your opinion?	No response	3
		No opponents	6
		People who have less benefit will oppose for implementing RTI	1
		Politicians	3
		People with personal benefits	6
07.	Who are the supporters / friends of this law?	Government, NGO, Public Representatives	11
		Honest people	3
		Media and common people	3
		Common people	4
		Social workers, young people and civil society	3
08.	What are the challenges to implementing the law?	No response	4
		Procedure of applying RTI	4
		Awareness creation	4
		Unawareness of authority	3
		Negative attitude of officials	2
		Corruption	3
		Political influence	4
09.	Which information at the upazilla level are	No response	6
		Question of public exams, participants name of	1

	exempted from the mandate of disclosure according to the section 7 of RTI Act?	tendering	
		All information are open	5
		Personal information	2
		Special drive against violation of law e.g. formalin use in food items	1
10.	What steps should be taken for effective implementation of the law in this community?	Awareness raising programme, workshop, seminar, training	11
		Already in implementation	3
		Awareness of authority	3
		Digital display	2
		Using cable network	2
11.	What are the roles of government officials in implementing RTI Act? What changes can take place in government and private service delivery if the law is implemented properly?	No response	3
		Respect this law that will combat corruption and ensure transparency, accountability of government officials and People will get better service.	6
		People will be aware and get more benefit.	6
		Would not create barrier.	1
		Positive changes will take place in public and private service delivery.	6
		Aware the beneficiaries	2

**Journalists**

Sl. no.	Question	Answer	Frequency
01.	Why the RTI Act was enacted in your opinion?	No response	3
		Aware people about their fundamental rights	
		This law helps people to know their right that will combat corruption and ensure accountability and transparency	4
		To facilitate people's access to information	5
02.	How far the people of this community are aware about the law? To what extent are they using it? What is the reason?	General people are not aware and do not apply to get information but educated people know this law through electronic media.	8
		People are aware but they don't use this law much. Different NGOs, Journalist play active and responsible role to circulate this law.	1
		General people know this law but they think it's only for journalist. A farmer used this law and applied to agricultural office to get information. After much efforts and failure the information commission got involved and the farmer got the information but had to go through a lot of hassle.	1
		People are aware of this law but grassroots are not aware.	2
03.	How far the journalists are aware of the law? Are they using it for their professional, personal purpose or for public interest? How can they use it for their profession?	Most of the local journalists don't know this law. They don't use this law in personal or professional life because they have access to any offices to get information.	8
		Journalists are aware about the law but the implementation is hardly seen as it is time consuming.	2
		They can use the law when they fail to collect information.	1
		Very few journalists use the law.	1
04.	What is the attitude of government officials regarding the law?	No response	4
		They provide information but dishonest officers hide correct information for their personal interest.	2
		Authorities are positive in providing information.	1
		Mostly negative attitude	5
05.	Is the involvement of journalist essential for implementing the law? Why? Explain.	No response	4
		Journalists' involvement is important to circulate the law to the local people and aware them.	5
		Journalists' involvement is important because they are the spokespersons of people.	2
		Important because it helps journalists.	1
06.	What are the roles of journalists in implementing RTI Act? What changes can take place in government	People will get quick and better services.	4
		Journalists can implement this law through reporting. They along with community representative can work together to aware people.	1
		General people come to journalists for different	1

	and private service delivery if the law is implemented properly?	purposes and they can aware them easily about their right.	
		Journalists can aware people about the law which will ensure transparency.	1
		Journalists should pave the way of seeking information. People will follow them.	2
		Report on usefulness of RTI Act and the impediments.	3
07.	Who are the opponents to this law in your opinion?	Corrupt people and officials will oppose the law.	6
		Officials and political parties will oppose.	2
		Information providing authorities will oppose.	1
		Conservative people are opponents.	1
		Vested interest groups	2
08.	Who are the supporters / friends of this law?	No response	1
		Civil society, elite people, journalists and honest government officials will be friends to implement this law.	9
		People working for implementation of the law are the friends.	2
09.	What are the challenges to implementing the law?	No response	3
		Contradiction between general people and responsible authority	2
		Main challenge is opposition by corrupt people.	2
		Changing the system is the main challenge.	1
		Changing the mindset of opponents	2
		Combating corruption	1
		Involving common people is a challenge.	1
10.	What steps should be taken for effective implementation of the law in this community?	No response	1
		Organize seminar, workshop and awareness programmes in rural areas to inform people about this law and aware them about their rights.	5
		Ensure people's participation to circulate the law.	1
		Formation of citizen's group, organize training and orientation	1
		Community meetings and mass media programmes	3
		Involve youth, start social movement.	1

NGO

Sl. no.	Question	Answer	Frequency
01.	Why the RTI Act was enacted in your opinion?	No response	3
		Ensure citizen's rights	1
		Ensure transparency and accountability of public-private organization	1
		Disclose information as a fundamental right	2
		Promote people's access to information	2
		Inform people about their constitutional rights	1
		Open flow of information for good governance	2
02.	How far the people of this community are aware about the law? To what extent are they using it? What is the reason?	No response	
		People are aware about this law and they know through SMS	1
		Fifty Percent people are aware of the law.	1
		20% people know this law but don't know in details of how and where to apply for getting information.	1
		General people are less aware of RTI as a tool for getting information due to pitfalls in the law and less awareness campaign.	5
		Eighty percent (80%) people are unaware about this law.	1
		Unaware at the grassroots	3
03.	Who are the opponents to this law in your opinion?	No response	1
		No opposition	2
		Government officials, Local Chairman, member and people who do public functions.	2
		Corrupt people, political parties	2
		Public representatives, government officials	3
		Information holder who is not transparent.	1
		Violators of rights	1
04.	Who are the supporters / friends of this law?	No response	1
		Mass people, NGOs, civil society will help for implementing RTI	2
		Opposition political party, civil society, general people	3
		Teacher, civil society and mass people will favor it	4
		Sufferers, Honest people	1
		Journalist, donors	1
05.	What are the challenges to implementing the law?	No response	3
		Pressure of corrupt people	2
		Partiality and corruption	1
		Non-cooperation of the government	1
		No challenge	1
		Awareness and mindset of authorities	4
06.	What steps should be taken for effective	No response	1
		Participation of all people	1

	implementation of the law in this community?	Positive initiative for the NGO to work transparently	1
		Aware general people about positive consequence of RTI	1
		Awareness through meetings	3
		Use of media, involve educational institutes, use leaflet, poster	3
		Task force at the union and village committees	2
07.	This law covers the NGOs also. NGOs are compelled to disclose information according to this law? What is your opinion about it? Is it a problem or an advantage for the NGOs?	No response	3
		It is a positive and good initiative.	7
		It has created space for transparency and accountability.	2
08.	In your opinion what is the situation of present pro-active information disclosure and information storage system of government and non-government offices?	No response	3
		Now govt. offices are more digitalized than before.	1
		Don't know about govt. offices but private offices manage their file orderly. It should be maintained for both GO/NGO offices in a digitalized system. Upazilla has citizen charter	1
		Information storage and disclosure system not satisfactory	3
		System has to be modernized and improved	4
09.	Which information at the NGO offices are exempted from the mandate of disclosure according to the section 7 of RTI Act?	No response	4
		No secrecy for NGOs	8
10.	What changes can take place in government and private service delivery if the law is implemented properly?	No response	3
		People's rights will be protected which will reduce corruption.	1
		People will be aware and get better service	2



## **Document review**

The following documents were reviewed in conducting the baseline assessment as an activity of PCAI project:

1. Country diagnostic analysis, a study conducted by MRDI as a part of RTI situational analysis in four South Asian countries initiated by The Asia Foundation
2. RTI Act: Voice of the grassroots -- a perception assessment conducted by MRDI

### **Document 1**

The country diagnostic analysis was conducted by MRDI in 2013 in coordination with the RTI Forum of Bangladesh. The study covered three departments of the government at the national level and the same offices at the district and upazilla levels. Bogra, Barisal and Jessore districts were taken as samples at the district level.

Document review, interviews, FGD, case studies and news media analysis methodologies were applied in conducting the study. Here are some major findings of the study:

- General citizens, particularly the vulnerable segment of the society are unaware of the law.
- Information Commission and NGOs have taken initiative on awareness building, but it reaches only to a limited segment of population.
- Every office covered by this study was found to have a designated officer. This is good progress by Bangladesh.
- Designated officers do not have clear idea about their responsibilities. They have little motivation to do the job and they think they are just carrying out an office order.
- As regards voluntary disclosure of information, several efforts have been initiated. Almost all offices have websites and there is a positive initiative to update the sites. Since 2007, it is mandatory for all government offices to have citizen charter. It has been reinforced by RTI Act 2009.
- There is a positive trend among the journalists in recent times in using RTI law for seeking information. Several journalists have used the law to seek information to be used in reports. But newsroom leaders need to be more sensitive and supportive.
- There are some confusions and misconceptions among the bureaucrats about the section 7 of the RTI Act, 2009 which exempts some information from the mandate of disclosure for which this section needs to be revised or simplified.

## Document 2

The perception assessment was conducted in 2010, shortly after enactment of the law, in partnership with PROGATI - USAID. The study aimed to assess the perception level of the stakeholders about RTI Act and identify the key issues and constraints in implementing the act. Roundtables were organized in divisional cities of the country including Khulna and Barisal. Working areas of the PCAI project, Jessore and Barisal fall under these two divisions.

Panel discussants and participants of the meetings discussed about strengths, weaknesses and use of the act, challenges of its implementation and also made some recommendations on measures to be taken for implementing the act. Here are some major recommendations that surfaced from the roundtables in Khulna and Barisal.

- Human resource development for information disclosure through recruiting trained personnel and organizing need based training. An enabling environment has to be created in the organization for providing information on demand.
- Develop policy on information storage, management and disclosure in compliance with the guideline of Information Commission.
- Disclose the important and essential information proactively.
- Create greater awareness among the people about the law and its benefit.
- Prepare list of information disclosure units of the government ministries and departments, NGOs receiving foreign funds and their designated officers. Statistics on activities related to implementation of RTI Act has to be preserved.
- Qualitative issues like reasons for reluctance to provide information, Barriers to receiving information, trend of proactive disclosure after enactment of the law have also to be recorded.
- Institutions have to expedite the steps to deploy designated officer and appellate authority , organize training and list out disclosed and undisclosed information.
- From the demand side citizens expect to receive information on demand, apply their right to appeal and establish their right to access information.