

# Annual Report

Year-1

(January 2021- December 2021)

**More Information More Accountability**



## Context

Bangladesh has passed the first decade of enactment of the RTI Act. As evident from different studies and reports, limitations are there in both supply and demand sides despite interventions of the Cabinet Division (CD), Information Commission (IC) and CSOs to build capacities of the information providers and raise awareness of people. National RTI survey conducted in 2019 reveals some progress in making the supply side prepared to implement the RTI Act. However, In contrast to that, the awareness level on the demand side i.e. the citizens, has been found to be as low as 7.7% only. This is a matter of concern that needs to be addressed properly.

Cabinet Division set up an RTI Sub-Committee under the framework of National Integrity Strategy (NIS) to accelerate the implementation of the Right to Information Act and a Working Group on RTI is in operation at the Cabinet Division. CD, in partnership with the IC, developed a strategic plan 2015-2021, “Connecting Government to Citizens” that set out critical actions for the implementation of the RTI Act. One of the important demand-side actions under the plan is to undertake initiatives to make citizens progressively aware of the RTI Act and its implementation. RTI working group of CD emphasized upon maximizing proactive disclosure of information by public authorities to comply with clause 6.2 - “No authority shall conceal any information or limit its easy access”. It has been brought under the Annual Performance Agreement.

Ministries, divisions and district offices disclose information proactively through their websites to facilitate easy access to information by citizens. But it has been found through assessment that people face difficulty in terms of usability of and accessibility to the websites. Often necessary information is not available in the sites which discourages people to visit these sites for information. Hence, the proposed project will develop an appropriate template for web-based information disclosure to facilitate easy access to government website by the citizens. The government ministries and divisions will disclose their information proactively using this template. This proactive disclosure will ease the process of receiving required information by people.

The project will also develop a group of young people as RTI change makers through training camp, workshop, campaigning and other interventions. These enthusiastic young change makers will create example of success in enhancing awareness among people on the needs and benefits of information and how to seek information as a right. Young people have been the major force behind every notable social, political and economic achievement in Bangladesh. The country is enjoying a unique demographic dividend, meaning the population has more youths and working people to produce goods and services for the economy. This dividend can be utilized to its full potential, only when the youth have the opportunity to contribute.

To translate their potentials into actions, young people need support, not in the form of assistance, rather in the form of empowerment. A properly empowered youth group can make incredible changes in their families, the society and the country as a whole.

Side by side with education and technical skills young people need sufficient information which is a vital component of empowerment. Information empowers. So, access to information has to be ensured. People’s awareness on the importance of information in their life and livelihood, and their desire to seek information can make a big change. But even after more than a decade of enactment of the RTI Act, level of people’s awareness on the act is very low. Young people can become potential change makers if they are equipped with capacity on right to information.

Thus, the project aims at working in two levels, to keep the momentum of enhancing demand and supporting authorities to disclose information proactively.

## Project Objective

1. Facilitate ministries and divisions comply with the provisions and regulations of RTI Act
2. Create awareness on RTI and enhance demand for information in the community

## Reporting period

January 2021 - December 2021

## Activity Update

### Activity 1: Develop Proactive Disclosure Template for Ministries

**1.1 Content Sharing Meeting:** To present the draft methodology of web based proactive disclosure assessment of Ministries/Divisions a content sharing meeting was organized. Team leader of the assessment, Nepal Chandra Sarker, Former Information Commissioner made a presentation in the meeting.

Additional Secretary and Project Director A2i Dr. Md. Abdul Mannan; Deputy Secretary and National portal implementation Expert A2i Md. Doulatuzzaman Khan; Result management Expert A2i Md. Anowarul Haque Arif; Director Knowledge Management Manusher Jonno Foundation Dr. Rezwanul Alam and Assistant Director Programme, Research Initiative Bangladesh Ruhi Naz were present in the meeting as issue experts. Director (Admin, Finance & IT), Information Commission J R Shahriar represented the Information Commission. MD. Nazrul Islam MRDI Board of Director and former Secretary Coordination & Reforms, Cabinet Division also attended the meeting.



The participants agreed on the importance of such assessment and put some recommendations on the methodology. The A2i programme of the ICT Division thanked MRDI for the initiative and agreed to extend for a quick completion of the assessment. After incorporating the recommendations, assessment methodology was sent to Information Commission and received approval. The methodology was also shared with the ICT Division of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology.

**1.2. Conduct Web Portal Assessment:** MRDI team under the supervision of two experts Nepal

Chandra Sarker, Former Information Commissioner and Md. Farhad Hossain, former Secretary Information Commission has completed the web assessment for ministries/ division. All ministries/division was assessed following the methodology approved by the Information Commission. Experts developed a scoring matrix to assess the current scenario of proactive disclosure of information through website.

**1.3. Draft Template:** Based on the findings come out from web-assessment, experts drafted a common template on proactive disclosure of information for the ministries/divisions.

**1.4. Share and Finalize Template:** A meeting was organized to share the draft template on web-based proactive disclosure of information for ministries/division of information. Former Information Commissioner Nepal Chandra Sarker and former secretary Information Commission Md. Farhad Hossain presented the draft template in the meeting. Officials of ICT division, a2i and computer council participated in the meeting and gave necessary feedback. The meeting also discussed on the sharing the template in a workshop jointly organised by ICT division, a2i and MRDI. Relevant officials from different ministries and divisions will be invited to the workshop where two separate presentations will be made on how proactive disclosure can increase the E-participation.



**1.5. Launch Template:** MRDI conducted a meeting with the ICT division, to share the findings and how proactive disclosure of ministries and divisions can enhance e-participation, which can improve the position in global e-government indicator. During the meeting it was decided to organize a consultation to chalk out a roadmap. The ICT Division gave their consent to organize the programme in collaboration with MRDI where Chief Information Commissioner and Secretary Coordination and Reforms of the Cabinet Division will be the chief guest, chaired by the Senior Secretary, ICT Division. Mr. N M Zeaul Alam PAA, Senior Secretary of ICT division; Nepal Chandra Sarker, Former Information Commissioner; MD. Nazrul Islam, Director, MRDI; Hasibur Rahman, Executive Director, MRDI and Aktarun Naher, Deputy Manager, MRDI participated in the meeting.

Instead of formal launching of the template keeping its immediate execution in mind, MRDI in collaboration with the ICT Division and a2i organized a “Future Search Workshop: Web-Based Proactive Disclosure to Enhance E-Participation” on how proactive disclosure of information can contribute to



increase E-participation that will finally improve the country's position in global E-Government indicator on 28 December 2021 at the auditorium of Bangladesh Computer Council.

Senior Secretary of Information and Communication Technology Division, N M Zeaul Alam PAA chaired the workshop and Chief Information Commissioner, Martuza Ahmed graced the occasion as the chief guest. Dr. Md. Abdul Mannan, Executive Director, Bangladesh Computer Council; Md Mustafizur Rahman PAA, Secretary, Ministry of Land and K.M. Tariqul Islam, Director General, NGO Bureau Affairs were present as special guests. Nepal Chandra Sarker, Former Information Commissioner, Information Commission Bangladesh and Md. Doulutuzzaman Khan, Deputy Secretary & National Portal Implementation Specialist, a2i, ICT Division made presentations on Proactive Disclosure for Enhancing E-participation: Present Status & Way Forward and functions and status of the national web portal respectively. The workshop was moderated by Md. Nazrul Islam, Former Secretary Coordination and Reforms Cabinet Division and Director, MRDI Board of Directors.

Dr. Dewan Muhammad Humayun Kabir, Project Director (Joint Secretary), a2i, ICT Division welcomed the guests through his inaugural speech and provided his opinion on how enhancing e-participation through web-based disclosure will eventually improve the country's position in global E-Government indicator. Hasibur Rahman, Executive Director, MRDI, explained purpose of the initiative. He referred to involvement of MRDI as a civil society actor in enactment, promotion, advocacy and implementation of the RTI Act. MRDI's initiative to keep the demand-supply chain of information operative through awareness building and capacity development has been appreciated by the government, development partners and the civil society. A total of around 100 participants including among other experts, panelists and open discussants from government and non-government agencies and media took part in the workshop.

Special guest Md Mustafizur Rahman, PAA, Secretary, Ministry of Land said that if information is disclosed proactively, e-participation will increase vertically, with a cascading effect to reach the goal targeting accountability and transparency. Dr. Md. Abdul Mannan, Executive Director, Bangladesh Computer Council stressed on regular updating of the sites and creating a mechanism that helps people understand whether these sites are updated or not. Making the sites user-friendly is very important for enhancing e-participation. K.M. Tariqul Islam, Director General, NGO Affairs Bureau in his speech put emphasis on creating demand for information among people and aware them about seeking information using RTI Act. He suggested for creating a common template for all NGOs to provide their information proactively.

Mozammel Babu, Editor-in-Chief of Ekattor Television, Syed Ishtiaque Reza, Editor-in-Chief of Gazi TV and Dr. Ananya Raihan, CEO of iSocial put their views as panelists. They insisted upon regular updating of websites, providing accurate information and take the issue of information sovereignty into consideration. Open discussion by the workshop participants followed the panel discussion session. They proposed to strengthen awareness and advocacy programmes.



Chief guest of the workshop Chief Information Commissioner, Martuza Ahmed said that the RTI act was meant for citizens welfare and the path that it has already come across is undoubtedly



a great milestone. However, we have a long way to go for achieving our desired goal. The workshop chair N M Zeaul Alam PAA in his concluding speech called for upholding the spirit of maximum disclosure and minimum exemption in implementing the RTI Act. He emphasized on creating a culture of asking and sharing information,

enabling an environment that endorse people to go for digital interaction rather than physical, in terms of information specifically.

## Activity 2: Develop Youth Group of RTI change makers

**2.1. Form RTI youth group:** MRDI team formed three RTI youth groups by visiting Jashore, Rangpur and Barishal. Interested female and male youth took part in the meeting. Communication skills, positive attitude, team spirit and interest in social service were considered as pre-requisites for selecting youth group members. Finally, 33 youth members were selected between the age of 18-25 years - 18 females and 15 males. Assistance of MRDI local coordinators were taken in the process of selection.

**2.2. Capacity Building of Youth:** To improve information and understanding level of youth members on right to information and its use, an RTI Camp was organized from 6-9 March 2021, at CCDB Hope Center, Savar, Dhaka. The selected 33 youth members from 3 districts took part in the camp. During the four-day camp, participants learned what is information and how information can influence their life and livelihood through participatory learning techniques including lecture, discussion, debate, interaction, filing RTI application, games, drama, group work and sharing success stories. The camp was inaugurated by Director Research, Training and Publication of The Information Commission Dr. Abdul Hakim. Mahenur Alam Chowdhury, Capacity Development Specialist; Mir Masruruzzaman, Trainer & Communication Specialist were the facilitators for the RTI camp and Hamidul Islam Hillol, RTI Specialist was present as resource person.





**2.3. Local planning and sharing meeting:** Youth group members from 3 districts prepared a six-month work plan on RTI campaigning. Considering the Coronavirus pandemic and lock down situation in the country the meetings were organized virtually through zoom where the youth group members presented their plan and participated in the zoom meeting sessions.

**2.4. RTI Campaigning:** According to the six-month plan, RTI campaigning started from May 2021. Regular monthly meetings were arranged to share and update the work progress of the previous and upcoming months where MRDI Local Coordinators were present. The lockdown and deteriorating situation of covid-19 hampered the work progress of the planned RTI campaigning and campaign could not be executed properly. From 3rd week of June social media campaigning were done in three districts by the youth groups through “MRDI RTI Helpdesk” facebook page. List of government designated officers for 3 districts were made that will assist information seekers. Youth groups from the 3 districts met their Deputy Commissioners. They presented their campaign planning in the meeting. Apart from the social media campaign, they prepared list of designated officers of government offices at district level.

Barishal and Rangpur youth group members organized an online quiz competition on completing RTI course placed in MRDI iknow app where the highest scorer completing the quiz earliest was awarded with a smart mobile phone as the first prize and T-shirt for next five winners. Approximately 2000-3000 youths made query for the course at MRDI RTI Help Desk and in personal accounts of 33 youths which resulted in registration by 381 participants in the course.

Barishal Youth Group organized a two-day RTI workshop to create changemakers in their community. Twenty-two young boys and girls from 6 colonies of Barishal city participated in the workshop. Enter-educate methods were applied in enhancing their awareness and capacity on importance and understanding of information and how the information can help improve their life and livelihood. RTI activists, MRDI JANAK members and the members of the youth group facilitated the sessions.



Barishal, Jashore and Rangpur youth group members also organized 3 separate Debate competitions at their districts. At Jashore, a Conventional Debate Competition was held Jashore Collectorate School. Twenty-four debaters participated from all 8 upazilas of Jashore. Deputy Commissioner of Jashore handed over the prizes to the champion and runner up teams in the programme of District Administration in observance of the Right to Know Day on 28 September. The quiz winners of the i-know app of MRDI were also awarded prizes during the programme.

The youth group of Barishal organized a month-long workshop and debate competition at Barishal Division on Right to Information. A total number of 48 debaters from school and college participated in 6 workshop sessions and the debate competition. Other than the final debate the workshops and the debate sessions were organized online. The group also organized a discussion session and prize giving ceremony at Barishal Circuit House in which the Deputy Commissioner of Barishal was present as the chief guest and handed over prizes to the winners of debate and i-know app quiz. Members of district RTI Committee, NGO leaders, Government officials were present in the programme. The programme was extensively covered by the national and local media.



To observe the Right to Know Day, Rangpur Youth Group organized conventional debate competition. A discussion programme on Right to Information was also held in which the Deputy Commissioner of Rangpur was present as the chief guest along with Md Sadrul Alam Dulu, Chairman, Shonak Rangpur, Rozi Rahman, Chairman, Jatiyo Mahila Shangstha Rangpur and A M Shahjahan Siddique, Officer, District Primary Education Office, Rangpur as special guests. The guests handed over the prize to the winners of debate and i-know app quiz. Moreover, on Right to Know Day 2021 all the 3 youth groups distributed different communication materials like flyer, leaflet, poster and comic book among their communities.

The youth group of Rangpur district organized 3 advocacy meetings involving peers, school/college students, Prothom Alo youth group and a courtyard meeting from 30 October to 1 November. Approximately 370 people participated in the meetings. As a part of the campaign, a total of 20 applications were ready to file to different authorities at 3 districts.



Communication materials produced under the project were distributed among the participants. A short video documentary on how RTI can help to resolve community problem has been produced at the request of the CIC for social media campaign. The video has been shared through facebook page of MRDI RTI helpdesk. The youth group members also shared the video.

The youth group of Jashore district organized RTI orientation program involving school-college students on 23, 25 and 27 November. An approximate number of 300 students participated in the meetings. Principal, School managing committee president, Departmental heads were present in the session. Youth group members shared their experience regarding RTI. RTI self-learning video and RTI camp videos shown in the session. Youth group of Barisal district organized RTI orientation program with school-college students on 20 and 25 November. Approximately 300 people participated in the meetings. Communication material books, leaflets, posters were distributed among participants.



**2.5. Lesson Learnt Workshop:** Lesson Learnt Workshop - Experience of youth in RTI Campaigning was organized on 13 December 2021 at A. S Mahmud Seminar Hall, The Daily Star, Dhaka. The workshop aimed to share the field experiences of RTI youth groups on campaigning and filing RTI applications. Thirty youth group members from Barishal, Jashore and Rangpur districts



participated in the workshop out of whom 6 from 3 districts shared their experiences. Martuza Ahmed, Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commission was grace the event as

Chief guest. Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman, Former Chief Information Commissioner; Professor Dr. Sadeka Halim and Former Information Commissioners, Information Commission Nepal Chandra Sarker were present as special guests. Hasibur Rahman, Executive Director, MRDI moderated the session.

The youth participants expressed their thoughts and experience of the RTI campaign. They shared their experience on filling RTI application in government offices. There were many instances where they got their desired information immediately after filing applications. Simultaneously, sometimes they were refused to get information. But they were very hopeful to file more RTI applications. Youths during experience sharing proposed that the Designated officers need to be trained about RTI and proper knowledge of RTI act should be provided.



Martuza Ahmed, chief information commissioner; Prof Dr. Sadeka Halim, former information



commissioner and Nepal Chandra Sarker, former information commissioner responded to various queries of the youth group members. They said that young people will play the most vital role in raising awareness on RTI in the community. Representatives from The Carter Centre, Article 19, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), The Institute for Environment and

Development (IED), Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB), Safety & Rights Society, COAST Foundation, WAVE Foundation, Nari Moitree were present in the program. Media persons were also present in the program.

**2.6. Develop RTI communication material:** MRDI designed one leaflet, poster, cartoon folder and reprinted it's RTI comic book. With the consent of using logo and approval of Information Commission these were printed. These materials were given to the youth groups for distribution during their campaign. Additionally, as per request from Chief Information Commissioner, one video documentary has been produced containing insights of impacts and success of using RTI Act along with description of main spirit of the act and its applications.