



TEARING THE VEIL OF SECRECY

LESSONS LEARNT

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মানুষের জন্য
manusher jonno
promoting human rights and good governance

জনগণের ক্ষমতায়ন এবং
স্বচ্ছতা ও জবাবদিহিতা প্রতিষ্ঠার লক্ষ্যে
তথ্য অধিকার আইন পাস হয়েছে



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TABLE OF CONTENT



FOREWORD	01
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	04
INTRODUCTION	06
GOAL & OBJECTIVES	08
PREPARING FOR OPENNESS	10
THE CAMP	14
ACHIEVEMENTS	17
A COMMON CHALLENGE	20
KEY INSIGHTS	21
LOOKING FORWARD	24
CONCLUSION	26
CASE STUDIES	27
TRAVELING TOGETHER TOWARDS THE VISION	36
RTI APPLICATION STATUS	39
LIST OF CAMP PARTICIPANTS	44

ACRONYMS



ASA	Association for Social Advancement
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DO	Designated Information Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GD	General Diary
IC	Information Commission
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDG	Information Disclosure Guideline
JANAK	Jagroto Nagorik Committee
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
MRDI	Management and Resources Development Initiative
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PCAI	Promoting Citizens' Access to Information
RTI	Right to Information Act, 2009
UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parisad
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development-
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding
VP	Vested Property

FOREWORD

Enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2009 is a milestone in the history of legislation of Bangladesh. The significance is that, unlike other laws, RTI Act is applied upon the government and NGOs using public money and foreign funds by the people, instead of common practice of the government applying law upon people. It is undoubtedly a potential tool for ensuring free flow of information, which, in turn, will promote transparency and curb corruption in the society.

While enactment of the law has been acclaimed as a significant achievement, its implementation, both from the demand and supply ends of information, is being seen as a challenge. The issues of creating demand for information among the citizens and preparing authorities to provide information have to be addressed to keep this demand-supply chain smoothly operative.

In view of this scenario, Information Commission Bangladesh, government bodies and NGOs/CSOs are taking different initiatives to implement the RTI Act. Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI), as a frontline advocate for the promotion of RTI, has been working relentlessly through its innovative initiatives.

One such initiative is implementation of a project Promoting Citizens' Access to Information (PCAI), supported by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) with the aim to promote access to information for the people by keeping the demand - supply chain of information increasingly operative. Major purposes of the project were to sensitize authorities and beneficiaries about demand for and supply of information and develop capacity of information seekers and providers under the RTI Act.

Since government has the biggest stake in disclosing information, MRDI, under the project, has involved government bodies, starting from the ministry to the upazila administration, in the process of advocacy and capacity building on RTI Act and information disclosure. Information Disclosure Guideline (IDG) has been developed for the ministries and relevant departments with the technical assistance of MRDI. Series of meetings and consultations were organized with the Information Commission, Cabinet Division and other ministries to outline the format of the guideline. Training and orientation were organized for the designated officers. These initiatives are helping the supply side getting prepared for providing information.

To create demand for information among people and convince them to seek information from authorities using the RTI Act, MRDI intervened in 12 upazilas of Barisal and Jessore as pilot initiative. Interventions included awareness campaign, cultural programmes, debate competition, public gathering and events which drew attention of the rural people to an issue they hardly thought about. Citizens' forum "Jagrata Nagorik Committee" (JANAK) formed with community leaders, teachers and other professionals played a vital role in earning community support to RTI.

To consolidate this support and facilitate direct involvement of the people in the process of applying RTI Act for their benefit, MRDI organized an RTI camp in Shinghajhuli union of Chowgacha upazila, Jessore as an innovative approach. The camp sensitized the participants on what change information can bring in their lives through discussions and interactions. Then they were oriented on the procedure of seeking information from authorities by using the RTI Act. Finally, the participants submitted RTI application to government and non-government offices seeking information they need for their life and livelihood. The camp, first of its kind in Bangladesh, could create a vibration in the community about their right to know. Participants developed a feeling of confidence in going through the process of seeking information they need, which they perceived as a difficult task before.

This publication 'Tearing the Veil of Secrecy' is a compilation of the background and proceedings of the camp, lessons learnt from it, some success stories and recommendations on future direction. The publication also contains in an inner jacket a video documentary on a real life story on how marginalized people can use RTI to bring changes in their lives.

Both the Information Commission and the Cabinet Division provided crucial support to MRDI, which made the RTI Camp a success. Presence of high profile government officials in the camp and their constant support made people realize the importance of the camp. District and upazila administration, local elected representatives and people of the community extended support and cooperation in organizing the camp.

We are thankful to the Information Commission and the Cabinet Division for their all out support to MRDI and partnership at different phases of intervention. These two institutions have always led from the front in establishing the people's right to information.

Presence of Former Chief Information Commissioner Ambassador (Rtd.) Mohammed Farooq, Information Commissioner Nepal Chandra Sarker, Former Secretary (Coordination and Reforms) of Cabinet Division Md. Nazrul Islam and staff of Information Commission in the inaugural ceremony substantially contributed to the success of the RTI Camp. We express our thankful gratitude to them. Our sincere thanks to Dr. Md. Humayun Kabir, Deputy Commissioner of Jessore, S.M. Habib, Upazila Chairman, Chowgacha and Shushama Sultana, Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Chowgacha for their hearty cooperation in organizing the camp. Special thanks to the Chairman of Shinghajhuli union Rezaur Rahman Rendu for allowing us to use the union parisad premises, extending all out cooperation and his wonderful attitude to RTI. Such a positive mindset of an elected representative at the grassroots is encouraging. Authority of the Shaheed Moshir Rahman Secondary School, participants of the RTI Camp and people of Shinghajhuli union deserve special thanks from us. Members of JANAK, Chowgacha played a formidable role in organizing the camp. We are thankful to them.

MRDI implemented number of advocacy, research and capacity building activities to achieve the objective of the project which is directly linked with the camp. This accomplishment would not be possible without the support and cooperation of the former CIC, two former Information Commissioners Dr. Sadeka Halim and Md. Abu Taher and immediate past Secretary of Information Commission Md. Farhad Hossain. We extend our gratitude to them.

In order to promote people's right to know, MRDI conducted research studies, undertook policy advocacy initiatives and organized interactive meetings on relevant issues. Honorable Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu, former Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiul Alam, Principal Secretary, Prime Minister's Office Md. Abul Kalam Azad, Secretary, Law and Justice Division, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Abu Saleh Sk. Md. Zahirul Haque and Information Commissioner Prof. Dr. Khurshida Begum Sayeed inspired us through their participation in these programmes. We extend our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the Honorable Minister and other dignitaries for their kind presence and valuable comments.

Disclosing social safety-net information through wall writing at Shinghajhuli union has been an exceptional idea. Chief Information Commissioner Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman and Secretary-in-charge (Coordination and Reforms) Cabinet Division NM Zeaul Alam visited the union to see the impact of the initiative. We feel inspired and grateful to them.

MRDI's coordinators at Jessore and Barisal Mobinul Islam Mobin and Liton Bashar respectively are our strength in the field. Field coordinators of the project are working hard to discharge their responsibilities. We are thankful to all of them.

This thanks-giving will remain incomplete if we don't mention the name of our guide, Executive Director of MJF Shaheen Anam, a torch bearer of RTI movement in Bangladesh. Not only for this project - she has always been a source of inspiration to us. We are thankful and grateful to her.

Publishing this lesson learnt document and the concept of the documentary was not included in the project budget. Mohammed Iftekher Hussain, Deputy Manager (RTI), MJF felt its importance and incorporated it in the budget as an activity. Otherwise this publication would not have been possible. Hearty thanks to him.

With a heavy heart, we recall the memories of late Farzana Naim, Director (Governance), MJF. The concept of such RTI camp was her brainchild. Relentlessly she advised us with newer insights and guidance, today, this publication reciprocates our humble gratitude to this soothsayer. Let her soul rest in peace.

National and local media have not only provided sufficient coverage to our programmes at different stages, but also highlighted the total procedure with keen interest. Support of the journalists of Jessore has been very helpful in organizing the camp successfully. Thanks to the media and the journalists.

This publication is the product of hard and sincere work of Syed Zain Al-Mahmood. He has really done a wonderful job by analyzing the activities, identifying the lessons learnt and recommending some future actions. Production house Image Rain has skillfully produced the documentary depicting real life story from the results of the camp. MRDI thankfully acknowledges their works.

Officials of MRDI worked hard for compiling and publishing this document. They deserve special thanks for this.

Finally, our sincere gratitude and thanks to UKAid for inspiring us to address the issue of citizens' right to information. We hope this support will continue.

This document is published with the hope that it will inspire other organizations and groups to replicate such initiative and promote people's access to information they need for their life and betterment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to information is essential for a democratic society where citizens are empowered to exercise their voice, to effectively monitor and hold public officials to account and to make informed choices about issues that affect their lives.

The Right to Information Act, 2009, a historic piece of legislation that emerged essentially as a manifestation of the desire to move the democratic process progressively forward, has the potential to improve governance by empowering all citizens, including the poor and the marginalized.

However, in the years since the enactment of the RTI Act, implementation has remained uneven and its impact limited, mainly due to a lack of awareness among citizens and officials. Capacity constraints among both the users and the providers of information are also seen as a major challenge.

To address the ground realities with both the demand and the supply of information, MRDI is implementing the PCAI project, with support from Manusher Jonno Foundation. The Information Commission and the Cabinet Division have provided the necessary assistance for the project which aims to raise awareness about RTI and build capacity of the users and providers of information.

As part of the initiative to raise awareness and build capacity at grassroots level, MRDI arranged an RTI camp in Shinghajhuli union of Chowgacha Upazilla in Jessore in August 2015. Thirty citizens participated in the camp, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, in which they learned what changes information can bring in their life instead of teaching them the articles and clauses of the RTI Act. They also learned about the right of access to information. The participants prepared and filed 58 RTI applications seeking information from the relevant authorities regarding services and issues that affect their lives.

A follow-up camp was organized in October 2015 which built on the gains of the earlier camp. Use of information received through applications were discussed. Applicants, who were not given information by the DOs, were facilitated by the follow up camp to appeal to the authority. Next step of the procedure was also explained. Some participants also planned for new applications.

The impact of the RTI camp was groundbreaking. People who had been completely oblivious of their right to know and had for long been excluded from decision making processes, suddenly felt empowered and emboldened.

Out of 58 RTI applications, chosen and filed by the applicants themselves, 41 received the information without delay. Fifteen appeals were submitted out of which ten applicants received the information they sought and five had to complain to the Information Commission for the necessary information. It may be mentioned that due to refusal to

receive application and absence of Designated Officer, complaint against two authorities were directly submitted to the Information Commission. The fact that they could demand and receive information from the authorities was a revelation for most of the participants, something they had never experienced before.

The applications resulted in proactive disclosure of information on 5 areas of social safety net and the budget of the union parisad (UP) through writings on the walls of UP complex and 9 villages of Shinghajhuli union and bill boards.

The initiative also led government and NGO officials to take stock of their capacity to produce, preserve and transmit data. In many ways, this helped to build a bridge between the authorities and the community, according to the Deputy Commissioner of Jessore.

There were challenges as well. Some authorities were reluctant to provide information, didn't store the information properly or refused to respect the applicant's right to the information. Some officials resorted to delaying tactics, seemingly in the hope that the applicant would give up.

Generally, there was more resistance from NGOs when information was sought compared to government offices. This was evident by the fact that all the RTI applications directed to NGO offices, except one, had to go to appeal.

ASA, a national level NGO, had no designated officers to provide information. The organization designated 3,033 officers as providers of information after a hearing at the Information Commission as a result of one of the RTI applications generated in the RTI camp. Before the application, ASA strongly believed that they were not under the purview of the act.

INTRODUCTION

The Right to Information Act can empower people by ensuring citizens' access to important information regarding services and benefits provided by government agencies and non-government organizations.

The Right to Information (RTI) Act 2009 was adopted in the first session of the Ninth Parliament on March 29, 2009. The provisions of the law became effective on July 1, 2009. The Government formed the Bangladesh Information Commission as provided by the law.

The preamble to the Act refers to the constitutional commitment to freedom of thought, conscience and speech as a fundamental right and on that basis recognizes the importance of ensuring free flow of information and people's right to information.

Article 19 of both the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that the right to freedom of expression includes not only freedom to 'impart information and ideas of all kinds', but also freedom to 'seek' and 'receive' them 'regardless of frontiers' and in whatever medium.

Article 19 covers both concepts of information and communication. By doing so, people then become generators, users and conduits of information. Article 22 of the ICCPR also provides for the right to freedom of association with others which enables collective analysis of information and can lead to collective action.

The internationally accepted understanding of the right to information asserts that governments hold information in trust on behalf of citizens, and therefore, citizens have the right of access to the information held by the authorities.

However, since colonial times, citizens have been denied access to information and have for long been excluded from decision making processes in public affairs.

Public officials - civil servants and elected officials alike - have all too often hidden behind outdated official secrecy rules. The common people, especially the poor and the less educated, have been oblivious to the right of access to information and have not dared to ask questions. A barrier has emerged between the rulers and the ruled. Nongovernment organizations that talk about openness and empowerment have often been negligent when it comes to being transparent themselves.

Against such a backdrop, the potential contribution of RTI to good governance may become severely limited unless the barriers to effective implementation of the RTI Act are vigorously addressed.

Experience in the field shows real barriers which hinder both the capacity and incentives of the government to produce information, and the ability of citizens to claim their right to information and to use it to demand better governance and public services.

Citizens may not be aware of their legal right to information, or, in some cases may be reluctant to assert it, either because of fear of powerful vested interests, or a prevailing culture of not questioning authority. Also in some cases, there are structural barriers to poor people accessing and using information. For example, access to the Internet remains low in rural areas, and many people still cannot read or write. Low-income citizens in rural areas may not have the time and resources to pursue RTI applications, especially if the authorities concerned are reluctant to provide information promptly. From the supply end, some officials may not be actively supportive of the right to information, particularly in contexts where there is a legacy of 'closed' government or fear of exposure.

MRDI organized the RTI Camp at Shinghajhuli, Jessore to address these barriers, by building the capacity and raising awareness among both information seekers and information providers.

GOAL & OBJECTIVES

GOAL

The RTI Camp was organized to aware people about the change information can bring in their lives and develop the habit of seeking information applying the RTI Act for ensuring transparency and accountability in the governance system.

OBJECTIVES

Following three objectives were set to attain the stated goal:

1. Raise grassroots awareness about the right of access to information and its importance in the context of good governance.
2. Build capacity among the local population to use the RTI Act to access information beneficial to their lives.
3. Assist camp participants to file RTI applications about information they needed and help them through the RTI process - including application, appeal and complaints.

ATTAINING THE OBJECTIVES

As a result of the camp, participants learned that access to information fosters openness and transparency in decision-making. An informed public is also likely to be vigilant against corruption within and outside of government.

Participants also learned that the RTI Act gives every citizen the right to information from the authority, subject to provision of the Act, and that the authority must, on demand from a citizen, be bound to provide him or her with the information.

Out of 58 RTI applications filed by camp participants, 50 were directed to government offices while the rest were submitted to NGOs. Typical applications included seeking records related to the dispensing of medicine at the local health complex, benefits / beneficiaries of social safety net programs, project information of NGOs, regulations and operations of micro credit programs and government allocation and expenditure on public works.

In organizing the RTI Camp, MRDI had to take into account a complex interrelationship between stakeholders in the locality. This had to be carefully analyzed and dealt with in order to mitigate potential resistance and to ensure the camp met the desired outcomes.

As in any RTI intervention, there were a number of stakeholders to deal with. These include creators, users and intermediaries of information. It was recognized that the media can often play a role in fulfilling the "intermediary" function but other entities, such as community spokespersons, local government officials and NGOs also fulfill an important intermediary role.



MRDI engaged the media in every step of the way, including well-attended press conferences at the opening and closing of the RTI camp. MRDI recognizes, and this was amply illustrated through the experiences at the camp, that media has a vital role in building an inclusive information-based society. The

media can not only play an important role in monitoring the delivery of services by government offices and NGOs, it can also raise awareness on RTI Act and help promote a culture of openness and transparency.

Many of the significant grassroots level issues that participants focused on at the camp, usually do not come to public attention unless publicized by the media. By using the RTI act, the media can highlight and even investigate issues that concern the larger public interest - but it can also inspire members of the public or aggrieved parties to seek information using the RT Act.

In the case of Jessore, following the progress of the RTI camp by the media played an important role in making many officials come up with proactive disclosure. MRDI's persuasion and media's involvement prompted the Union Parishad chairman of Shinghajhuli not only to disclose information about the budget and five areas of safety net program including Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), but also to write them on the walls of the UP complex and villages of the union. This has won plaudits from the locals as a proactive measure.

The fiscal budget, for example, is a central tool for the local government to improve the human development situation. However, vulnerable groups often have limited access to budget-creating processes or the budget itself. The disclosure of the budget and information on the VGD/VGF beneficiaries set an example of transparency that many locals said would make it difficult for other officials to indulge in corruption.



PREPARING FOR OPENNESS

Since the RTI Camp and related activities were unique and first-time events in Bangladesh, this was uncharted territory. Without any precedence to follow, MRDI had to chart the course for the RTI awareness and capacity-building activities in Jessore and build its RTI operations there from ground up.

The first and obvious step was to map the RTI landscape, identify the challenges and find solutions. MRDI spent roughly two years, from mid-2013 to mid-2015, in laying the groundwork that ultimately led to the successful RTI Camp in Chowgacha.

The risks were high: vested interests, political cliques, the local administration and even the people themselves might view RTI-inspired openness with suspicion and fear. Capacity constraints and poor records maintenance practices might render useless the most well-intentioned moves to implement RTI. Apathy among the local population might make the RTI camp a futile exercise.



MRDI went about analyzing and addressing these risks in a systematic way. Along the road, valuable lessons were learned, key insights were gained and important alliances were built.

In attempting to identify potential opponents to RTI, transparency activists often think of the government as a likely source of resistance. It was MRDI's experience in Jessore that the administration, from cabinet level to the local level, was by and large helpful and supportive of RTI.

The cabinet division sent a letter to the local administration setting out the goals of the project and this was very helpful to secure the cooperation of local officials. The Deputy Commissioner of Jessore was consistently supportive and the Upazila Nirbahi Officers of six upazilas of Jessore were proactive in helping the RTI efforts.



BRINGING POLICYMAKERS ONSIDE

Since the beginning of the Project, MRDI decided to act with the support and assistance of the Information Commission and the Cabinet Division. These two institutions have always led from the front in establishing the people's right to information. Both the Information Commission and the Cabinet Division provided crucial support to MRDI, which enabled the successful conclusion of the RTI Camp.

The Information Commission provided various kinds of assistance, including technical advice, at all stages of the RTI Camp. Information Commission officials helped to decide the content of the RTI Camp and sent letters to various levels of the administration seeking assistance. The presence of the then Chief Information Commissioner Mohammed Farooq and Information Commissioner Nepal Chandra Sarker at the inaugural event lent wind to the sails of the RTI Camp effort.

Of the RTI Applications generated at the Camp, seven went to the Information Commission for disposal. The Information Commission was largely seen to be pro-people. The rulings from the Information Commissioners, including the decision to reimburse the applicants for their expenses, gave encouragement to the applicants, all of whom were poor villagers.

The Cabinet Division has been working sincerely to implement the RTI Act at all levels, including within the administration. The Cabinet Division lent its support to MRDI to hold the RTI Camp successfully. At the very beginning, letters sent to the Deputy Commissioners of Jessore and Barisal, requesting assistance for the advocacy, helped set the tone for the local administration. The presence of the Cabinet Division at various events related to the Camp was a welcome boost for the RTI Camp and related efforts.

The role played by the Information Commission and the Cabinet Division in the formulation of the government's policy for proactive disclosure by the ministries is noteworthy. Initially, five ministries of the government and their associated departments went for proactive disclosure and that experience was used to draw up a Proactive Information Disclosure Guideline, which was published on the website of the Cabinet Division.



ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY: JANAK

Having secured the cooperation of the administration, MRDI focused on the community. It became clear that the thrust of the resistance would come from political factions and vested interests within the community.

To nullify and overcome this source of resistance, MRDI set up a civil society group called Jagrata Nagorik Committee (JANAK) in 6 upazilas of Jessore. JANAK became a crucial platform for community engagement and its members played a pivotal role in raising the profile of the RTI camp within Jessore.

The selection of the JANAK members had to follow a carefully calibrated process. Various local figures were interested in getting their supporters included in the committees. MRDI fought to include only people who had credibility and acceptance within the community. As a result, JANAK became the vanguard of the RTI movement in the project areas.

The activities of JANAK played a central role in dispelling any lingering doubts about RTI in the six upazilas where MRDI worked. The JANAK in Chowgacha was the most proactive, actively "door stepping" in the community in support of RTI and this was one of the reasons for the choice of Chowgacha as the location of the first RTI Camp.

MRDI engaged local political leaders, both through JANAK and directly. This engagement by and large succeeded in turning potential opponents into supporters.

INVOLVING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Between 2013 and 2015, local officials in the six upazilas were trained on Right to Information Act, 2009 and its implementation. MRDI also provided assistance on information management as follow up support of the training. Meetings and interactions with government officials of Jessore district, Chowgacha upazila and 5 other upazilas of the project were organized in preparation for the RTI Camp. Many challenges and limitations were identified and resolved. These initiatives were helpful during the Camp phase when citizens sought information.



CONVINCING THE CHAIRMAN

Shinghajhuli Union Parishad chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu had potentially the most to fear from RTI. He had been elected as Chairman unopposed after his brother was killed by alleged political opponents. Facing a reelection, Rendu was initially hesitant about RTI activities in his area. He tried to thwart the camp by including his supporters in the list of participants.

After several meetings, MRDI was able to convince Rendu that throwing his weight behind the RTI Camp would increase his popularity since voters would see him as a new breed of politician who is transparent and accountable.

The Chairman was motivated to the extent that he decided to proactively disclose his budget and the list and procedure of selecting the beneficiaries of Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) safety net programs. He wrote them on the walls of the Union Parishad and the villages for the public to see.

Winning over the local Chairman was a key victory that facilitated the successful conclusion of the RTI Camp. It is also a precedent that can be used to hold other elected representatives accountable.

THE MEDIA

The media was identified as an important ally early on in the project. MRDI engaged the media during the key phases of the RTI camp. The divisional coordinator of MRDI in Jessore is also the editor of Jessore's most popular newspaper. The participation of the local and national news outlets helped raise awareness about the camp and silenced potential opponents. No one wanted to be portrayed in the media as opposing transparency and accountability. MRDI's close relation with national and local media also facilitated the process.

Most media outlets ran positive coverage of the RTI Camp and published reports stressing the importance of RTI in ensuring good governance.

People must know about RTI Act for optimum use

Speakers tell first ever RTI Camp; chief info commissioner calls it the only law that can be implemented by citizens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Benefits of the Right to Information Act need to be highlighted to ensure its optimum use by citizens, said speakers at the country's first ever RTI Camp yesterday.

MRDI and Jagroto Nagorik Committee (JANAK) organised the camp with support from Manusher Jonno Foundation at Shaheed Moshir Rahman High School in Jessore, according to a press release.

Chief Information Commissioner Mohammed Farooq was present as chief guest, while Deputy Commissioner of Jessore Dr Md Humayun Kabir chaired the function.

Mohammed Farooq said the act is

the only law in the country that citizens can apply on authorities instead of the other way round.

Citizens are empowered by the act and the maiden camp has added a new dimension to the campaign for people's right to know, he added.

Information Commissioner Nepal Chandra Sarker said implementation and benefits of the RTI Act depend upon the extent of use of the law by people. They would use it frequently if they were aware of the act's benefits, he said.

Hasibur Rahman, executive director of MRDI, said the camp wants to make the people's right to know movement more dynamic.

Dr Md Humayun Kabir said the act would make the district administration and the activities of upazila and union parishads more transparent and people-friendly.

"The presence of dignitaries has inspired us to be more positive about people's right to know," he said.

Additional Superintendent of Police of Jessore Md Shahid Abu Sarwar and Chairman of Chowgachha upazila SM Habibur Rahman, among others, also spoke.

Representatives from the district and upazila administrations, journalists, teachers, students and about 1,500 peoples from all walks of life were present.

CHOOSING CAMP PARTICIPANTS

The selection of RTI Camp participants was a major challenge since getting the right people to take part was vital to the success of the camp. The aim was to ensure the participation of neutral, hardworking local villagers deprived of services and benefits.



The Union Parishad Chairman lobbied in favour of a list he had prepared. The list was unacceptable since it was populated with the Chairman's supporters. The Chairman was upset because his list had been rejected. This had to be handled tactfully by explaining that placing his supporters in the camp might bring allegations of a cover-up. JANAK also prepared a list. A final list was drawn up by MRDI staff with the help of JANAK, who went door to door interviewing potential participants.

THE CAMP

Prior to organizing this five day camp, a preparatory meeting, a press conference in Jessore, inaugural ceremony of the camp at the premises of Shaheed Moshir Rahman Secondary School at Shinghajhuli were organized. Then the five day RTI Camp was held and a follow up camp was organized after six weeks. The camp activities came to an end through a press conference at the Shinghajhuli UP office.

PREPARATORY MEETING

A preparatory meeting was held with the participants. The meeting informed the participants about the purpose of the camp, its procedure, who will be involved, what benefits it will bring. It was an opportunity to assess the group's preparedness as participants of the camp. It also developed a group feeling among the participants and facilitated them to prepare themselves to face potential challenges collectively.

PRESS CONFERENCE

A press conference, aimed to share with the journalists the purpose of the RTI camp, its modus operandi, expected results and future directions was organized at the auditorium of Jessore Press Club. It was also a wake up call to the authorities to prepare themselves. First of its kind in Bangladesh, the camp received huge media coverage as a successful advocacy effort. All national and local print, online and TV media outlets attended the conference.





INAUGURAL CEREMONY

Inauguration of the 5 day RTI camp was done in a different approach which created a stir in the community. Thousands of villagers, community gatekeepers, elected representatives, local elites, youth, government and NGO representatives enthusiastically attended the inaugural ceremony organized at the premises of Shaheed Moshir Rahman Secondary School at Shinghajhuli. Presence high profile dignitaries including the then Chief Information Commissioner Mohammed Farooq as the chief guest, Information Commissioner Nepal Chandra Sarker and the then Secretary (Coordination & Reforms) Md. Nazrul Islam as special guests made the programme a special one. Presided over by Dr. Md. Humayun Kabir, Deputy Commissioner of Jessore, the session was addressed by upazila Chairman of Chowgacha S.M. Habib, upazila Nirbahi Officer, Shushama Sultana, Chairman of Shinghajhuli union Rezaur Rahman Rendu and MRDI's Executive Director Hasibur Rahman.

Main features of the RTI Act was presented before the audience through a colorful performance of pot and pala songs. Leaflet, cartoon book and easy read text on RTI developed by Manusher Jonno Foundation were distributed among the audience. Presence of the representatives of the highest profile of the government indicates their commitment to RTI and support to the camp. This commitment has been helpful to organizing the camp and implementing follow up activities.

"Let us all
vow that the RTI
movement in
Bangladesh will
gain momentum
from Shinghajhuli
Union, Chowgacha
Upazila."

*Mohammed
Farooq*

The then Chief Information
Commissioner



FIVE DAYS OF THE CAMP

First half of the camp sensitized the participants about definition of information, importance of information in life, strength of free flow of information, what change information can bring in life through discussions, debates, role play, group interactions, poster designing etc. The second half of the camp focused on the RTI Act and its application. Participants identified the information they need for their life and livelihood, issues on obstacles to receiving services from public authorities and NGOs. They were oriented on the procedure of seeking information from authorities by using the RTI Act. Finally, the participants submitted RTI application to government and non-government offices seeking information. They shared their feeling of getting empowered through practicing their rights.



FOLLOW UP CAMP

Knowledge acquired from the camp was reviewed in the two day follow up camp. Applicants shared their experiences of receiving information and interacted on how they can use and share the information with their neighbors. Also those who did not receive information within 20 working days or who received wrong or partial information submitted appeal to the authorities. A total of 15 appeals were filed - 9 for not receiving response and 6 for providing wrong or partial information.

CONCLUDING PRESS CONFERENCE

The RTI Camp and related activities were formally closed with a press conference that was as well-attended and widely publicized as the inauguration. The process that started involving media in a press conference, also ended with a similar

event. MRDI shared lessons learnt from the camp, success, achievement, challenges of the camp and future plan with the media and declared closing of the camp. All national and local media outlets of Jessore attended the conference. Reporters interacted with the camp participants about the cases presented and eventually visited field locations to see the wall writings which is new approach of proactive disclosure of information. The conference got wide coverage over media. Such a press conference at union level has set a milestone of open flow of information.

৩০৩৩ তথ্য কর্মকর্তা নিয়োগ দিয়েছে আশা

যশোর অফিস

উন্নয়ন সংস্থা আশার সুদের হার-সংক্রান্ত তথ্য চেয়ে না পেয়ে যশোরের চৌগাছা উপজেলার সিংহঝুলি গ্রামের এক ব্যক্তি তথ্য কমিশনে অভিযোগ করেন। ওই অভিযোগের তদানীন্তন শেখের সংস্থা কর্তৃপক্ষ ওই ব্যক্তিকে তথ্য দিয়েছে। এরপর কর্তৃপক্ষ সংস্থার সারা দেশের বিভিন্ন শাখায় ৩ হাজার ৩৩ জন তথ্য কর্মকর্তা নিয়োগ দিয়েছে।

গতকাল বুধবার দুপুরে চৌগাছার সিংহঝুলি ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ মিলনায়তনে তথ্য অধিকার ক্যাম্প ও পরবর্তী অভিজ্ঞতাবিষয়ক সংবাদ সম্মেলনে বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা এমআরডিআইয়ের নির্বাহী পরিচালক হাসিবুর রহমান এসব তথ্য দেন।

এ সময় আশার কাছে তথ্য চেয়ে আবেদন করা আরিফুল আলম নামের ওই ব্যক্তিও উপস্থিত ছিলেন। তিনি সিঙ্গাপুরপ্রবাসী। আরিফুল আলম বলেন, 'আশার ক্ষুদ্রঋণ ও সুদের হার বিষয়ে আমার জানার আগ্রহ ছিল অনেক দিনের। এমআরডিআইয়ের তথ্য অধিকার বিষয়ে ক্যাম্প অংশ নিয়ে তথ্য চেয়ে আবেদন করার বিষয়টি জানতে পারি। তখন আশার

তথ্য কমিশনের নির্দেশ

এমআরডিআইয়ের
নির্বাহী পরিচালক
হাসিবুর রহমান বলেন,
এটি তথ্য অধিকার
আইনের একটি বিরাট
সাফল্য

স্থানীয় কার্যালয়ে আবেদন করে তথ্য না পেয়ে তথ্য কমিশনে অভিযোগ দাখিল করি।

হাসিবুর রহমান বলেন, তথ্য কমিশনে অভিযোগের তদানীন্তন গিয়ে আশার কর্তৃপক্ষ তথ্য দেয়। এ ছাড়া তথ্য কমিশনের নির্দেশে আশার কর্তৃপক্ষ সারা দেশে ৩ হাজার ৩৩ জন তথ্য কর্মকর্তা নিয়োগ দেয়। এটি তথ্য অধিকার আইনের একটি বিরাট সাফল্য হিসেবে তিনি উল্লেখ করেন।

তথ্য অধিকার আইনে তথ্য চেয়ে চৌগাছা উপজেলার বিভিন্ন দপ্তরে আবেদন করা ৩২ জন নারী-পুরুষ ওই সম্মেলনে উপস্থিত ছিলেন। ২৩ আগষ্ট থেকে গত জানুয়ারি পর্যন্ত পাঁচ

মাসে তাঁরা সরকারি ও বেসরকারি দপ্তরে তথ্য চেয়ে ৫৮টি আবেদন দাখিল করেন।

হাসিবুর রহমান সম্মেলনে লিখিত বক্তব্যে বলেন, এর মধ্যে সরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানে ৫০টি ও বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানে আটটি আবেদন করা হয়। আবেদনের পর শুরুতে ৩৯টি প্রতিষ্ঠান তথ্য প্রদান করে। অন্যান্য প্রতিষ্ঠান পরে তথ্য দেয়। আর্থিক বা ভুল তথ্য সরবরাহ করেছে সাতটি প্রতিষ্ঠান।

সংবাদ সম্মেলনে উপস্থিত ছিলেন এমআরডিআই খুলনার বিভাগীয় সমন্বয়কারী মবিনুল ইসলাম, জাগ্রেত নাগরিক কমিটি চৌগাছার সভাপতি মাহবুবুল আশরাফ, এমআরডিআই কর্মকর্তা হামিদুল ইসলাম এবং এস এম আরিফুজ্জামান।

এ ব্যাপারে গতকাল সন্ধ্যায় আশার যশোর শাখার ব্যবস্থাপক মোস্তফা কামালের মুঠোফোনে কল করলে তা বন্ধ পাওয়া যায়। তবে কার্যালয়ের সাবেক ব্যবস্থাপক ও বর্তমানে আশার জামালপুর শাখার নির্বাহক আল মামুন বলেন, সম্প্রতি প্রধান কার্যালয় থেকে তাঁদের কাছে এই মর্মে চিঠি এসেছে, শাখা ব্যবস্থাপকই তথ্য কর্মকর্তার দায়িত্বে থাকবেন।



ACHIEVEMENTS

Access to information is not only about promoting and protecting citizens' right to information but is equally concerned with promoting and protecting the use of information to voice one's views, to participate in democratic processes that take place at all levels and to set priorities for action.

In recognition of this, MRDI concentrated on several key interventions at the RTI camp in Shinghajhuli, Jessore.

SENSITIZING AND RAISING AWARENESS

The camp created a lot of interest and enthusiasm among the residents of Shinghajhuli. Thirty citizens participated in the camp, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, where they learned about the right of access to information. The 30 participants prepared and filed 58 RTI applications seeking information from the relevant authorities regarding services and issues that affect their lives.

However, dozens of anecdotes and interviews with villagers show that awareness about the RTI Act spread far beyond the camp participants. News of the camp spread through word of mouth and locals crammed the union council auditorium during the closing ceremony of the RTI camp.

Enthusiastic local residents allowed the use of their walls for wall writing.

Monirul Islam, a shopkeeper in Shinghajhuli, had offered a wall of his shop for black-on-yellow writing that proclaimed the criteria for receiving the VGD/VGF government safety-net benefits. Although he wasn't a participant at the camp, he said he had heard about the project and was strongly in favor of information disclosure.

"People should know who will get government benefits and why," he said.

TURNING ENTHUSIASM INTO ACTION

A core activity of the camp was building capacity of activists, information seekers and providers under the RTI Act.

Camp participants were trained to identify the areas where they needed information, to prepare an RTI application and to submit it to the appropriate authority. They understood that this was not an academic exercise or "dummy run" but a real-life situation where they could exercise their right as citizens of Bangladesh.

Most of them chose to demand information about situations where they felt they had been deprived for lack of knowledge.



"My daughter now studies in class viii. For last seven years I have been paying Taka 20 each year for receiving books from the school. This year I got them free. It seems to be a magic to me!"

Aleya Begum
Camp Participant

Rashida Khatun, a 32-year-old housewife, said she had been turned away by officials at the local health complex when she tried to get medicine. After she was told the drug she wanted was unavailable, she filed an RTI application seeking a list of drugs that had been dispensed at the health complex of Chowgacha as well as the names of the beneficiaries. She was given wrong information by the DO. Then she appealed to the Civil Surgeon of Jessore and was not given any response. She filed a complaint to the Information Commission and received the information.

"I don't think there will be irregularities in dispensing medicine at the health complex anymore," she said. "Officials will realize that the public have a right to know."

Aleya Begum, mother of a school going child wanted to know from upazila secondary education office, whether money is required to get text book from the school and if so, how much is to be paid. She also wanted a copy of the government circular in this regard. She got information from the authority and now Aleya and other guardians do not have to pay any money for books for their children.

Another applicant Mizanur Rahman demanded to know the criteria and procedure for getting electric connections. Despite installation of electric poles, part of the village was deprived of electric connection. He got information and the community got electric connection after he pressed ahead with his RTI application.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

As part of the Promoting Citizens' Access to Information project, MRDI facilitated the setting up of a civil society group called Jagrata Nagorik Committee (JANAK) in 6 upazilas in each of Jessore and Barisal districts, committed to an open, information-centric society. The members of the committee of Chowgacha, Jessore played an important role in organizing and publicizing the activities at the RTI camp and the issue of RTI in general.

Government officials and elected representatives were engaged as part of the sensitization. The Deputy Commissioner of Jessore and the upazila Nirbahi Officer of Chowgacha remained engaged throughout the process and lent their support.

The Shinghajhuli Union Parishad chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu turned into a strong supporter of information disclosure from his position of maintaining culture of secrecy. He extended all out support and cooperation at each step of organizing the camp which contributed substantially to make it a success. As a result of his positive mindset he disclosed his budget and the beneficiaries of 5 areas of safety net programs including Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF). He wrote them on the walls of the Union Parishad and the villages of the union for all to see. This has been a demonstration of courage and commitment by an elected representative.

"I don't want to be involved in corruption and I don't want anyone to indulge in corruption after me," he said.

WALL WRITING: AN INNOVATIVE WAY OF INFORMATION DISCLOSURE

Various types of information were requested from Shinghajhuli union parisad, Chowgacha upazila of Jessore district during the RTI camp. They include -- union parisad budget and expenditure, list of beneficiaries receiving VGD, VGF, old age pension, widow allowance and disability allowance along with the procedure of availing them. Information on relief distribution, tube-well distribution, water arsenic test, roads construction and renovation were also requested.

The union parisad provided all the information requested by camp participants. Of them, the current fiscal budget and expenditure in past years were written in the UP complex building. Criteria and conditions for getting the benefits were also written. List of beneficiaries of five categories of social safety net written in black over a yellow background adorn the walls of 9 villages of Shinghajhuli. The villagers can now check whether allowances distribution and beneficiary selection were done following proper rules and conditions. Anyone deprived of the services can ask the authority. Any irregularities in the process can also be challenged. The writings created a buzz and raised awareness among locals who expressed interest in the RTI Act.

UP chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu extended full cooperation in the spirit of the Act. This gesture of the chairman undoubtedly reflects positivity. Rendu opted for this exemplary method of information disclosure as he became aware that any irregularities or anomalies found in the government service to people will be solely his responsibilities. He said information, if disclosed this way, will bring transparency, check corruption and discourage anyone attempting corruption in the future.

Shinghajhuli union parisad has created a glowing example. Information disclosure through this method is the first ever in Bangladesh. Other unions may follow this example of disclosure by Shinghajhuli union or one day the method will be a mandatory provision of information disclosure for them by the government. However, Shinghajhuli union made its mark in the history through breaking the ice.

The list includes the name of a college teacher of our village. He does not even know it. I have come to see whether my name is there - which will be embarrassing for me. No, it is not there. I feel relieved.

A man of Shinghajhuli looking into the VGF list on the wall



A COMMON CHALLENGE



Fifteen of the RTI applications had to go to appeal after the designated official refused to provide information or provided the wrong or partial information. Ten of the above-mentioned applicants received the information after an appeal. Five applications then went to the Information Commission after the applicants complained that they had not received the right information or any information at all. Due to refusal to receive application and absence of Designated Officer, complaint against two authorities were directly submitted to the Information Commission.

The process from filing the application to the complaint at the Information Commission turned out to be time consuming and resource intensive for the applicants. In many cases the applicants had to visit the concerned office more than once, and waste a considerable amount of time in order to get their applications accepted. There were also instances of applicants being turned away or discouraged from filing RTI applications.

MRDI encouraged the applicants to stay in the process and assisted them with appeals and complaints.

Tarikul Islam, a resident of Shinghajhuli UP, filed an RTI application to know the fund allocation for renovation of Dyanarbil, a local water body, allocation against fish farming and other related allocations in fiscal 2014-15. He also requested details of fund expenditure and copies of bill and voucher for this expenditure.

After the designated officer of Baor Office failed to provide the information within the stipulated time, Tarikul appealed to the district fisheries officer. He was given partial information and told that he would not get the rest of the information.

With support from MRDI, Tariqul filed a complaint to the Information Commission and got information after hearing. The lengthy process of obtaining information cost Tarikul time and resources that could be avoided if the designated officer discharged his responsibility.

KEY INSIGHTS

The RTI camp has opened up a window through which rays of hope are seen. People have started feeling the need for information in their day to day life. They also know that getting information is their right and information can bring positive changes. Still, the experiences of the camp have raised following thoughts and insights that deserve attention to sustain the positive results.

- The demand for knowledge is strong. Once local people realized that information is their right, there was no shortage of people interested in filing applications. One of the achievements of the camp was to convince local people that access to information can make a positive change in their lives, whether as individuals or collectively. However, barriers to access such as illiteracy, lack of know-how, non-cooperation from officials need to be addressed.
- People often wanted to file RTI applications when they were aggrieved or confused about a real life situation. This points to the prevailing scenario of people using RTI Act to their access to information in their daily lives, rather than as a research tool for academics or an investigative tool by journalists.
- There are real barriers for poor and the marginalized people in using RTI. Poor people have difficulty accessing the 'right' kind of information. Sometimes the officials refuse to respect their right to know. Often the information provided is inappropriate to meet their needs, either in content (it does not reflect their reality) or in presentation (in a form that they can understand).
- Information is often disseminated without understanding the needs of the users, or the contexts in which they can access and use the information. Many information systems exist to provide information to the poor that are not demand driven, overlook local knowledge, misunderstand the role of intermediaries and do not monitor usage.
- Information availability also means little if the costs of accessing it are unreasonable (time and money) and if the information is not 'userfriendly'. Proactive disclosure by government and NGO officials is to be encouraged and will go a long way towards solving this problem.

- The Information Commission has been playing a pro-people role and this is vital if RTI Act is to have the desired impact. The Commission appeared sympathetic to the applicants. The designated officer was compelled to compensate the poor villagers with travel expenses for coming to Dhaka at the hearing as he didn't provide information timely - a positive step by the Commission.
- It is necessary to be realistic when dealing with RTI applicants from poor, rural areas. Naturally rural people feel shy talking before the tribunal of the commission out of fear and confusion. So they took assistance with the permission of the Information Commission. The applicants from the deprived community need special care from IC.
- Rural women are most often excluded from the governance discourse. But the experience of the RTI camp showed that women were dynamic and active in filing RTI applications to seek relevant information - a clear example of empowerment.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

- The Deputy Commissioner of Jessore, Dr. Md. Humayun Kabir, was supportive of the project and gave necessary directions to the administration to facilitate the camp. Sushama Sultana, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Chowgacha also remained engaged. Both of them dealt promptly and effectively in dealing with RTI applications that landed in their offices, setting an excellent example of civil servants embracing the RTI Act.
- The Deputy Commissioner said the RTI Act could build a bridge between the administration and the people. "I can see the difference in Chowgacha," he said, "As the RTI Act is used more frequently, it will reduce corruption and bring the people and the administration closer together."
- The Shinghajhuli Union Parishad chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu disclosed budget and the beneficiaries of 5 areas of safety net programs including Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF). He wrote them on the walls of the Union Parishad and the villages of the union for all to see. The proactive behavior of an elected representative set a good example.
- The camp participants gained knowledge about the filing of RTI applications. All of them said they will file more applications in the future. They said their social reputation has been enhanced by their initiative to get information that can benefit the community.
- In the vast majority of cases, the applicants got the information through RTI, a clear indication that the RTI process is working in Bangladesh.
- The RTI Camp generated overwhelming curiosity and enthusiasm among young and old in Shinghajhuli, demonstrating people's innate desire for transparency and good governance.
- The NGO ASA nominated 3,033 designated officers to provide information.
- As a result of several RTI applications, the local health complex has brought positive changes to its quality of services.

EXPERIENCES OF LIMITATIONS

- Many officials are still used to a culture of secrecy. It is taking time for them to adapt to a culture of openness ushered in by the RTI Act 2009.
- Some NGOs seemed even less prepared than government offices when the question of providing information came under the RTI Act 2009. All of the RTI applications filed at NGOs, except one, went to appeal. The local BRAC office did not have the designated officer's name on display. The applicant got a name from the reception and filed the application. The application was rejected by BRAC on the grounds of not applying to the correct official. It would seem entirely possible for an organization that wanted to disclose information to provide it even if the official's name on the form wasn't the right one - a mere technicality.
- The designated officers were prepared to give information to the Information Commission but refused to give it to the applicant - a clear sign of disrespect to the right of citizens.
- In one case, the civil surgeon, who is a member of the District Advisory Committee, Jessore, didn't respond to any of the four appeals directed to him. It is unacceptable instance of negligence from an official in such a position.
- Some information the applicant received from the authority are in English. These can hardly meet the demand of marginalized people due to barrier of language.

NGOs Underprepared

It was initially assumed that NGOs would be vastly better motivated and prepared for RTI compared to government agencies. This turned out to be a wrong assumption.

The experience of the RTI Camp showed that many NGOs, including some of the largest ones, were woefully underprepared to deal with RTI applications. There was unexpected resistance from some NGOs who didn't want to provide information or appeared unaware that they were under the purview of the RTI Act.

Some NGOs did not make clear who the designated officers were to whom citizens could submit their RTI applications. The NGO ASA did not have designated officers.

It was one of the limitations of MRDI's preparatory activity that there was less focus on sensitizing and training NGOs on RTI compared to the effort dedicated to government officials. This was due to the initial belief that NGOs would be proactive and organized when it came to implementing RTI.

Ironically, some of the NGOs that resisted the efforts of citizens to get information from them have their own right to information projects.

LOOKING FORWARD

BUILDING ON SHINGHAJHULI

MRDI is continuing to build on the success of the RTI camp by engaging with the participants, working more closely with the government offices, NGOs, Upazila and Union Parishad. Lesson learnt has been shared with these stakeholders, challenges were discussed and future actions were planned. The CIC and the Secretary (Coordination and Reforms), Cabinet Division have also been involved with the process. As a result, JANAK members are feeling strengthened and showing higher level of commitment.

SCOPE OF REPLICATION

Similar camps can be organized in other parts of the country, replicating the success of the Shinghajhuli camp by organizations working on people's right to know. Wall writings will also encourage the atmosphere of transparency.

JANAK AT THE DOORSTEP

Citizens' group JANAK is now working at the upazila level. To reach the doorstep with RTI assistance, this group needs to be formed and activated at the union level.

BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE

Since a portion of the allocation for the safety net program is being misused, according to the government's own data, proactive disclosure of the beneficiaries of VGD/VGF and other social safety net programmes could be a vital tool for transparency and accountability. MRDI's success with wall-writing in Chowgacha can be replicated across the country. The government should allocate a small amount in the budget for wall-writing and make it compulsory for local councils to disclose the names of beneficiaries.

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

MRDI will continue to engage with the media to popularize the RTI Act and disseminate knowledge about its benefits to the common citizens through sharing with the gatekeepers and reporters interested in investigative journalism, investigative reports in which reporter used RTI as a tool. MRDI will encourage journalists to oversee the process of RTI implementation both from the demand and supply ends, and obviously the role IC is playing in this regard.

SENSITIZING AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF INFORMATION PROVIDERS

Government and NGO officials, as well as elected representatives, will be sensitized about the benefits of the RTI Act. To strengthen the supply side of the information flow, capacity of information providers has to be enhanced. There will be training on better information preservation and management system in offices. A blended online training curriculum needs to be developed to provide training to the government DOs to address the challenge of frequent change of DOs due to transfer.

ACTIVATING DAC

District Advisory Committee (DAC), comprised of government officials, professionals and civil society representatives will have to be further activated to ensure better flow of information for public benefit.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Further awareness among people about the benefits of information and role of RTI Act should be created. In addition to discussions, public gathering and interactions, an enter-educate approach will be useful which may include street drama, folk forms of culture and other entertaining programmes.

RTI CHAMPION

To inspire and recognize RTI actors, both from the demand and supply ends, RTI champion can be declared annually. Best information provider and the best user of information can be awarded.

RTI ON WHEEL

This is an idea of running a mobile campaign on wheel through exhibiting a short film that will inspire marginalized people on their right to know. Then the wheel will provide immediate support to the deprived through filing RTI application if required. Follow up of the application will also be done by the wheel.



CONCLUSION

The biggest lesson of the RTI Camp in Jessore is that access to information not only promotes openness, transparency and accountability in administration, but also facilitates active participation of people in the democratic governance process. In the words of the district's top civil servant, it builds bridges between the administration and the people.

When people use RTI, they tend to form informed opinions, which allows them to influence policies and help in shaping a more assured future for themselves and their communities. The RTI Camp and associated interventions have helped in spreading transparency both from the demand side as well as the supply side, thereby enabling effective access to information, and paving the way to better service delivery in Jessore.

The momentum gained through the RTI camp in Jessore can be maintained by supporting and facilitating initiatives that sensitize government and NGO officials on the importance of making official information available and by working with civil society platforms like JANAK to promote civic education on rights and entitlements provided under the Right to Information Act 2009.



CASE
STUDIES



MD. TARIKUL ISLAM

Village : Jahangirpur

Office of the DO : Office of the Manager of Ber Gobindopur Baor

Appellate authority : District Fisheries Officer, Jessore

Lessons Learnt

RTI can empower citizens to access information and to monitor government expenditures and performance, providing opportunities for more direct social accountability. This case also demonstrates the mechanisms for appeals and effective enforcement against the denial of information.

Summary

Dyanar bil is a natural water body administered by Ber Gobindopur Baor office, a government office under Upazila Fisheries. This office is responsible for maintenance of Ber Gobindopur Baor, Dyanar bil and other ponds and canals in the locality. This authority also carries out fish fry production, pond renovation and other activities related to the wetlands.

There are complaints of irregularities against this office from local residents.

The water bodies are leased out to locals. The lessee spends his/her own funds for the fish food, fry, etc. but every year there is a significant amount of government allocation to this office. The RTI Applicant suspects the government allocation is shown as expenditure. There is also the suspicion that the total fund gathered from the lessees is not properly submitted to the government.

Information sought under RTI Application

- Government fund allocation for renovation of Dyanar bil, allocation against fish farming and other allocations related to the beel in fiscal 2014-2015
- Details of fund expenditure and copy of bill voucher for these expenditures

The Application Process

Tarikul Islam filed the RTI Application at the RTI Camp, but information was not given within stipulated time by the

Designated Officer. Tarikul appealed to the district fisheries officer on 7-10-2015. After appeal, partial information was given on 13-10-2015 and the applicant was verbally informed that the remaining information would not be given. A complaint was sent through registered mail on 26-10-2015.

Vested interests of powerful groups were involved in this so bill/vouchers were not given.

Hearing and verdict of Information Commission

The Designated Officer expressed apology for not providing information. He agreed that his lack of knowledge on RTI Act led to the failure to provide information. He assured the Commission of giving information as per the instruction of the IC. The IC rebuked him for failing to respond adequately.

The Information Commission, after hearing both sides, instructed

- Present the letter of allocation from higher authority
- Instead of the voucher, IC instructed to provide the expenditure figure, voucher number, name of the vendor and documents against the income from the Dyanar bil
- Give the information within next 7 working days

Tarikul Islam said in an interview that he felt empowered and that he would file more RTI applications to demand transparency from the local officials.

MST. RASHIDA KHATUN

Village : Jamalta
Office of the DO : Upazila Health Complex
Appellate authority : Civil Surgeon, Jessore



Lessons Learnt

The RTI Act gives citizens the right to access government records without demonstrating any legal interest or standing. The proper implementation of RTI can therefore cause a significant shift in the way state-society relationships are organized: from need-to-know to right-to-know.

Summary

The Chowgacha Health Complex, a government facility, is required to provide medicine free of cost to citizens. But RTI Camp participants alleged that the medicine often does not reach the people who need them. They suspect some of this medicine is sold off illegally or is delivered to cronies of hospital staff. In many cases, the locals have to pay for the medicine out of pocket. The applicant, Rashida, was one of the victims.

Information sought under RTI Application

- Allocation and list of medicine for free distribution in last two months (June-July 2015) at Chowgacha Health Complex
- List of the recipients of medicine in month of June-July 2015

The Application Process

Rashida Khatun discussed the issue at the RTI Camp and decided to file an RTI Application.

The Designated information officer failed to provide information within stipulated time. After repeated contact, he provided wrong information on 6-10-2015. Problems were faced in receiving the information as well. No top-sheet/forwarding/letter was given with the information to the applicant.

The information was given carelessly without putting any importance on it. A photocopy of the list of allocation of medicine for the month of May 2015 was provided which was not readable at all.

The authority tried to intimidate Rashida and suggested that she did not have the right or the standing to demand such information.

An appeal was sent on 7-10-2015 requesting full information to Jessore Civil surgeon office. After receiving no response from the civil surgeon office, a complaint was sent via registered mail on 12-11-2015.

The appellate authority, the Civil Surgeon, didn't give any attention in spite of receiving the appeal. This shows negligence of the appellate authority towards the law. This also sets a bad example as the civil surgeon is also a member of District Advisory Committee on RTI.

The committee was formed by the recommendation of the cabinet division's working group on RTI implementation. The government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh issued a circular to form such advisory committee at the district level in order to strengthen implementation of the RTI Act. Accordingly a 15 member committee has been formed in each district.

Hearing and verdict of Information Commission

At the hearing, Rashida Khatun complained that the information given was not the one she requested. The DO tried to misguide IC by stating that he thought the application was a part of the RTI camp exercise and therefore he didn't act on it. After getting the summon he tried to prepare the information and provide it to IC.

The IC instructed:

- To provide all the information requested to the applicant within 7 working days and warned him against future misconduct

In an interview, Rashida Khatun said her RTI Application and the long fight through the appeal process to the Information Commission hearing would force the health complex to respect citizens' right to know. She thought her application would reduce corruption at the health complex and improve services.



MD. ASHRAF HOSSAIN

Village : Jamalta

Office of the DO: Upazila Health Complex

Appellate authority: Civil Surgeon, Jessore

Lessons Learnt

The RTI Act functions as a tool for citizens' empowerment by providing access to public policy choices and decision-making processes, to understand entitlements regarding basic services such as health care.

Summary

The health complex receives government allocation of medicines. However, there are allegations of irregularities against hospital authorities on the distribution of the medicines. The patients have to buy medicine from outside, even though it is supposed to be free. Ashraf Hossain decided to file the RTI Application to hold the health complex authority accountable.

Information Sought Under RTI Application

- List and quantity of medicine allocated for Chowgacha upazila health complex in first eight months of 2014-15 fiscal
- List of allocated medicine from September 2015 to 2016

The Application Process

Designated information officer failed to provide information within stipulated time. After making contact, he provided wrong information on 6-10-2015. Problems were faced in receiving the information as well. No top-sheet/forwarding/letter was given with the information to applicant. An appeal was sent on 7-10-2015 requesting full information to Jessore Civil surgeon office. After receiving no response from the civil surgeon office, a complaint was sent via registered mail on 12-11-2015.

The information was given carelessly without putting any importance on it. A photocopy of the list of allocation of

medicine for the month of May 2015 was provided which was not readable at all. Also, the appellate authority didn't give any attention in spite of receiving the appeal. This shows negligence of the appellate authority towards the law. This also sets a bad example as the civil surgeon is also a member of District Advisory Committee on RTI.

Hearing and Verdict of Information Commission

At the hearing, Ashraf Hossain complained that the information given is not the one requested. The DO said he is placing the information under the question number 1 to commission. Since the question number 2 is not valid, the information was not provided.

The IC instructed:

- To provide all the information requested in Question No.1 to the applicant within 7 working days
- As Question 2 is faulty, the DO is excused

Ashraf Hossain expressed his delight at the empowering effect of RTI. He said he could not believe that a common citizen, armed with RTI, could require the administration to provide information regarding services.



MD. JALIL MANDAL

Village : Jahangirpur
Office of the DO : Upazila Health Complex
Appellate Authority : Civil Surgeon Jessore



Lessons Learnt

Information availability means little if the costs of accessing it are unreasonable (time and money) and if the information is not 'user friendly'.

Summary

There are complaints regarding Maternity services of Chowgacha Upazila Health complex. The Camp participants thought there are irregularities in the services and demanded greater transparency. Jalil Mandal decided to file the RTI Application to hold the authority accountable.

Information Sought Under RTI Application

- Information about the ongoing maternity services in Chowgacha upazila and under which project these activities are going on
- Detailed budget of the services and project

The Application Process

Designated information officer failed to provide information within stipulated time. After making contact, he provided wrong information on 6-10-2015. Problems were faced in receiving the information as well. No top-sheet/forwarding/letter was given with the information to applicant. An appeal was sent on 7-10-2015 requesting full information to Jessore Civil surgeon office. After receiving no response from the civil surgeon office, a complaint was sent via registered mail on 12-11-2015.

The information was given carelessly without putting any importance on it. Allocation of medicine for the month of May 2015 was provided which was not readable in the photocopy along with a list of medicines on 3rd installment for the complex for year 2014-15. Also, the appellate authority didn't give any attention in spite of receiving the appeal. This shows negligence of the appellate authority towards the law. This also sets a bad

example as the civil surgeon is also a member of District Advisory Committee on RTI.

Hearing and Verdict of Information Commission

The designated information officer came with prepared information regarding maternity services. Applicant requested for the circular of this type of services. The DIO stated no such circular exists in his office. He also said budget of any services of Upazila health complex is not available to them. The budget is available in higher offices.

The IC instructed

- Considering the poor socio-economic condition of the applicant, the IC instructed the DO to pay half of the information seeker's travel cost i.e., Tk. 700 as penalty
- The IC rebuked the DO that he could provide information on time even after being summoned as he had the information with him during the hearing and save the poor information seeker from additional harassment
- To provide the information after gathering from the higher authority to the applicant within 15 working days

Jalil Mandal said the application process had been long and required a lot of patience. He was happy that the Information Commission was in his favour and had ordered the government office to reimburse his travel costs. He said the local officials should be pro-people and should not resist requests for information.



MST. AKLIMA KHATUN

Village : Hudahfatahpur

Office of the DO: Upazila Health Complex

Appellate authority: Civil Surgeon Jessore

Lessons Learnt

The collection, retention and preservation of records are not standardized. This constitutes one of the main challenges to the implementation of the RTI Act. All offices under the purview of the RTI Act must put in place internal arrangements and processes that support the right to information.

Summary

It is a common allegation in Bangladesh that government health complex physicians don't follow duty rosters. The same allegations are leveled against physicians of Chowgacha health complex. The RTI camp participants raised this issue and Aklima Khatun filed the application in the hope that in the future the issue will be resolved.

Information Sought Under the RTI Application

- Duty rosters of physicians from 1 July to 31 December 2015 in Chowgacha upazila health complex. Which physicians were in-charge of which duty during 1 July to 31st December 2015
- List of health services provided by health complex and how poor people get the services

Application Process

Designated information officer failed to provide information within stipulated time. After making contact, he provided wrong information on 6-10-2015. Problems were faced in receiving the information as well. No top-sheet/forwarding/letter was given with the information to applicant. An appeal was sent on 7-10-2015 requesting full information to Jessore Civil surgeon office. After receiving no response from the civil surgeon office, a complaint was sent via registered mail on 12-11-2015.

The information was given carelessly without putting any importance on it. Allocation of medicine for the month of May 2015 was provided which was not readable in the photocopy along with a list of medicines on 3rd installment for the complex for year 2014-15. Also, the appellate authority didn't give any attention in spite of receiving the appeal. This shows negligence of the appellate authority towards the law. This also sets a bad example as the civil surgeon is also a member of District Advisory Committee on RTI.

Hearing and Verdict of Information Commission

The Designated Information Officer claimed all information has been submitted to the IC. After investigating the information, it was found only the duty roster of emergency section is given, the outdoor section and ward rosters were missing. The DO said only the emergency section has duty rosters. Those who are not serving at the emergency are usually available at the outdoor section. Also, the ward duty rosters are not preserved.

Information commission instructed

- DO to provide the related information with answers within 7 working days

Aklima expressed the hope that her application would improve services at the health complex. She also said the health complex should maintain proper records so that citizens could seek and receive information when they needed it.



MD. ARIFUL ALAM
Village: Shinghajhuli
Office of the DO: ASA, Chowgacha

Lessons Learnt

RTI Act is an effective pro-poor tool for getting information. Even a poor farmer can compel a big organization to abide by the provisions of law.

Summary

Ariful Alam heard about the leading NGO 'Association for Social Advancement (ASA)' providing micro-credit to poor for bringing a change in livelihood of his fellow farmers and others. But, he also felt the urge to know more about the process. This thrust for knowing led him in applying the knowledge gained on RTI Act from the camp.

ASA, a leading NGO in Bangladesh operating micro-credit and other developmental programs with headquarters at Dhaka has branched out countrywide. The name made famous worldwide for its micro-credit programs among the poor.

Ariful wrote an RTI application addressing the designated information officer of ASA.

Information Sought Under the RTI Application

- What is the rate of interest of the micro-credit project of PKSF?
- List of micro-credit recipients of Shinghajhuli and Majali villages under this project
- A copy of the terms and conditions for getting loan under this project

Application Process

Submitting the RTI application was just not possible. No one at ASA Chowgacha office would receive it! They stated we are not obliged to provide information as we do not fall under the purview of the RTI Act.

Depressed Ariful didn't give up on the Act. He moved forward with filing a complaint, according to the relevant clause of the Act in absence of a designated information officer, to the Information Commission (IC), Dhaka.

Hearing and Verdict of Information Commission

The IC served notice/summon to ASA, Chowgacha office. One ASA official met Ariful after being summoned by IC. Ariful fell under persuasion of withdrawing the complaint. But, an adamant Ariful's perseverance was much stronger than the persuasion.

Later, ASA presented them in the hearing of IC where Ariful was also present. They tried to tell the IC that they are not compelled to provide information as they do not fall under the purview of the Act.

The IC, in its verdict, clearing the misconception declared them 'authority' and instructed to appoint designated officers in all its unit country wide and inform IC within 15 days and also provide the information to Ariful. This sealed triumph for one young poor farmer Ariful against a big NGO like ASA. The RTI Act proved itself again as an effective pro-poor tool for getting information.

According to the verdict ASA appointed and submitted names of 3033 designated officers to IC. Ariful also received the information he sought.



REZAUR RAHMAN RENDU

Chairman, Shinghajhuli Union Parisad

Lessons Learnt

RTI Act can bring the people and their elected representatives closer together by ensuring transparency and goodwill. Proactive disclosure of information can herald a new era of openness and good governance. Even a local politician used to traditional culture of secrecy can be turned into a supporter of RTI through extolling the benefits of the RTI Act.

Summary

Shinghajhuli Union Parishad chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu initially appeared to be an opponent of RTI and its message of openness. Through an open dialogue and a carefully cultivated relationship, MRDI was able to transform this former opponent into an ardent supporter. Rendu set a positive example by proactively disclosing his budget and the list and procedure of selecting the beneficiaries of Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) safety net programs. He wrote them on the walls of the Union Parishad and the villages for the public to see.

Winning over the local Chairman was a key victory that gave a big boost to the RTI Camp and related awareness activities.

Rendu Embraces Openness

Rendu had been elected as Chairman of Shinghajhuli after his brother, the former Chairman of the Union Parisad, was killed by unidentified assailants. Rendu was used to the conventional local politics of Bangladesh and in the beginning he was seen as a potential barrier to the successful implementation of the RTI Camp.

Instead of confronting the Chairman, MRDI engaged in a dialogue with him and through a carefully calibrated series of meetings, attempted to convince Rendu that it was in his best interests to embrace RTI. MRDI conveyed the message that Rendu would be seen as an honest and forthright chairman if he helped the RTI Camp and

proactively disclosed his budget and other relevant information regarding the social safety nets. This would greatly increase his popularity. He would thus have a much better chance of re-election and the administration, which has supported RTI, would also view him favourably.

These efforts at persuasion were successful. From a potential opponent, Rezaur Rahman Rendu turned into a strong supporter of information disclosure. He extended all out support and cooperation at each step of organizing the camp which contributed substantially to make it a success. As a result of his positive mindset he disclosed his budget and the beneficiaries of 5 areas of safety net programs including Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF). He wrote them on the walls of the Union Parishad and the villages of the union for all to see.

"I don't want to be involved in corruption and I don't want anyone to indulge in corruption after me," he said.

Rendu explained in an interview that no one wants to be known as a corrupt chairman. It was vested interests and supporter groups that pushed elected representatives toward corruption, he said. He expected that after his proactive disclosure through wall-writing, other local representatives would be pushed to do the same.

"This is a new era of openness," he said. "RTI is a great thing that will bring a new politics in Bangladesh."

Rendu believes that in the future, politicians will need to proactively disclose their work and the services they have provided, rather than cut deals with vested interests. This will empower the voters and hold elected representatives accountable.

Rendu remains a strong supporter of RTI Act and MRDI will continue to work with him to raise awareness about RTI in the area.

The Wall Speaks...

Black ink over yellow paint embellish the walls of 9 villages of Shinghahjuli union, Chowgacha upzila of Jessore district. The writings carry information about social safety net beneficiaries. Anyone can know the names and thus question the one's missing! All VGD, VGF, old age pension, widow allowance, disability allowance beneficiaries' names are written in walls at places which cannot miss the eye. This innovative method of information disclosure is opening new window at the village level.

RTI camp- the beginning of journey to 'change'

The innovative way of information disclosure began with a RTI camp organized by MRDI in Shinghahjuli union of Chowgacha, Jessore. Thirty grassroots people attended the 5-day camp which showed them the changes information can bring in their lives. Camp participants made 40 applications to Shinghahjuli union parisad and government and non-government offices in Chowgacha on the 4th and 5th day of the camp.

RTI application in Union Parisad

Various information were requested from union parisad. They include- union parisad budget and expenditure, list of beneficiaries receiving VGD, VGF, old age pension, widow allowance and disability allowance along with the procedure of availing them. Information on relief distribution, tube-well distribution, water arsenic test, roads construction and renovation were also requested.



Chief Information Commissioner Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman and Secretary-in-charge (Coordination & Reforms) Cabinet Division NM Zeaul Alam visited the innovation

Information disclosure through wall writings

The union parisad provided all the information requested by camp participants. Of them, the current fiscal budget and expenditure in past years were written in the UP complex building. List of beneficiaries of five categories of social safety were written in the walls of the villages. Criteria and conditions for getting the benefits were also written.

The villagers can now check whether allowances distribution and beneficiary selection were done following proper rules and conditions. Anyone deprived of the services can ask the authority. Any irregularities in the process can be challenged.

Information disclosure and the courage of UP chairman

UP chairman Rezaur Rahman Rendu extended full cooperation in the spirit of the Act. This gesture of the chairman undoubtedly reflects positivity. Rendu opted for this exemplary method of information disclosure as he became aware that any irregularities or anomalies found in the government service to people will be solely his responsibilities. He said information, if disclosed this way, will bring transparency, check corruption and discourage anyone attempting corruption in the future.

Shinghahjuli union parisad has created a glowing example. Information disclosure through this method is the first ever in Bangladesh. Other unions may follow this example of disclosure by Shinghahjuli union or one day the method will be a mandatory provision of information disclosure for them by the government. However, Shinghahjuli union made its mark in the history through breaking the ice.

TRAVELING TOGETHER TOWARDS THE VISION

RTI Camp in a remote village did not take place all of a sudden. It was the result of long efforts of MRDI and support of the RTI advocates. Commitment of the Information Commission and the Cabinet Division and other true lovers and champions of RTI made it possible for MRDI to organize the camp which created a sort of sensation in the community thus inspiring others to promote and spread the concept of RTI in the country. Here are glimpses of what some of our champions said about the RTI camp.

I heard about the initiatives of MRDI after joining the Information Commission. Now I am really impressed to see their activities in the field. Disclosure of information on services through wall writing in the remote villages of Shinghajhuli union of Chowgacha has created a unique example in Bangladesh. Now it will be replicated in other places of the country. Chowgacha is now one step ahead in implementing the RTI Act.



Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman

Chief Information Commissioner
Information Commission Bangladesh

*At the sharing meeting on
"RTI Camp: Success and potentials"*

All the laws of the country are meant to be applied on people. Authorities apply them on the people. RTI Act is the only law which people can apply on the authorities.



Ambassador (Rtd.) Mohammed Farooq

The then Chief, Information Commissioner
Addressing the inaugural ceremony of RTI Camp



Nepal Chandra Sarker
Information Commissioner
Information Commission
Bangladesh
*Addressing the inaugural
ceremony of RTI Camp*

Implementation and success of RTI Act depend upon the use of the law by the citizens. Once they are aware about the law and benefits arising out of the law, people will tend to use it frequently. The RTI Camp of MRDI can be an effective way to make the people aware. This will remain as a significant approach in the history of people's right to know.



NM Zeaul Alam
Secretary-in-charge
(Coordination and Reforms)
Cabinet Division
*At the sharing meeting on
"RTI Camp: Success and potentials"*

The initiative of disclosing information through wall writing is a significant success of MRDI. If we can sustain it and spread it in other areas, people will develop interest in seeking information.

Sufferings in people's life caused by corruption or abuse of power by the state can be mitigated through uninterrupted flow of information. We have already faced such cases. It is observed that 22-23% people of the country are aware about the RTI Act. Awareness created through this camp must continue.



Md. Nazrul Islam
The then Secretary
(Coordination and Reforms)
Cabinet Division
*Addressing the inaugural ceremony
of RTI Camp*

The positive attitude of the highest level of the administration towards RTI is the reflection of the willingness of government. Transparency and accountability of the government and non-government organizations will be established if people press for access to information.



Shaheen Anam
Executive Director
Manusher Jonno Foundation
*In an interview with the lessons learnt
document development team*

One thing I observed in Chowgacha is that people are not coming directly to us as they did before. Initially they are going to the UNO or other offices at the upazila level for information. The camp clearly shows the procedure and sequence of RTI application and the template of the application form. This type of training will encourage people.



Dr. Md. Humayun Kabir
Deputy Commissioner, Jessore
*In an interview with the lessons learnt
document development team*



S.M. Habib

Upazila Chairman, Chowgacha
*Addressing the inaugural
ceremony of RTI Camp*

Chowgacha had a leading role in our glorious war of liberation. Organizing the first ever RTI camp at Shinghajhuli has again put Chowgacha at the front of the movement for people's right to information.

This camp will make people aware about the RTI Act and motivate them to seek information applying the act. I have requested the upazila officers to behave responsibly after receiving RTI applications.



Shushama Sultana

Upazila Nirbahi Officer
Chowgacha
*Addressing the inaugural
ceremony of RTI Camp*

Chairmen are often termed as corrupt persons. Nobody takes them as honest. I want to remove this allegation. I want to prove that all chairmen are not corrupt. Let's be transparent and be accountable to the people through the wall writing.



Rezaur Rahman Rendu

Chairman
Shinghajhuli Union Parisad
*In an interview with the lessons learnt
document development team*

Whoever will be the next Chairman must take into consideration that he has to continue the wall writing to get vote. Ultra-sonogram machine of Chowgacha Hospital was kept locked. Now, it's open. People are getting service. Nothing can be more sustainable than this in the project. No one needs to pay twenty taka for book. Therefore, it is not only a success, but also a sustainable initiative.



Hasibur Rahman

Executive Director, MRDI
*In an interview with the lessons learnt
document development team*

RTI APPLICATION STATUS

A total of 48 RTI applications were filed by the participants during the camp. Another 10 applications were filed immediately after the camp. The participants also helped others to file such application. A summary of the applications submitted until the date of closing the camp is furnished below.

Number of Total Application	: 58
Government Authority	: 50
NGO	: 08
1. Information Received within 20 Working Days	: 41
Government Authority	: 40
NGO	: 01
2. Partial/Wrong Information Received	: 07
3. Appeal Application	: 15
Information Received after appeal	: 10
Complaint aggrieved from appeal	: 05
4. Directly Complaint	: 02

BRIEF OF THE APPLICATION

Name of authority	Information requested*	Number of application	Results
UNO office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of fund for auditorium repairing and head wise statement of expenditure • List of NGOs in Chowgacha • Meeting minutes of NGO coordination meeting • Copy of master roll and amount of rice distributed among the poor during Eid-ul-Fitr 	3	All information received within 20 working days.
Polli Bidyut Somity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why there is no electricity connection in a certain portion of the village • What are the heads of charges for getting electric connection • Copy of government order for getting connection 	4	Information received within 20 working days and the locality got the desired electric connection.

Name of authority	Information requested*	Number of application	Results
Upazil Land Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of vested property (VP) with Daag and Khotiyan Numbers List of persons who is occupying the land according to Daag and khotiyan numbers Under what legal provisions they are occupying the land. If illegal, what actions have been taken 	1	DO provided partial information. Applicant went for appeal. Appellate authority (Deputy Commissioner of Jessore) called for a hearing where both the parties were present. DO was instructed to provide information.
Upazila livestock Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of medicine and master roll of free distribution Any government veterinary physician for artificial breeding Stock position of injection Schedule of vaccination 	1	Information received within 20 working days.
Upazila Food warehouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government's fixed price of purchasing paddy from farmers, list of farmers from whom paddy was purchased 	1	Information received within 20 working days.
Upazila Secondary Education Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any provisions for students to pay for receiving books of the government's book distribution programme? If yes, a copy of the order 	1	Information received after submission of appeal. As a result, students got books free of cost for which had to pay before.
Upazila Education office (Primary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of students getting stipends Yearly allocation of stipends and copy of circular for stipend distribution 	1	Partial information received within 20 working days and remaining info provided after appeal.
Upazila Agricultural Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total quantity and allocation of chemical fertilizer, crop seed & pesticide for distribution and item wise list (with quantity) of individual farmers Master roll of distribution, criteria for selection along with orders and circulars of the government Details of field visit by the officers responsible for counseling farmers Copy of movement register of the sub-assistant agriculture officer List of the farmers who received counseling from responsible officers Expenditure statement of field visits made by the officer 	2	Information received within 20 working days.

Name of authority	Information requested*	Number of application	Results
Police station, Chowgacha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules for filing general diary (GD) • Whether any fee is required for GD, if any, what is the amount • Whether any fee is required for police verification, if any, what is the amount • List of police verification done during January to July 	1	Information received after submission of appeal.
Upazila Youth Development office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of upazila youth development programs • Procedure and rules of providing financial assistance, selection criteria of beneficiaries • List of beneficiaries and conditions of receiving financial assistance 	1	Partial information received within 20 working days and the remaining after appeal.
Baor Office, Chowgacha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget allocation for the maintenance of Dyanar bil, fish culture and others • Detailed statement of expenditure along with bills and vouchers • Copy of documents of fish sale, copy of tender document, government earning from fish selling, information about tree selling from baor bank 	2	<p>One information received after IC verdict.</p> <p>Another information received within 20 working days.</p>
Union Parishad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of running budget along with UP funding and government allocations, last year's sector wise statement of expenditure • Number and list of beneficiaries of VGF, VGD, Old age pension, widow pension, disability allowance and copies of government's office order, rules, circular on selection criteria of beneficiaries • Village wise list of beneficiary • Allocation on disability allowance and list of recipients for last year and selection criteria • Why repairing of roads of Shinghajhuli union are not being done, when these will be repaired • Relief distribution during last Eid - who got, under what criteria • As a widow how can I get relief • Number of tube-wells allocated with list and address of recipients • Rules and selection criteria for tube well allocation • Detailed information on arsenic test programme and list of tube wells tested • Source of earning and sector of expenditure with bill & voucher of UP 	19	Information received within 20 working days.

Name of authority	Information requested*	Number of application	Results
Upazila Project Implementation Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which category of citizens are entitled to receive financial benefits under the government's 'Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar Project' What amount of money is allocated for one farm Copy of the master roll of beneficiaries this year 	1	Information received within 20 working days.
Pouroshova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amount of money received against tax and toll in 2013 Copy of the tax and toll collection register for 2014-15 Information on government allocation for development and head wise expenditure List of beneficiaries of old age pension, widow pension, disability allowance and VGF 	1	Information received within 20 working days.
Local Government and Engineering Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information related to road repairing in different villages of Shighajhuli union 	4	Information received within 20 working days.
Upazila Health Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List and quantity of medicines allocated for free distribution Master roll of medicine distribution Maternity services provided under Maternity services project and the budget Duty rosters of physicians Health services provided by complex 	5	<p>Partial and wrong information provided to 4 applicants. Appeal submitted. Complaint submitted for not getting any response from appellate authority. Information provided after IC's verdict.</p> <p>Another application was filed which received information within 20 working days.</p>
Jagorani Chakra Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of on-going projects in Chowgacha with the name of donor, proposal and budget Copy of conditions and office order of PKSf for operating PKSf supported micro credit programme Name and address of micro credit beneficiaries in Jamalta village under PKSf support 	2	Information received after submission of appeal.
Ashraf Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved project proposal and budget for ongoing project on disable welfare 	1	Information received within 20 working days.

Name of authority	Information requested*	Number of application	Results
BRAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of project proposal of micro credit program and conditions for receiving loan with office order • List of micro credit beneficiaries of Jagannathpur, Jahangirpur and Garibpur villages • Approved project proposal and budget for ongoing TB control project at Chowgacha 	2	<p>The local BRAC office did not have the designated officer's name on display. The applicant got a name from the reception and filed the application. There was no response from the DO and the applicant submitted appeal.</p> <p>The appeal was rejected on the ground of not applying to the DO by proper name and suggested to file a fresh application. Applicant submitted application again and got information.</p>
Upazila Social Welfare Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of allocated widow pension • List of the beneficiary of widow & disabled pension • Criteria of selecting beneficiary 	1	Information received within 20 working days.
Civil Surgeon Office, Jessore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of vacant post of physician in Chowgacha Health Complex • Plan and initiatives to fill the posts 	1	Information received within 20 working days.
ASA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate of interest of micro credit programme under PKSF fund • Name and address of micro credit beneficiaries in Shinghajhuli and Majali villages • Terms and references for receiving micro credit 	1	Complaint submitted to IC for non-availability of DO. IC through its verdict ordered to provide all information and appoint DOs in all units of ASA in Bangladesh. Information received after the verdict and 3,033 DOs appointed.
BURO Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of project proposal, conditions and office order of micro credit programme operated by BURO • Terms and references for providing micro credit • Name and address of micro credit beneficiaries of Jagannathpur, Jahangirpur and Garibpur villages 	1	Information received after submission of appeal.
Shishu Niloy Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of on-going projects in Chowgacha with the name of donor, proposal and budget • Terms and references for providing micro credit • Name and address of micro credit beneficiaries of Jamalta village 	1	Complaint submitted to IC for non-availability of DO. IC through its verdict ordered to provide all information and appoint DOs. Information received after the verdict and DO appointed.

* This column is a summary of information requested to the authorities by camp participants. Copy of individual application is available at MRDI.

LIST OF CAMP PARTICIPANTS

Sl.	Name	Village
1	Mst. Rashida Khatun	Jamalta
2	Md. Ashraf Hossain	Jamalta
3	Md. Mizanur Rahman	Jagannathpur
4	Rekha Das	Garibpur
5	Md. Ahad Shekh	Jagannathpur
6	Khadija Begum	Shinghajhuli
7	Mst. Khadeja Megum	Majali
8	Parul Akter	Shinghajhuli
9	Md. Shofiqul Islam (Limon)	Jagannathpur
10	Mst. Shajeda Khatun	Jahangirpur
11	Md. Shukur Ali	Shinghajhuli
12	Mst. Rabeya Khatun	Jahangirpur
13	Mst. Salma Khatun	Jagannathpur
14	Md. Jamal Hossain	Moshiurnagar
15	Mst. Tahmina Khatun	Moshiurnagar

Sl.	Name	Village
16	Mst. Shagorika Begum	Jagannathpur
17	Mst. Shufia Khatun	Jahangirpur
18	Aleya Khatun	Shinghajhuli
19	Md. Jalil Mondol	Jahangirpur
20	Mst. Aklima Khatun	Hudafatahpur
21	Md. Motaleb	Jagannathpur
22	Md. Ariful Islam	Shinghajhuli
23	Mst. Sabera Akter (Moina)	Jagannathpur
24	Mst. Tohura Khatun	Garibpur
25	Md. Renu Mia	Garibpur
26	Md. Younus Ali	Hudafatahpur
27	Md. Jamarul	Jamalta
28	Mst. Chaina Begum	Hudafatahpur
29	Md. Tariqul Islam	Jahangirpur
30	Md. Monu	Jagannathpur

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