

# NGOs to help villagers exercise RTI Act

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

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VILLAGERS will now question the government. They will demand answers about the welfare and developmental schemes being carried on by the government in their villages. A campaign to facilitate the same is being launched from December 9 in five districts of Uttar Pradesh - Faizabad, Bahraich, Banda, Chitrakoot and Allahabad. About 300 applications under Right to Information (RTI) will be filed in various government departments from each village.

Workers and volunteers from various organisations involved in spreading awareness and struggle for the Right To Information (RTI) will organise workshops and discussions in the villages and help the villagers in drafting and filing RTI applications.

RTI experts from Delhi based NGOs like Kair and Parivartan, and the local workers from approximately ten organisations, will be working hand in hand for this campaign. It will be the responsibility of the local volunteers to help the villagers submit the applications to the departments concerned. Initially, this campaign will cover six villages where extensive workshops will be organised.

Volunteers working for the cause of RTI will be personally present at the workshops.

The aim of the campaign is to provide the common villager with the opportunity to ask questions regarding the availability of basic amenities - from ration cards to health services, education, roads, etc, to the government. They will also demand information regarding the budget of the forthcoming welfare and development schemes.

Chingari, an NGO working in the villages of Chitrakoot and Banda will be actively participating in this campaign. Bhagwat Sharma, coordinator Chingari says, "The money to be spent on the welfare and the development of the villagers is being openly misappropriated by the officials. The money is going in wrong pockets and we are completely helpless about it. But now we are empowered with the Right to Information. So, every villager can stand up against such open thefts of his rightfully deserved money."

Manish Sisodia from Kabir says, "We got the inspiration for this campaign from the villagers themselves." Citing an instance he adds, "a few villagers not only constructed their houses allotted to them under the Indira Awaas Yojna, they also got the roads, schools and bridges etc. made without paying any bribe. So, if these questions are raised from all

the villages the face of the soul of India i.e the villagers will definitely change."

Jitendra Sharma, an RTI activist from an interior UP village of Bahraich, famous for stopping ration thefts in this region, says, "Thousands of villagers do not even understand the meaning of freedom. The real success of this campaign would be to empower the common man and make him realize his identity, that even he has the right to ask questions in this country."

On December 9, a workshop will be conducted at Sara Bishanpur Village of Faizabad, followed by extensive discussions with the villagers and they will be assisted in drafting and filing the right to information applications. Similarly, on December 10, same schedule of events will be carried out at Taj Khodai Village and the next day at New Basti Nishaad Nagar of Bahraich District.

On December 12, a meeting regarding the problems encountered while submitting the applications to the various government departments with the Bahraich administration, will be held.

The volunteers involved in the campaign will meet the Information Commissioners of UP government on December 13. Similar activities will be carried out in villages of Banda, Allahabad and Chitrakoot from December 14 to 19.