

Future of RTI Campaigns

1 to 4 October, 2015



The online seminar titled 'Future direction of Right to Information campaign' was arranged jointly by Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) and Information Commission, Bangladesh on the occasion of Right to Know Day 2015. It was held from 1st to 4th October and was hosted on IID's online portal - www.obhimat.com/rtk15

Information Commission welcomes everybody to this online seminar arranged jointly by IID and Information Commission on the occasion of International Right to Information Day 2015.

- Nepal Chandra Sarkar
Acting Chief Information Commissioner,
Information Commission

Right to information is a human right by birth. There is **no alternative for establishing democracy** other than practicing Right to Information.

- Hasanul Haque Inu
Minister, Ministry of Information



1227
Online Reader

54
Comments



1

Training of Designated Information Officers

Training should be made mandatory for Information Officers. A **comprehensive manual** or handbook on guidelines and procedures should be provided

- **Khushi Kabir**
Nijera Kori

There is no specific guideline on what information the designated Information Officers should provide, what they are not bound to provide and how the information should be provided. All government officials should be provided with **necessary guidelines** from their reporting authority in this regard.

- **Hasibur Rahman**
Executive Director, MRDI

2

Understanding diversity of demand and target audience

RTI is not suitable for daily news due to its long process of information processing. Rather it is more effective for Crime or investigation reporting. Thus RTI campaign should **consider the differences of occupation**.

- **Risalat Bari**
Journalist

In spite of awareness of RTI in rural areas due to some NGO campaigns on RTI, many people in urban areas are unaware of this act. The **educated middle class** group should be made aware of this law. At the same time, **slum people** lack awareness on RTI even though it is of great importance to them. Therefore, RTI awareness campaigns should consider including slum people in the urban areas.

- **Kazi Nazrul Fattah**
Programme Head,
Urban Development Programme, BRAC

Relevance of RTI to the **daily struggle of marginalized people** needs to be communicated. The direct role of ensuring transparency and accountability of the government has to be undertaken by upper middle class as has been suggested by Ms. Meghna Guhathakurta

- **Jharna Das**
NGO Activist

Most petitioners usually come from disadvantaged people who failed to get information on old age allowance, special safety net programmes, free distribution of medicines by the community hospitals, etc.

- **Professor Sadeka Halim**
Former Information Commissioner

If advocacy can be done through providing assistance to people regarding filing the application form, appeal form and complaint form in areas with poor communication, people can have a **clear idea** and **proper information** regarding RTI Act.

- **Md. Marufull Haque Maruf**

The **middle class should be involved** in the initiatives of establishing right to information to ensure transparency and accountability.

- **Moumita Rahman**
Social Entrepreneur

Public demand for information is at the core of successful implementation of RTI. Hopefully, future movements for RTI will consider **public demand** rather than mere top-down assumptions.

- **Meghna Guhathakurta**
Executive Director, Research Initiatives
Bangladesh (RIB)

For the mass people, government transparency and accountability is less relevant than their own livelihood. Therefore, they need to be approached with information relevant to their **day-to-day livelihood issues** and problems.

- **Amanul Islam**
RTI Activist

3

Awareness about ease of use

For successful implementation, highest priority should be put on **RTI awareness**.

- **Zahidul Haque Khan**
RTI Activist

RTI is now included in the **curriculum of class IX and X**. We are advocating to include it at the college level.

- **Hasibur Rahman**
Executive Director, MRDI

Many people find information **application under RTI** quite **complex**. Whereas informed people in rural areas have used this and successfully combatted corruption in their respective areas. Thus everyone should know about RTI.

- **Khushi Kabir**
Nijera Kori

There are diverse approaches taken to raise RTI awareness by NGOs, e.g. RIB favoured PAR, Article 19 focused on legal support, etc. however, the important aspects are on **capacity building** on how to file RTI applications, training of staff, and governance.

- **Tahmina Rahman**
Country Director, Article 19

If we can include RTI in the **secondary or higher secondary school curricula**, it will be a great step in building awareness.

- **Advocate Tanbir Siddiqui**
President and CEO, Change Makers



Awareness building through small steps

4

Each government office can have an **instruction on its notice board** about RTI and the steps to be taken if someone is denied of any information.

- **Dr. Md. Abdul Alim**
Director
Election working Group (EWG)

If all the NGO offices across the country adds a **notice on RTI** in their offices, that can create public awareness on RTI.

- **Hasibur Rahman**
Executive Director, MRDI

Legal and Institutional Measures

5

It should be made mandatory to include the **appeal officers name, designation and address in the information application**. This will reduce harassment of the applicant and they will be more encouraged to ask for information.

- **Suraiya Begum**
Assistant Director, RIB

We have a long way ahead in establishing Right to Information. Absence of efficient implementation of RTI is resulting from lack of **proper initiatives by existing institutions**.

- **Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar**
Shujan

A small **video clip on RTI** can be transmitted on TV channels for RTI campaigns. TV channels can be encouraged to make **short films and documentary on RTI**.

- **Debeshwar Singh**

Information Commission may have a **media cell** for regular communication with all types of media. Media cell will draw a comprehensive plan to improve the **media visibility of RTI**.

- **Muhammad Lutful Haq**
President, Campaign for Right to Information, Rajshahi

Since 2010 till date, the Information Commission has received 1036 complaints, and 405 complaints were sent back to the applicants with directives to reapply following the RTI procedure duly. However, the **re-application rate** (for seeking the information again) is **extremely low**. This is where Information Commission requires brain storming with RTI forum, and other civic groups working to benefit the most marginalized people.

- **Professor Sadeka Halim**
Former Information Commissioner

Public are discouraged when they ask for information regarding corruption within the government. There are instances when information application has been rejected which asked for specific information regarding government expenditure.

Bangladesh has made good progress in implanting RTI Act 2009. But still it has a long way to go. Due to lack of proper initiative of the existing organizations, RTI is still not implemented fully.

My co-worker who is a news correspondent of the Daily Ittefaq in Pangsha Upazilla asked for information from the local agricultural officer who rather than providing information filed a GD with false allegation against him and threaten to get him arrested through a high level police officer.

- **Babu Mollik**
Editor, Weekly Onushandhan, Rajbari

There are cases where **activists have been threatened** because they sought information about local government activities. ...Hence we call for increased focus on the **protection of RTI activists**. In this regard, enforcement of the **Whistleblower Act**, currently gazetted but not in force, can play an important role.

- **Tahmina Rahman**
Country Director, Article 19

There are laws and policies for instance, national broadcasting policy, ICT Act, proposed Cyber Security Act etc. which contains **provisions that are quite contradictory to RTI act** and freedom of expression. Activists and civil society have long been advocating to remove these provision. Before designing any campaign, these acts and policies should be carefully examined and impediments should be removed.

- **Meer Ahsan Habib**

6

Coordinated ICT-aided efforts

RTI application process will be more convenient if **web based and mobile based application** process is introduced. If someone is unable to physically come or send someone for the application, they can apply online from their home. Mobile banking services such as DBBL mobile banking, Ucash or bKash can be used to pay for applied information if any charge is applicable. People can also apply from a nearby Union Digital Center/UISC.

- **Kazi Nazrul Fattah**
Programme Head,
Urban Development Programme,
BRAC

An initiative to provide **online application process** for information is starting from this month. Now it is time to see how active information officers are in terms of providing information to people online.

- **Rizwan-ul-Alam**
Director, Transparency International
Bangladesh (TIB)

A **coordinated initiative** should be taken regarding **online information application and development of mobile apps**. As there are other organizations also working on these.

- **Hasibur Rahman**
Executive Director, MRDI

“ Applicants will be benefitted if the **procedures of online complaint filing, timeline of appeal** are included in the **guidelines**.

- **Babu Mollik**
Editor, Weekly Onushandhan, Rajbari

“ Along with RTI success stories, **sharing of failure stories** will also benefit the efficient designing of the future roadmap.

- **Syed Ahamed**
CEO, IID

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- Both local and global participants

Features

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- Well thought opinions are given
- Large scale participation is ensured
- Experts can participate in their convenient time as online seminars are usually held throughout 1 or 2 days
- An inclusive approach as participation from abroad and distant areas of the country are ensured

7

Coordinated ICT-aided efforts

“ On a pilot basis, Information Commission and/or government may select one or two service sectors (for instances health or education) and then design the RTI campaign. After reviewing the impact, modifications can be done and more sectors can be brought under this campaign.

- **Meer Ahsan Habib**

“ We should **exchange** our **difficulties, success and failures through online group**. IID may take the initiative.

- **Muhammad Lutful Haq**

“ Many organizations are working in the field of RTI. But they rarely **share** their **experiences** or **coordinate** their **efforts**. We try to learn from the successful efforts in RTI of other countries whereas we ourselves do not know about each other's success. How will RTI be implemented if we ourselves do not have information of successful initiatives of each other?

- **Munayem Chowdhury**
Development Worker

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Concluding remarks

“ Thank you all for your spontaneous participation. Especially, recommendations and suggestions from those of the volunteers and activists who are relentlessly working to implement RTI for public welfare will be important guidelines in the future roadmap of RTI.

- **Syed Ahamed**
CEO, IID



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