

Action Research Villages

A Right to Information Campaign



MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS



Development Alternatives



Pricewaterhouse Coopers (P) Ltd.

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Development Alternatives, New Delhi, 2007

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Action Research Villages

A Right to Information Campaign



A Report

Action Research Villages
A Right to Information Campaign

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Action Research Villages

A Word about the Book

Right to Information Act is a magic wand in these times of turmoil, where literally half of India's population not only subsists below the poverty line but is also a victim of the bureaucratic Red Tape. Our 5, 70,000 villages are suffering from the skewed development pyramid where the people at the bottom hardly receive a trickle of what is their due. It is not simply the rural area that is strife with corruption. It is the same story with our small towns and even big cities where the citizens have a long list of woes, encompassing problems like ration cards, electricity, bad roads (or no roads) and bribery at each and every step.

This document - Action Village Research - is an eye-opener as it reveals true success stories regarding this one year long RTI Campaign in the remote villages of India where the local populace fought for their rights with the Government machinery and got justice. A number of committed CSOs launched this campaign by empowering the village folk with the weapon of RTI to teach the corrupt Government officials a lesson or two and force the administration to take the necessary action against them.

In spite of being deprived of even the basic amenities of food, shelter and clothing, the village folk were ready to fight for their rights - a fight to the finish. And, they were immensely pleased with the positive results within a few weeks from the day of the commencement of the battle for justice. The Campaign spread like wild fire among the other neighbouring villages as well. In fact, Action Village Research is a testimony to the fact that a little spark of knowledge could ignite a people's campaign that may finally snowball into a mass movement to provide justice to the common man through the magic wand of the Right to Information.

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Action Research Villages

Preface

Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme began in the year 2001 with an aim to help millions of poor people in 108 poorest districts of the country. PACS is a development intervention that works with Civil Society Organisations. The programme is currently spread in 94 poorest districts of six states namely, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. These selected districts perform poorly on indicators related to health, education, governance, income and production, etc. These districts score high on lack of infrastructure, lack (and poor quality) of Government services and exploitation. The Programme is supported by Department for International Development (DFID), UK and managed by Development Alternatives and Pricewaterhouse Coopers (P) Ltd. PACS Programme has been an evolutionary one, not to say that thematic priorities were not clear earlier but thematic focus has shifted to making interventions sound and managing for better impact through work on livelihoods and other required areas.

PACS Programme focuses strengthening Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for evoking civil society action in poorest areas. The rights-based approach of PACS has been a catalytic strategy to trigger CSO response in poorer districts. The programme has reached out to over nine million households and approximately over 45 million population spread across six Programme States. More than 83% of the populations reached are from Scheduled Castes (38%), Scheduled Tribes (21%), other backward classes (23%) and 17% from general class who are economically vulnerable and marginalised.

The various processes witnessed active partnership developed at various levels - from village level to block, district, state and national levels. The partnership processes ensured that hitherto excluded and marginalised

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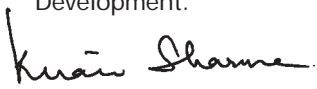
people from the hard to reach areas are included and they take part actively and in most cases lead the processes. At present, 178 PACS projects are running, wherein 665 CSOs are involved.

The capacity building initiatives continue being done at various levels: project level, programme level and at the central level which encompass a wide variety of issues viz., Campaigns for awareness raising on NREGA and RTI, workshops on Gender, CSO Governance, training for resource mobilisation, etc, with the focus on capacity building as against service delivery. Studies have been initiated to monitor the implementation of key programmes of the Govt. (e.g. on RTI, NREGA and NRHM). Various media strategies (involving and training journalists on RTI and other issues, radio programmes, community radio) are being successfully employed to further the work on RTI, NREGA and other issue based campaigns.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning System (MEAL) has been a major achievement in the PACS programme to enable PACS programme partners to reflect, plan, and implement the project activities in a result based approach. Overall, MEAL has made a mark in reflection, learning, actions and systematic improvements in the implementation of PACS projects.

At the close of the PACS Programme after seven years of intensive field work, we would like to encapsulate the learning of the various initiatives into a set of 12 guidebooks in the form of manuals and reports, making the gradient low so that a large cross section of development practitioners can understand about the vital issues of the poverty crisis and how to deal with them.

This report on **Right to Information Campaign** is part of the above-mentioned PACS Series and is a fruition of the PACS experiment. We are thankful to our resource person **Mr. Manish Sisodia** from the organisation **Kabir** and all the CSOs who have been part of this venture and helped us in making this Programme a great success. We hope that this PACS Series is not only interesting but educative as well for all those engaged in the field of development and believe that empowering the poor is the optimum path that leads to the goal of Sustainable Development.


(KIRAN SHARMA)
PACS Programme Director



1

Action Research Villages Dawn of a New Era

India is an agrarian economy. More than half of the country's populace resides in the villages. But as a stark irony, the status of a common villager today has been reduced to that of just a 'voter'. Big schemes for him are made by the so called representatives of the masses sitting in Delhi, who claim to be the best rulers by preparing the annual budget. While Implementing such schemes, expenditures are mentioned in their budgets but there is no place for transparency or accountability in it. Millions of village hospitals, schools, anganwadis, ration shops, community centres, roads, dams, houses, are only made on paper. Fake bill vouchers and false muster rolls are prepared; false entries are made in the registers and a Government committed to the welfare of the villagers is praised. The makers and breakers of law are the same at all levels of governance. So, even on the lowest rung of democracy – the Panchayat – for a common villager, it turns out to be fatal to raise a voice against the system. Keeping these circumstances in perspective, the late Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi had said that only 15 percent of the money sanctioned for the welfare and development of the villagers reaches its rightfully deserving beneficiaries. Attempts to curb this corruption have been made but they were limited to making some rules and setting up specialist committees. A visit to any of the seven lakhs villages of the country would be a testimony to the failure of such initiatives. The millions and billions of rupees sanctioned for the welfare and development of the villagers should reach the villages. But HOW? The question still remains unanswered.

An effective, though limited, answer to this question has been received in the form of **Right to Information**. It is interesting to note here that the concept of transparency in the functioning of the

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Government found its inception in the villages. The voice raised by the villagers of Rajasthan, under the able leadership of Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey, took the form of the Right to Information Act and today, it has become a big support for the many other villagers across the country. Today, even a Dalit residing in the country's interior village has started questioning the so called rulers and is making sure that the ruler gets punished for not providing the answers. For the first time, he/she has developed self-confidence and has started believing in the power of the common man – the true meaning of democracy. But such believers are only a few thousands or few millions. In a country with its population running in crores, such statistics are not very encouraging. Further more, the feudal bureaucracy also leaves no stones unturned to bring down such numbers. So, a need for a campaign was felt wherein the RTI experts, local social activists and the villagers themselves join hands to create awareness and explain the importance of Right to Information amongst the villagers; and, encourage and assist them to use RTI. Thus, commenced the Action Research Villages Campaign. This Year-long campaign aimed at analysing the effectiveness of RTI in the villages. The mission of this experimental project was to have a joint venture of the RTI experts, activists, volunteers and the villagers to come together for one year to assist the local people in the mass usage of the RTI Act and study its impact. This was an effort to understand whether the 85 paise which was misappropriated before reaching the villages (as mentioned by the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi) could be brought down to 75 paise or 65 paise. Needless to mention here that one year is considerably not enough time for a scientific study of this nature, but still the results of the campaign achieved up till now make us believe that the above mentioned words are not just figments of imagination. We sincerely hope that the positive outcomes so far prove to be the milestones and prime examples to further such initiatives.



2

Action Research Villages Realising the Dream

Action Research Villages was a dream. Whenever we thought about RTI and village administration, it was always felt that RTI could be effectively used to resolve the problems of the village. But due to the strong caste divide in the village, one caste is usually dominant and the others are deprived and backward. And, it is this dominant caste itself which is a problem. It was also felt if the backward classes could get together and collectively utilise the RTI act, they could make the village administration more transparent and answerable. But due to lack of education, this experiment was not very successful. Basic education was necessary for the purpose.

During February 2006, we attended the “Peer learning Workshop” organised in Chitrakoot under the PACS programme. The PACS social workers present there showed special and extraordinary interest in the RTI Act. Within few months, various PACS partner organisations conducted intensive training for their volunteers. This was particularly meant for those volunteers who were working under different conditions in the village. This resulted in the massive usage of the RTI by the villagers and emergence of such cases/issues which could be termed as the realisation of the dream. For instance in many villages, people got together and collected evidence of the ration mafia, thus creating pressure on the administration to remove the mafia. For years, these ration Kotedars had diverted the ration sent by the Government meant for these villagers. When the villagers raised questions under the RTI, even the administration could not save these Kotedars. Similarly, cases of irregularities in land allotment and welfare schemes were also sorted out by soliciting information from the concerned departments. But, such cases were piece-meal and not uniform. As a result, one could not estimate the

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impact of RTI in a particular village. In the mean time, in July 2006, a mission called 'GHOOS KO GHOONSA' (or 'Drive Against Bribe') was carried out in 55 cities to create awareness on RTI. Many PACS partner organisations participated in it. Although this mission was limited to the cities, the volunteers from the above partner organisations carried it to the villages where they were working. There were many success stories which suggested that the RTI, if properly used by the villagers, could enable them to get their day-to-day Government related works pertaining to age, income, occupancy certificate, etc., done without paying any bribe because ordinarily they have to pay bribes for these purposes. There was an interesting case worth mentioning during this mission. Two years back, one man had sent rupees 400 by money order to his daughter studying in Delhi, which she never received. The postal department was not ready to provide any information regarding this sum of money. This man exercised his right to information under the 'GHOOS KO GHOONSA' mission and asked for information from the postal department. Within one week, an officer from the postal

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department visited his house, returned the sum of money and apologised for the department's negligence.

In the month of July, Chingari Sangathan, related to PACS partner – Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan, filed an application pertaining to a developmental issue that proved that RTI could be effectively and prolifically used for the welfare and development of the villages. When the residents of Chandrapura, a village situated at a distance of 70 Kilometres from the district headquarter, filed applications and questioned the Government about the welfare and development of their village, the official machinery got alert and within few months, the village took a complete u-turn.

Within three months, a bridge was built, an eight kilometre road was constructed, the entire village was electrified and hand pumps were installed in the village. The villagers had waged a long struggle for the above mentioned works and demands. They conducted a 60 Kilometre long road march (on foot) to the commissioner's office. The Banda District Magistrate finally made a field visit to the village in March 2006. Seeing the village's deplorable condition, he immediately ordered for developmental works. For five months, no action was taken on the orders. Finally, the villagers filed RTI applications on the non-compliance of the DM's orders on the 1st of July, 2006. By October 2006, 75 percent of the works had already been completed.

In February 2006, we were moving forward with the RTI Campaign along with PACS partners. Successful implementation of RTI had already reaped fruitful results in a few villages of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Another Peer learning workshop was organised by PACS partners in Jhansi after seven months, where discussions on Right to Information took place. All the PACS partners shared their experiences about the 'Drive against Bribe' Campaign and other related issues. During the workshop, we shared our idea of running an RTI campaign in the villages with PACS Director – Kiran Sharma. The immediate approval of Kiran Sharma laid the foundation for the Action Research Villages Campaign. It was decided that an experiment be conducted in five villages of Uttar Pradesh with PACS partners and try to ascertain the impact of collective use of RTI to demand transparency in governance by the villagers. The Campaign

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commenced in five districts of Uttar Pradesh, namely – Bahraich (Taj Khudai, Nai Basti – Nishaad Nagar), Faizabad (Sara Bishunpur), Chitrakoot (Bharthaul), – Banda (Panchampur – Village) – and Allahabad(Gadha Katra). It is necessary to mention here that initially, Killa Gadwa was not a part of the campaign, but was included later on ABSSS' insistence. But, activities in Faizabad came to a halt as the local volunteers could not organise themselves and so, once again, five villages were included in the campaign's ambit.

Another issue that is usually raised is that the geographical coverage of the campaign is too large, nearby villages could have been chosen. We need to clarify here that since this was an experiment, so it was imperative for us to select our subjects: the villages with different social, economic and geographical conditions. So, a deliberate effort was made to choose those villages where RTI had not been used in the past and also the availability of PACS partners, resources and experts was also considered. Keeping all these issues in perspective, the campaign was launched in December 2006. Positive results were noticeable in the very first week of the campaign itself. The success stories of RTI in the villages have been very encouraging. It has also been a learning experience for the various social organisations involved with the campaign.



3

Action Research Villages The Thrust

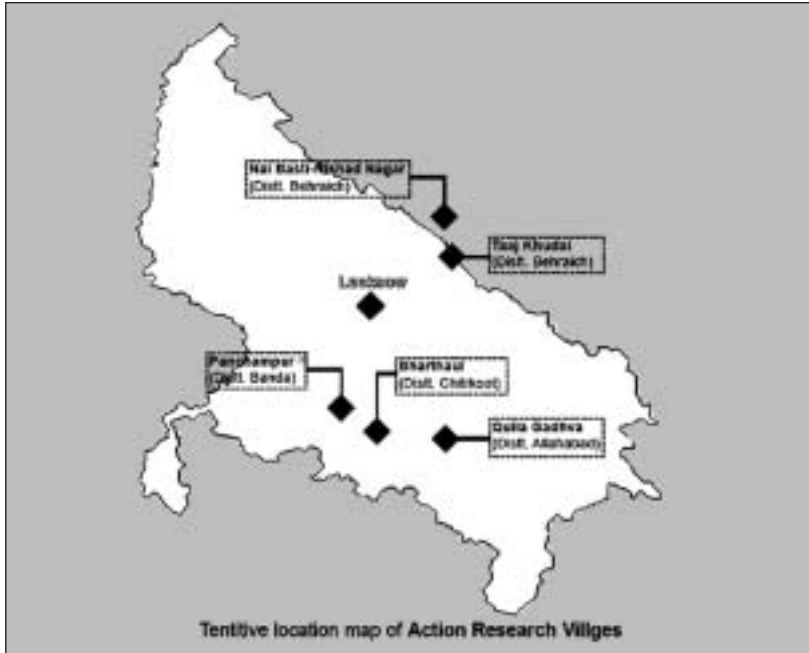
Action Research Villages is a joint initiative of Poorest Area Civil Society Programme partners **ABSSS, Dehat** and Delhi based RTI activist group **Kabir**. It is an experimental campaign in Uttar Pradesh to study the potential impact of the Right to Information Act (RTI) on village life. The one year experiment, launched in December 2006, has focused on five villages in various districts of the state with the following four objectives.

- (1) To study and monitor the impact of an extensive use of RTI over the course of a year, with the aim of replicating the experiment elsewhere, if successful.
- (2) To train and encourage as many people as possible to start using RTI.
- (3) To facilitate the formation of user groups, support groups and networks of citizens dedicated to the use of RTI.
- (4) To inculcate within the community the practice of monitoring various actions, programmes, and schemes run by the Government.

The primary activity of Action Research villages has been to train and encourage the villagers to file a minimum of 300 RTI applications on various issues from each village. Nearly ten months after the launch, the experience and outcomes of the campaign have been encouraging not only in the targeted villages but also in the surrounding villages where the word of RTI has spread. In a few cases, there have been district-wide increase in the use of RTI.

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Poverty is a symptom of poor and ineffective governance and lack of participation. It is a commonly known factor that countries where people have no access to information are likely to have lower development indices and higher corruption quotients.



4

Action Research Villages The Mission

Constant help and follow-up

It was decided under the campaign that the workers of Delhi and various other places working on the right to information would educate the villagers on the benefits arising from the use of the RTI. For this purpose, posters, banners, wall paintings, hand bills, etc., were prepared in simple language, so that the villagers could easily understand the Act. But, one could not neglect the fact that right to information is a law and the above campaign itself was in its initial stages of understanding and publicising the law. It was impossible to make the villagers understand the nitty-gritties of the Act or law.

Regular assistance in the villages

For the above purpose, social workers were given the responsibility to be constantly active throughout the campaign. All such social workers in different villages had already been provided training on the right to information in the various workshops. The responsibility of these social workers was to explain the Act to everyone who wished to know about the right to information, provide help and keep a constant vigil on future activities.

Constant support from Delhi

One volunteer in the organisation **Kabir** in Delhi was assigned the task to remain in constant contact with the volunteers in the villages and provide them the necessary support whenever required. He was given the responsibility of the mission, which mainly included giving final shape to the applications filed in the

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villages, filing an appeal, etc, on denial of information and being in touch with the media.

Special responsibility for sensitive issues

Kabir in Delhi, **ABS** in Chitrakoot and **Dehat** Sanstha in Bahraich controlled and managed the mission constantly with the help of their workers. All these people had voluntarily taken out time to conduct meetings in the villages, provide complete knowledge about the right to information, help file applications under the Act, etc. Along with these, volunteers undertook the responsibility to file applications on those issues which were comparatively critical and beyond the villagers' capacity. In the first meeting itself, such issues arose on which applications under the right to information were filed by this group of volunteers. For example, in Nishad Nagar, asking for information from the Forest Department directly by the villagers involved risks. That is why applications were filed in the meetings conducted in December and the volunteers from Delhi and Bahraich asked for information. Similarly, information on records of land and mining/excavation works in villages of Bundelkhand was a serious issue, which was also raised by these volunteers.





5

Action Research Villages The Beginning

The Campaign commenced in PACS – supported five districts of Uttar Pradesh namely – Bahraich(Taj Khudai,Nai Basti – Nishaad Nagar), Faizabad (Sara Bishunpur), Chitrakoot (Bharthaul), Banda (Panchampur Village) and Allahabad (Gadha Katra). There were problems galore in these villages. The village populace was deprived of even the basic minimum needs of food, clothing and housing. But it was heartening to learn that they were willing to fight their problems and all they needed was a little bit of support. The issues raised in these villages mostly related to their economic, social and geographical conditions and also their local problems. In almost all the villages, the educated and experienced people showed interest in the fact that with the use of their Right to Information, they could question even the senior Government officials.

Faizabad: Village Sara Bishunpur

On the 9th of December, 2006, the first general meeting of the campaign was organised in Suhawal Block of Faizabad District,Uttar Pradesh.

The village is spread over a diameter of three kilometres. The meeting was organised in the 'Poore Kumhai' majra of the village. PANI organisation is working in collaboration with PACS in this village. The village is an agro-based economy. The men and women of the village mostly work as agricultural laborers. There is one Primary school and a Junior high school in the village. There is a Primary Health Care Centre situated four kilometres away from the village where medicines, doctors and nurses are hardly available.

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RTI experts explained about the Right to information and its usefulness to the villagers. The villagers raised various issues relating to their problems and showed keen interest in getting the information regarding such problems by filing RTI applications.

Issues raised by the villagers

1. Maximum numbers of villagers have not received the voter ID card
2. The workers at Government works, or with contractors, do not receive even minimum wages
3. Health problems due to the absence of any proper drainage facility
4. Irregularities at the Anganwadi centres
5. Many students raised the issue that there were irregularities in the scholarships being given to them. Some students also informed that one hundred rupees were deducted from their scholarships without any reason. (Tinki, a seventh grade student, was the first one to raise this issue and other students followed suit)
6. In spite of two physical education teachers being appointed at the Suhawal School intermediate College, there were no sports equipment available at the college.

Thirty Five RTI applications were drafted after two hours of extensive discussions. Mr. Awadesh Kumar of PANI, an NGO working on rural issues in that area, and his associates took the responsibility of filing the applications in various departments at the Faizabad District Head Quarters.

Bahraich: Village Taj Khodai

On the second day of the campaign, we reached Taj Khodai village of Bahraich District. About 200 families reside in this village situated in Chittora Block of the district. Dairy farming and agriculture are the main occupations of the village.

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The few villagers engaged in agricultural pursuits face problems due to lack of proper irrigation facility. Though the Government has sanctioned installation of pump sets many times, but none of the villagers have received them. Presently, they are using the water collected in a pond that accumulates the dirty wastes and the polluted water of the nearby city for irrigation purposes, which is affecting the fertility of the land adversely. Some villagers also raised the issues of the bad quality of the school dress received from the school. Some residents also complained about the discrepancies in the allotments under the Indira Awaas Yojna and the ration distribution.

After discussing their problems extensively, RTI experts explained to them the benefits of using the Right to Information and how they can question the Government for their sad state of affairs. The villagers experienced a sudden splurge of emotions the moment they came to know about RTI and drafted 165 applications related to various issues. Some applications were also drafted by the residents of the nearby village.

A few village youth got together to form a group called Kranti Yuva Samooch and pledged to fight for the cause of RTI. They were instrumental in creating a positive environment for the campaign by writing slogans on the walls of the village a week before the campaign. As a result, each and every resident of the village knows about the Right to Information today.

Village: Nai Basti-Nishad Nagar

Nai Basti and Nishad Nagar are two parts of Katarnia Ghat, a forest village situated in Bahraich District of Uttar Pradesh. The Indo-Nepal Border is at a distance of three Kilometers from the village. Originally, a village named Nishad Nagar existed here but due to the irrational attitude of the Government, after being built and wiped out a number of times this village was finally divided into two as it exists today.

The initial meeting of the Right to Information Campaign was conducted in these two villages on the 11th of December, 2006. After talking to the villagers, it was evident that even the thought of Democracy was a distant reality for them. The rule of the jungle

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prevailed here due to the discriminatory policies of the forest department. The villagers have the proof that they have been residing in the village since pre-independence days, but the administration refuses to acknowledge their status. The recently formulated forest policies have declared them as encroachers. Since then, they are not being considered the citizens of this country at all. But ironically, their names have been included in the voters' list. This is a classic example of how an unreasonable vote bank politics can ruin the very identity of the citizens of this country but the rulers, our so called 'representatives', prefer to feign ignorance.

Banda: Village Panchampur

Panchampur is also a village comprising economically backward people. Their problems are also the same as the other villages of this region. Ration cards are not made here; and people who have the ration card, do not get their stipulated amount of ration. The elderly people of the village do not receive the benefits of the old age pension schemes. The hapless villagers wonder as to what has gone wrong? Who is responsible for their impoverished conditions?

There is a primary school and a junior high school in this village, but they remain closed because the only teacher appointed for the school, Mr. Promod Dixit, prefers to stay in the city rather than visiting the village to teach. The Government, paying him a monthly salary (for staying at home!!), is oblivious of the fact that one of its officers is playing with the future of 70 odd children, i.e an entire generation of the village, and is not being taken to task. The residents of the village managed to rope in a village youth to teach at the school by pooling in some money (ten rupees per month per student). When the villagers started complaining against the absentee school teacher, Mr. Promod Dixit went on a long medical leave and eventually, the school got locked once again.

Another problem the villagers face is that the village road connecting them to the city road has not been constructed. Two small bridges were made a couple of years back but they serve no purpose as no heavy vehicles, tractors or carts, etc., can move on the bridge. A villager from a nearby village complained that the only electricity transformer in the village got burnt in 1994, but has not been repaired since then. There is no electricity in the village, but still a few

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villagers are receiving the electricity bills each month. Many people have not been allotted houses under the Indira Awaas Yojana too.

The RTI experts and volunteers from organisations like Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthan, Chingari Sangathan, Vidyadham Samiti, Kabir and Parivartan organised a meeting to spread awareness about Right to Information in the village. After a detailed discussion about problems faced by the villagers a number of RTI applications were drafted for various departments of the Government. The Applications were filed in the block office of Naraini Tehsil and various departments of Banda District Head Quarters the next day.

Recently, a few residents of the village were given BPL (Below Poverty Line) ration cards. Legally, every BPL ration card holder is entitled to receive 35 kilogrammes of food grains and 10 litres of kerosene oil per month, but none of the villager has received a single grain of food till now. The ration shop dealer resides in a nearby village called Chahalwa – which, astonishingly, is not an encroachment in the forest department records. Whenever the villagers approach the dealer, they are rebuked and informed that the Government does not send food and oil for them.

A few villagers work in a nearby Government farm where they are not being given their full amount of wages. An approximate number of 110 families reside in Nai Basti, and almost the same number of families in Nishad Nagar. Talking to each member of these families unfurls a distressing saga of predicaments and impoverished conditions. Many people are on the verge of insanity and suicide due to these conditions. Dheeraj, a village youth from Nishad nagar, has informed that five members of his family are literally surviving on tree roots.

Every villager has a lot of problems. The Government should be made accountable for such injustice. Unfortunately, tired of fighting their deplorable conditions and administration's negligence, people have lost faith in any kind of solution. Under such circumstances, Right to Information could not raise high hopes for them. Nevertheless, due to their trust in the Dehat Sanstha working in their village, few villagers came forward to file RTI applications. Evidently, Dehat Sanstha has been working in that region and is fighting for

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the rights of the forest villagers under a campaign named-'Jai Azaadi' (or 'Hail Freedom'). This campaign became a part of the Action Research Village project to fight the injustice shown towards the residents of the forest villages. The residents questioned the administration regarding the policies formulated for their village, the irregularities in the ration distribution; their citizenship status, etc. In all, 70 applications were drafted and filed in various departments of the Government by the villagers. Most of the applications were filed in the Ration Department, Forest Department and the District Magistrate's Office.

Volunteers from Delhi based organisations, Kabir and Parivartan and the Dehat Sanstha accompanied the villagers to the various departments and helped them in filing the applications.

Chitrakoot: Village Bahrthaul

The residents of Chitrakoot have prolifically used their Right to Information, which has reaped fruitful results in the past. A few residents of the village had worked on a road construction site under the 'foodgrains for work scheme' two years ago. But, none of them had received food grains as promised to them under the scheme. The volunteers of the local level organisations – Chingari Sangathan and Damini Samiti – working in the village, had filed RTI applications regarding the same in the concerned Government departments. Within few days, the workers at the site had received their stipulated share of food grains.

The RTI experts and the volunteers of Kabir, Parivartan, Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthan (ABSSS), Damini and Chingari Sangathan experienced a great deal of excitement for the Campaign amongst the villagers. Slogans on Right to Information were already imprinted as paintings on the village walls. The volunteers conducted a road march and 'Nukkad Sabhas' (or Street Meetings) across the village to explain about the Right to information to the villagers and invite them for the public hearing. Posters prepared especially for the campaign were put on the village walls.

A public hearing was conducted by the Campaign volunteers in the Panchayat Bhawan. The Village Head (Pradhan), Kotedar, a school teacher, the ex-Village Head and the residents of the village

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participated in the meeting. Certain issues raised by the villagers directly pinpointed the responsibility on the Pradhan and the school teacher. These issues related to the difficulties in procuring a ration card, discrepancy in ration distribution, non-receipt of ration, bad state of the school, problems related to the school dress for students, scholarships, mid day meals, etc. Issues related to workers not receiving their full amount of wages and non-receipt of compensation by the family of the worker who died at the work site were also discussed in the meeting. The village residents also discussed the problems related to the unjustified encroachment upon their land and the unreasonable attitude of the forest department towards them.

RTI applications on almost all the above mentioned issues were drafted for the concerned Government departments after the discussion. The volunteers assisted the villagers in filing the applications at the District Head quarters the next day.

Allahabad Village: Gadha Katra

The volunteers of Kabir, Parivartan and ABSSS conducted the campaign in two phases in Shankargarh village situated in Shankar Garh block of Allahabad District, Uttar Pradesh. In the first phase, promotional activities like road march, wall paintings, sticking



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posters and 'Nukkad Sabhas' were conducted across eight 'Majras' (colonies) of Gadha Katra village to spread awareness amongst villagers about the campaign and invite them for the meeting to be organised in the next phase, the next day. People in large numbers turned up for the meeting organised at the Panchayat Bhawan of 'Rahai Majra' in Gadha Katra Village to discuss their problems. Lekhpal, the Block Development Officer, and the Village Head (Pradhan) also attended the meeting.

The Gadha Katra village residents complained that their children were not receiving scholarships, school dress and other facilities from the school. They also informed that 20 Junior High Schools of the block have remained closed since the past 20 years. When the villagers complained about the closure of the schools, the Primary Education Officer informed them that the schools have been locked down due to the dearth of adequate number of teachers. Problems related to Anganwadi, health centres and the Kotedar were also discussed in the meeting.

More than thirty Kol Dalits of 'Kila Gadhwa Majra' of Gadha Katra village have lost their lives due to inadequate medical facilities. Almost 85% of the village population is landless and earns a living by working in a nearby stone quarry. Due to the absence of any health care facility in the village, most of the residents have fallen prey to chronic diseases like asthma and tuberculosis. Few village inhabitants, who have been allotted land on lease under the forestation scheme, are being troubled by the administration. One of the major problems faced by the residents of 'Gul Rahai Majra' is the inadequate supply of drinking water. The only well of the village has dried down. From one of the two handpumps installed in the village, polluted water comes out and the other has broken down out and remains constantly out of order.

Though the Block Development Officer did offer some explanations, but they were not enough to satisfy the villagers and hence, maximum number of RTI applications were drafted and filed at the BDO office. RTI applications were also drafted regarding other problems pertaining to the concerned departments. Next day, these applications were submitted at the Shankar Garh Block and the concerned departments of the Allahabad District Head Quarters.



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Action Research Villages **First Phase: Summary**

The commencement of the campaign was definitely full of action. The response of the villagers was very encouraging. We had anticipated that the first couple of months would be spent in explaining the concept of the RTI Act to the villagers and how they can benefit from it. Interestingly, most of the issues were raised by the villagers themselves and they were eager to demand answers from the Government. The overwhelming response and the attendance at almost all the meetings indicated that the campaign had got to a flying start. But in this Process, we faced some challenges to convince the villagers to use RTI.

First Challenge: Explaining the Concept

Our biggest challenge was to explain the RTI Act to the people and how they can use it to their benefit. The maximum men and women who were attending the meetings were illiterate, so it was very difficult to elucidate the various provisions of the Act to them. So, posters were made in which pictures were used to explain that when they buy their basic necessities like salt, soap, toothpaste, matchboxes, and from the market or watch a film in the theatre, they pay taxes. The money thus collected is deposited in the Government treasury. The Government uses the same money for building roads, bridges, distribution of ration to the poor or any other work. Furthermore, this money is also used for the payment of salaries and perquisites like vehicles, bungalows to the Government officials. Thus, the Government officers are our servants, not our masters and it is our right to keep a check on them and ensure that they function properly. This right is the Right to Information. The villagers were also explained that the relationship that exists

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between the landowners and the labourers or the shop owners and the staff is the same as that between us and the Government officer. We are the masters and they are our servants. It was easy to explain these similies to the illiterate villagers. Finally, we did succeed in getting across the concept of the RTI Act to them.

The villagers were further explicated that if any of their work or any work related to their village is held up due to bribery, they could use the RTI Act to ask for the details of the work done in the files, like the



names and designations of the concerned officials. These instances were directly related to their day-to-day lives and they could easily comprehend and relate the usefulness of the Act in solving their daily problems. Other successful stories of the effective use of RTI were related to the villagers. This resulted in fixing up the accountability of the Government officials and also in resolution of their problems.

Posters and Hand Bills

Certain Provisions of the Act, like the deduction of 250 rupees per day from the salary of the faulty official, were explained by printing them on the posters and hand bills. A few people attending the meeting were literate too, though their numbers were very small since the meetings were organised during the daytime when the literates used to be out on work. The first meeting was attended by a considerable number of literate villagers, amongst whom hand bills and guide books were distributed. Wall Paintings and posters were used extensively for creating awareness amongst the villagers.

होड़ो अब राजनीति और सारे बकवास!
सूचना का अधिकार है सबसे खास ॥

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Action Research Villages

First Phase: The Issues

It was most invigorating to note that the villagers themselves were coming forward to raise their problem-related issues and appeared eager to use the Right to Information Act to resolve them. In many meetings, we noticed that people would immediately get interested in the Right to information Act and wanted to know more about the information that could be sought and drafting and filing of RTI applications.

A few people who attended the meetings had been fighting for their rights since years. They had already moved from pillar to post, from the courts to the offices with their limited resources and capabilities. In few of the the most poverty stricken villages, we found many residents who had not eaten a single morsel of food since days and were almost starved to death. Interestingly, given an opportunity, all of them were ready to raise their voices. Right to Information provided the most pertinent opportunity to do so. The *Kranti Yuva Sangathan* members of Taj Khodai deserve a special mention here. These inspired village youth had been involved in the preparations and had already set the stage by writing wall slogans all around the villages much before the commencement of the campaign. So, a great fervor for the campaign was experienced in these villages for the Right to Information.

The following issues were raised by the villagers in the first phase of the Campaign:

1. Inconsistencies in the Public Distribution System
2. Inconsistencies in the BPL ration cards

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3. Inconsistencies in the construction of roads, etc., from Gram Panchayat funds
4. Most of the villagers have not received Voter ID cards
5. Non-receipt of minimum wages at Govt. works
6. Irregularities in scholarship distribution
7. Bad quality food served under the Mid Day Meal scheme
8. Students are not being distributed free school uniforms and books
9. Bad quality of school uniforms (wherever distributed)
10. Non-availability of sports equipments in schools and colleges
11. Teachers remain absent in schools
12. Irregularities at the Anganwadi Centres
13. ANM does not visit the primary health care centres
14. Free treatment and medicines are not given at the Government hospitals
15. Absence of any irrigation facility in the village
16. The forest department is unjustifiably troubling the villagers
17. The villagers do not receive the benefits of the forestation scheme
18. Irregularities in the allotment of Gram Sabha land
19. Irregularities in the selection of beneficiaries of Indira Awaas Yojna scheme
20. Irregularities in the selection of the beneficiaries of Old Age and Widow Pensions scheme



8

Action Research Villages The Impact

Lessons on RTI taught to the Village School Teacher

Aggrieved by the unprofessional attitude of our democracy's very own public servant, the village got reprieved through their right to Information.

One of the foremost successes achieved in the first phase of the Action Research Villages campaign was that the residents of Panchampur, an interior village of Banda district, Uttar Pradesh, overpowered an egocentric school teacher. Mr. Promod Dixit would not have imagined even in the wildest of his dreams that the villagers would use their right to information as a weapon to teach him a lesson and force the administration to take the necessary action against him.

About two years ago, a Pre-Middle School was opened in Panchampur village, situated 70 kilometres away from the District Headquarters and a teacher was appointed for the school. But, teaching and learning became a distant reality for the students from the time Mr. Dixit took charge of the Poorva Madyamik Vidyalaya. For him, this appointment was just a formality to receive his monthly salary. He was not only playing with the future of more than 70 children but also making a complete mockery of the revered student-teacher relationship. He never taught for more than two days in a week in the past two years. The school remained closed the rest of the days. The families of the children studying in 6th, 7th and 8th Standards of the school started thinking of an alternative to secure their children's future. They managed to pool in some money (ten rupees per student) and fixed up a village youth to teach in the school. This arrangement suited the appointed school teacher, so he became more relaxed and almost stopped coming to the school. He

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went to the extent of framing innocent villagers who questioned him about his irregular attendance, under false charges of looting and theft. When the villagers started protesting about his 'unprofessional style of working', the school teacher went on a long medical leave and consequently the school got closed.

On 14th December, the workers and volunteers from the Delhi based organisations like Kabir and Parivartan, along with the local workers from the Chingari Sangathan under the 'Action Research Villages' Campaign, reached Panchampur Village to propagate the use of the Right to Information. Finally, the villagers witnessed a ray of hope when they learned that they could question the Government and ask for information related to the attendance records, leave records and medical records of the absconding village school teacher. Fifteen villagers drafted an application regarding the same and on the 15th of December, filed a number of applications with the Primary Education Officer at the Banda District Head Quarters. They not only asked for the records of Mr. Dixit but also questioned the Primary Education Department about the department's role and responsibilities in such situations. (All the application are provided from next page onwards).

Immediate action was taken on the issue by the department. The Primary Education Officer summoned Mr. Promod Dixit the very next day and asked for an explanation. Living up to his accountability and responsibility, the officer appointed a new school teacher for the village school. The school was opened the very next day and regular teaching began in the school. An enquiry has been ordered against Mr. Promod Dixit and he has been asked to report to the school instantly.

The villagers were overwhelmed with the fact that their use of Right to nformation could reap such instant results.

This success story will prove to be a catalyst in capacitating the citizens with the right to information and finally realising this dream of the father of the nation.

Application filed by Panchampur's villagers

The Public Information Officer
C/o District Primary Education Officer
Banda, Uttar Pradesh.

Sub: Application under the Right to Information Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to the Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya , Village Panchampur, Naraini Tehsil, District Banda, Uttar Pradesh :

1. Provide information related to works done (both on small and large scale) in the above-mentioned school in the year 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 with the following particulars:
 - a. Work/purpose for which the expenditure was incurred
 - b. Brief description of the work/purpose
 - c. Approved fund/amount for the work/purpose
 - d. Date of approval of work/purpose
 - e. Position/ state of completion of work or the ongoing work
 - f. Name of the agency responsible for getting the work done
 - g. Date of commencement of work
 - h. Date of completion of work
 - i. What is the rate at which the contract for work has been given?
 - j. How much money has already been paid?
 - k. An Attested copy of the sketch of the work
 - l. When and on which basis the decision for getting the work done was taken?

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Provide a copy of the decision.

2. How much money was allocated to the above-mentioned school up till now? Provide details of the allocated money with the following particulars:
 - a. Year of allocation
 - b. Amount
 - c. Purpose/work for which the money was allocated
 - d. Amount of actual expenditure incurred
 - e. Work/purpose for which the expenditure was incurred
3. How much money has been allocated for the above-mentioned school in the current financial year? Also, provide information related to the remaining funds from the money allocated in the last financial year in the above-mentioned school. Provide certified photocopies of relevant details.
4. How many projects are still waiting for approval and what is the estimate for each of these projects? Provide certified photocopies of the relevant details.
5. Provide an attested copy of all the governing orders/directions issued by the Government and the Department for the better implementation and maintenance of standards of the Mid Day Meal Scheme. What arrangements have been made in the above-mentioned school for the effective implementation of the Mid Day Meal scheme? How much money has been allocated to the above mentioned school in the year 2006?

Yours faithfully,

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The Public Information Officer
C/o District Primary Education Officer
Banda, Uttar Pradesh.

Sub: Application under the Right to Information Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to the Government School Teacher Mr. Promod Dixit appointed in the Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Village Panchampur, Naraini Tehsil, District Banda, Uttar Pradesh :

1. Since when has Mr. Promod Dixit been working in the above-mentioned School? In which school was he working prior to his appointment in this school?
2. Why and under what circumstances was Mr. Promod Dixit transferred to Panchampur? Provide all relevant details with certified photocopies of all relevant documents.
3. When was Mr. Promod Dixit appointed in your department? What are his academic qualifications and experiences?
4. How many complaints have been received against Mr. Promod Dixit by the department? Provide relevant details with following particulars:
 - a. Brief Description of the complaint
 - b. Name and address of the complainant
 - c. Date of complaint
 - d. Brief description of the action taken on the complaint
5. Provide a certified photocopy of the service record of Mr. Promod Dixit.
6. Is it true that Mr. Promod Dixit is on a long medical leave? If yes, then please provide information regarding his ailment. Provide a copy of the medical leave application submitted by him in the school and also of the medical certificates and the prescriptions prescribed by the doctors. (Please note that this

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issue is related to the future of 70 children of the entire village. Thus, this issue is in public interest and it cannot be treated as personal information)

7. How many times has Mr. Promod Dixit gone on a medical leave during his service period? Provide all relevant details with the following particulars:

Date , period of medical leave , his ailment, etc.

Yours faithfully,

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The Public Information Officers
C/o District Primary Education Officer
Banda, Uttar Pradesh.

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to the Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Village Panchampur, Naraini Tehsil, District Banda, Uttar Pradesh :

1. How many employees are working in the above mentioned institution? Provide a list of all the employees with following information: Name, Designation, Job profile/details of duties, Tenure of service in the present office, Daily record of the IN and OUT time of the employee
2. Kindly provide a copy of the attendance register of the Year 2006 of all the above mentioned employees.
3. What is the provision for action to be taken against an employee who is not punctual and remains absent without prior intimation to the institution. Kindly provide a copy of the rules, regulations and directions regarding the same.
4. What action has been taken against the employees who have not been punctual or have remained absent from work in the year 2006, as per the above mentioned rules, regulations and directions in the last 6 months?
5. Kindly provide the details of the leaves availed by the above mentioned employees (leaving the weakly offs and the gazetted holidays) in the last 6 months.
6. What provisions have been made by the Department for the discharge of duties and responsibilities in the absence of the staff/employee/officer on leave? Kindly provide a copy of the rules, regulations and directions regarding the same.
7. How many complaints have been received from the above mentioned school regarding corruption/irregularity in the year 2006? Provide a certified copy of all the relevant documents

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with the following particulars: Brief Description of the complaint, Name and address of the complainant, Date of complaint, Brief description of the action taken on the complaint, Description of the related school/employee (name, address, designation) against whom the complaint has been filed.

8. Has any complaint been received against the Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya , Village Panchampur, Naraini Tehsil, District Banda, Uttar Pradesh. If yes, provide related information with the following particulars: Brief Description of the complaint, Name and address of the complainant, Date of complaint, Brief description of the action taken on the complaint, Description of the related employee (name, address, designation) against whom the complaint has been filed, Name and designation of the investigation officer, a certified photocopy of the Inquiry report.

Yours faithfully,



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Action Research Village The Campaign

Campaign Report to the District Magistrate

Another interesting facet of the campaign was the process of filing the RTI applications. A group of ten volunteers and villagers were going to various offices for submitting the RTI applications. None of the applications could be filed easily. Most of the offices were ill-equipped for the filing of the RTI applications. One of the major problems faced during the filing process was that the clerks, and sometimes even the officers, appeared non-conversant and at times completely ignorant about the RTI Act itself. The applications were filed after a lot of trepidation, struggle and running around the offices. These experiences were submitted in the form of a report to the District Magistrate of Banda District, which is provided below. The effect of the report was evident in our next visit-The RTI application filing system had considerably improved in most of the offices.

The District Magistrate
Date: 16.12.2006
Banda,
Uttar Pradesh

Sir,

An RTI campaign named Action Research Villages is being run in five districts of Uttar Pradesh. The campaign aims to spread mass usage of Right to Information at the grassroots level i.e the villages and also to elucidate the efficacy of the RTI Act in solving village related personal and public issues. Conceptually, the campaign aims

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to ascertain whether the theft in the funds sanctioned for the development purposes could be stopped with the use of RTI.

This campaign has been launched in the villages of five districts of Uttar Pradesh, namely. Faizabad, Bahraich, Banda, Chitrakoot and Allahabad, though it is our effort to incorporate more and more villages in the purview of the campaign. Activists and volunteers fighting for the rights of the villagers are touring each of the five districts, discussing village related problems and assisting the rural residents in drafting and filing RTI applications on their problem-related issues. A minimum number of 300 applications to be drafted and filed by the villagers in various Government departments in the coming few months is being targeted. Questions related to various issues like school dress, mid day meals, scholarships, ration card, electricity problems, roads, water, transport and bribery will be raised and RTI applications will be filed with the help of the volunteers of this campaign in great numbers.

A public hearing was organised on the 14th of December in Panchampur Panchayat of Banda district during the campaign. Village residents in large numbers attended this meeting. The RTI experts and volunteers explained the effectiveness and the usefulness of the RTI Act to the Panchampur village populace. A great deal of excitement and eagerness to file RTI applications was witnessed in the villagers.

The residents raised village related problems in the discussion that followed. These issues/problems are enumerated below:

1. There is a primary school and a junior high school in this village, but they remain closed because the only teacher appointed for the school, Mr. Promod Dixit, rarely comes to the school to teach and is currently on a long medical leave. The residents of the village managed a village youth to teach in the school by pooling in some money (ten rupees per month per student). The future of 70 odd children, i.e an entire generation of the village, is being affected. In their RTI applications, the villagers have asked for information

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related to the attendance and leave records of the absentee school teacher.

2. The village residents also complained about the irregularities in the mid day meal distribution at the primary school in the other part of the village. They informed that the Kotedar always makes false excuses of non-receipt of ration from the supply office. Ration and food material has not been distributed since the past three months. The villagers have filed RTI applications on the issue with the Food and Supply Department.
3. The five kilometres by connecting road between the village and the cement road has not been constructed (*kuchha road*). In their RTI applications, the village residents have asked about the repairs and maintenance work undertaken on the connecting road in the last ten years.
4. The old people and the widows have not been receiving their pensions and other benefits under the Old Age And Widow Pension Scheme for years. In their RTI applications, they have asked the District Administration the reasons for the same.
5. The Public distribution system in Panchampur is in a very bad state. Most of the villagers do not have ration cards and those who have do not get their ration on time. People have asked for copies of the ration record of the shopkeeper in their RTI applications.

The applications were filed on the 15th of December, 2006 in the various departments of Banda District Headquarters. Our experiences are enlisted below:

General Problems faced in all the offices

1. No board pro-actively displaying information about the department related to RTI as per the provisions of the Act.
2. No arrangement in any of the offices for the receipt of application fees. None of the offices have printed Receipt No. 385 as per the provisions of the Act.

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3. The clerks responsible for the receipt of the RTI applications and the officials are mostly uninformed about the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005.
4. None of the officials/ staff could tell us the name in which the postal orders or the drafts could be sent for the payment of application fees.
5. It could be a coincidence but a point to be noted is that in none of the offices (BDO, Naraini, BSA, PDS, Collectrate) the Public Information Officers and the Assistant Public Information Officers were present and their subordinate clerks refused to receive the RTI applications.

Problems in different offices

1. There was no staff present/ employed in the Block Development Office for receiving the application fees. The BDO was also not present in the office. Clerks informed that since the cashier was on leave, receipt slip could not be furnished.
2. At the office of the Primary Aducation Officer of Banda, RTI related clerks were present but there was no arrangement, for depositing the application fees. After a lot of arguments, the application fees was deposited with the postman. The receipt has not yet been furnished. The application fees amount has been forcibly deposited with the postman.
3. At the Food and Supply Office, the post man was present but when he was asked to take the application fees, he called a related clerk who was somewhere and did not know anything about Receipt No. 385.
4. Even at the District Headquarters, there was no arrangement/system for the deposition of the application fees. At 4 pm, we were informed that since the bank has closed the application fees cannot be deposited through a treasury chalan also. An argument followed and finally, after a lot of trepidation, the clerk received the application fees by signing on the copy of the application.

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We request you to kindly take the above-mentioned facts in the right perspective and pass orders to all the officials and the Government employees of the district to take the RTI Act seriously. If necessary, we are also willing to orient the officials/employees and discuss RTI for a day and clear their doubts and queries related to the RTI Act.

Thanking You,

Manish Sisodia
Right to Information Campaign
E-109, Pandav Nagar,
New Delhi - 92
Ph: 9868875898

Priyanka Jaiswal
ABSSS
Bharat Janani Parisar
Ranipur Bhatt, Chitrakoot
Ph: 05198-224332
Email: abssschrakoot@rediffmail.com

Village women teach the dishonest Kotedar a lesson

The 'Mere Gaon Ke Sawaal' Campaign volunteers noticed that the residents of Nai Basti were also facing the same problems as that of the other economically backward villages of the region. They were completely fed up with the despotic Kotedar. The use of Right to Information by the villagers, the women being in majority, was successful in curbing the corruption seeped in the Public Distribution System to some extent.



When the campaign volunteers saw the BPL ration cards of the villagers, they found that no entries had been made during February 2006 to December 2006. It was evident that the villagers had not received any ration in the said time period. Immediately, 51 village residents agreed to file group RTI applications on the issue and demanded information regarding the acquisition and the distribution of the ration and also asked for copies of the ration records. The applications were filed by the applicants personally after a lot of difficulty at the District Supply Office. Exactly within a fortnight, the Kotedar reached the village and narrated a long sob story, which moved few of the innocent villagers so much that they even agreed to take back their RTI applications.

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They very next day the Kotedar brought a mini bus to the village along with pooris made with one quintal flour and asked the villagers to come to the SDM's office and take back their RTI applications. But, the women of the forest village rights forum refused to do so. What followed was a verbal altercation between the women and the Kotedar. This initiative by the women of the village enthused the other villagers and they also refused to take back their RTI applications.

The Kotedar trying another of his tactics, one day announced in the village that all those who requested for information can collect it from him. When few villagers reached to take the information, they were forced to make thumb imprints on a blank paper. The Dehat Sanstha volunteers immediately reported this scam to the SDM. Finally, the Kotedar Pradeep Kumar was suspended.

Application filed by the Nai Basti's villagers

Public Information Officers
Food and Supply officer
Behraich

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

I am a resident of Nai Basti Village. I have been given BPL Ration Card, Card Number-154207.

Provide the following information regarding ther BPL Card for the period February 2006 to December 2007

1. Provide the details/factual account of the ration and kerosene oil issued on my ration card per month, according to your records with the following particulars:
 - a. Month
 - b. Amount of ration and kerosene oil issued
 - c. Date of providing the ration and kerosene oil
 - d. Amount paid for each of the above
 - e. A photocopy of the receipt of the above mentioned amount.
2. Provide an attested copy of the following records of the ration shop and kerosene oil depot of the last six months:
 - a. Master card Register
 - b. Daily sale register
 - c. Daily stock register
 - d. Monthly stock register
 - e. Assessment book
 - f. Cash memo

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I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately/ I am a BPL card Holder, So, I am exempt from payment of fees. My BPL card no. is:154207. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005. Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request., where I may, if required, file my first appeal.

Yours sincerely,

Baleram
Vangram Nai Basti
Vill.Panchayat- Chahlwa
Po.- Girijapuri
Behraich, UP

School uniforms distributed at the end of the December Session

Despite several claims of the Government, school uniforms of the session- December 2006-07 – were not distributed among the students of the Gulrahai Primary School in Allahabad. On 19th December 2006, workers from KABIR and ABSSS conducted a meeting with the villagers of Gulrahai and educated them on the RTI Act. Immediately thereafter, nine parents prepared an RTI application and questioned the administration regarding the school dresses of the children. Till date, the administration has not been able to provide an answer but in the first week of January 2007 itself, the school dresses were distributed to the children.

Similarly, in the Bharthaul Village primary school of Chitrakoot district, school dresses were not distributed among the children till December. On 18th December 2006, under 'Mere Gaon Ke Sawaal' Campaign, KABIR & ABSSS conducted a meeting with the villagers of Gulrahai and educated them on the RTI Act. The very next day, parents of these children submitted an RTI application with the District Education Officer and within 15 days, school dresses were distributed and a video shoot of the court was also conducted.



Application filed by the Bharthol's and Gulrahai's villagers

Public Information Officers
District Basic Education Officer
Chitrakoot, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to the primary school of the Bharthol:

1. Have the uniforms for the year 2006-07 been distributed to the students of the above mentioned school? If yes, then how many students have the uniforms been distributed to? Provide a list of the students who have received the uniforms with the following particulars:
 - a. Name of the student
 - b. Date on which the uniforms were distributed to the students
 - c. A photocopy of the receipt registers of the students.
2. If the uniforms have not been distributed then provide the following particulars:
 - a. Why have the uniforms not been distributed till now?
 - b. According to the rules and regulations, what is the maximum time limit within which the uniforms should be distributed from the beginning of the session?
 - c. Who were the officers responsible for the distribution of the uniforms? Convey their names and designation.
 - d. What action will be taken against such officer/employee who shirks from work and causes problems for the people? When will this action be taken?

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3. Provide a copy of the governing orders/directions issued by the Government related to the distribution of uniforms in the schools.
4. Provide the name and designation of the officer/employee who is responsible for the problems faced by the students due to the non-distribution of the uniforms. What action will be taken against him? When will this action be taken?
5. By when will the students receive the uniforms?

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department, then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request, where I may (if required) file my first appeal.

Yours sincerely
Matganjan
Village- Bharthol
P.O. - Shivrampur
Chitrakoot, UP



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Action Research Villages

Representative Applications

In this section, we are presenting some of the representative applications under the RTI Act, which were sent to various Government Departments in the First Phase of the campaign, on development issues.

The Public Information Officer
Regional Forest Office
Bhraich

Date: 12 December 2006.

Subject: Application under the Right to Information Act, 2005

Sir,

Please provide the following information:

1. How many forest villages are there in Braich? Provide a list of forest villages with an outline map along with the following details:
 - a. Name of the village
 - b. Number of resident families in the village
 - c. Total population of the village
 - d. Name of the forest range
2. When was each of the forest villages established according to your official records? Provide a certified photocopy of the related documents.

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3. Has this village ever been established after being dislocated? If yes, when, under what circumstances and by which department was the village re-established after being dislocated.
4. Provide a certified photocopy of all the orders/governing orders, rules and regulations related to the provision of public utilities/facilities, cutting down on of citizens rights, dislocation, welfare programmes of the above mentioned villagers.
5. Are there any orders/governing orders of the Uttar Pradesh Government or the central government which ban the villagers from receiving public services? If yes, provide a certified copy of the related document
6. What services/facilities have been provided in each of the above mentioned forest villages? Provide the information with the following as well as other relevant details:
 - a. Health services being provided in the villages
 - b. Education facilities being provided to the children in the villages
 - c. How many villagers have received ration cards? Provide a village wise list
 - d. In which of these villages are ration shops located?
7. Provide certified encroachment details of the forest management work plan 2004-2014 of the wild life zone of Katarnia Ghat?
8. How many new encroachments have been recognised in forest areas of Katrnia Ghat in the last five years? Provide a marked map along with the following details
 - a. Type of encroachment (domestic or commercial)
 - b. Details of encroachers (Name, address, etc.)
 - c. What is the basis on which these areas have been declared as encroachment (provide a certified copy of all the related documents)

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- d. Area of the encroached land
 - e. Since when (specify date) has the land been encroached?
 - f. Action taken against the encroacher
 - g. Name, designation and responsibilities of the officials in service in that period
9. How many cases of wild life killings been registered from the jungles of Katarnia Ghat in the last five years? Provide relevant information along with following details:
- a. Date of incident
 - b. Details of the incident
 - c. Type of animal hunted/killed (species etc)
 - d. Details of the recognised offender (name, address)
10. How many new forest crimes have been recognised? Provide related information along with a marked map.

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately/ I am a BPL card Holder, So, I am exempt from payment of fees. My BPL card No. is:..../ If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request., where I may (if required) file my first appeal.

Yours faithfully,

Description of Land and Lease of Gram Panchayat

Public Information Officers
C/o, S.D.M. Office
Tahsil - Bara
Allahabad, UP

Date: 19-12-06

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to land in Gadha Katra Gram Panchayat:

1. Provide the following information regarding the details land in Gadha Katra Gram Panchayat with an attested copy of the sketch:
 - a. How much area of the total land is agricultural land (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - b. How much area of the total land is infertile? (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - c. What is the total area on which the fodder house is located? (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - d. What is the total area of land owned by the village society? (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - e. What is the total area of the burial ground of the village? (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - f. What is the total area of the land on which the well is located? (Raqba No. and Total area)
2. How many families of the above-mentioned Gram Panchayat have been given the following lease in the past 25 years? Provide the details with an attested copy of the sketch:
 - a. Agriculture land lease (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - b. Housing lease (Raqba No. and Total area)
 - c. Mining lease(Raqba No. and Total area)
 - d. Forestation lease(Raqba No. and Total area)
 - e. Any other lease (Raqba No. and Total area)

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3. How many landless families of the above-mentioned Gram Panchayat have been given land on lease during 2000 to 2007. Provide a list of such lessees with the Raqba No. and Total area and an attested copy of the related sketch:
 - a. Name of the lessee
 - b. Name of the lessee's father
 - c. Address of the lessee
 - d. Date of granting the lease
4. How many families of the above-mentioned Gram Panchayat have been granted agricultural lease during 2000 to 2007? Provide a list of related details along with Raqba No. and Total area and an attested copy of the related sketch:
 - a. Name of the lessee
 - b. Name of the lessee's father
 - c. Address of the lessee
 - d. Date of granting the lease
5. How many families of the above-mentioned Gram Panchayat have been granted Housing lease during 2006 to 2007? Provide a list of related details along with Raqba No. and Total area and an attested copy of the related sketch:
 - a. Name of the lessee
 - b. Name of the lessee's father
 - c. Address of the lessee
 - d. Date of granting the lease
6. How many families of the above-mentioned Gram Panchayat have been granted Mining lease during 2006 to 2007? Provide a list of related details along with Raqba No. and Total area and an attested copy of the related sketch:
 - a. Name of the lessee
 - b. Name of the lessee's father
 - c. Address of the lessee
 - d. Date of granting the lease

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

7. How many families of the above-mentioned Gram Panchayat have been granted Mining lease during 2006 to 2007? Provide a list of related details along with Raqba No. and Total area and an attested copy of the related sketch:
 - a. Name of the lessee
 - b. Name of the lessee's father
 - c. Address of the lessee
 - d. Date of granting the lease
8. How much land of the village society out of the total land of the Gram Panchayat is yet to be utilised for granting on lease? Provide related details along with Raqba No. and Total area and an attested copy of the related sketch.
9. What efforts/ measures have been undertaken by the department for granting lease to the landless families of the Gram Panchayat? Provide the details of (Name and designation) the officer/employees responsible for such efforts. Provide an attested copy of all related governing orders and directions.

I am a BPL card Holder, So, I am exempt from payment of fees. My BPL Card No. is:8037. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request, where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours faithfully,

Puja Devi
Village- Gulrahai
Panchayat- Gadhakatra
Po.- Shankergarh
Allahabad, UP

Description of Expenditure of Gram Panchayat

Public Information Officers
C/o, District Panchayat Office
Chitrakoot, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to land in Bharthol Gram Panchayat:

1. What is the total amount of funds/money allocated under various heads/schemes to Bharthol Gram Panchayat during the year 2001-06?
2. Provide the following details of works done by the above mentioned Gram Panchayat with following particulars:
 - a. Work/purpose for which the expenditure was incurred
 - b. Brief description of the work/purpose
 - c. Approved fund/amount for the work/purpose
 - d. Date of approval of work/purpose
 - e. Position/ state of completion of work or the ongoing work
 - f. Name of the agency responsible for getting the work done
 - g. Date of commencement of work
 - h. Date of completion of work
 - i. What is the rate at which the contract for work has been given?
 - j. How much money has already been paid?
 - k. An Attested copy of the sketch of the work
 - l. When and on which basis the decision for getting the work done was taken? provide a copy of the decision

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- m. Provide the names of the Assistant Engineer and the super intending engineers who supervised the work and approved the payments. Which part of the work was supervised by him?
3. Provide the expenditure (incurred) details of the Bharthol Gram Panchayat in the year 2001-06. On various works/schemes:
- a. Name of work on which the expenditure was incurred
 - b. Brief description of the work
 - c. Approved fund/amount for the work/purpose
 - d. Name of the agency responsible for getting the work done
 - e. Date of commencement of work
 - f. An Attested copy of the sketch of the work
 - g. When and on which basis the decision for getting the work done was taken? provide a copy of the decision

Yours faithfully,

Description of Scholarships in the schools

Public Information Officer
C/o, District Basic Education Office
Chitrakoot, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following details relating to the distribution of Scholarships in primary schools of Gram Panchayat Bharthol:

1. My Daughter is a student of class Third of the above mentioned school. Her name is Sunita. Is she eligible to get the scholarship this year according to your records? If yes, what is the amount of scholarship she should receive?
2. Has she already been given the scholarship amount for the current year according to your records? If yes, then provide a copy of the related documents/registers which contain the above mentioned details.
3. If she have not been given the scholarship, then specify the reason for the same. Provide an attested copy of the related documents.
4. How many students receive the scholarship in the above mentioned school? Provide a list of each such student with name, father's name, class etc.
5. How many students receive the scholarship in the year 2006-07? Provide an attested copy of the receipt register which contains the signatures of the students and their parents.
6. What is the basis on which the distribution of scholarships to the students is decided? Are there any rules and regulations for such scholarship distribution? Provide an attested copy of all related governing orders/directions and laws.
7. What is the total amount of funds allotted by the Government for the distribution of scholarships to various students?

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8. Has the department made any arrangement/system for the fair and just distribution of scholarships to the deserving students? Provide an attested copy of the related documents.
9. If a student has not received the scholarship yet, then specify the reason. Provide a list of all such students who have not been given the scholarship yet with the following particulars:
 - a. Name of the student
 - b. Father's name
 - c. Reason for not being given the scholarship
10. Specify the names and designation of the officers responsible for the non payment of scholarships on time. What action will be taken against such officers according to departmental rules and regulations? When will this action be taken?

Yours sincerely,

Description of the survey done for BPL selection

Public Information Officers
C/o, B.D.O. Office
Shankargarh, Allahabad, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Kindly provide the following information related to the survey done for Below Poverty Line (BPL) of Gulrahai village.

1. How many people are BPL card holders in the above mentioned village? Provide a list of such card holders with following particulars:
 - a. Name of the card holder
 - b. Father's Name
 - c. Card Number
 - d. Number of members on the card(unit)
2. On what basis was the BPL card for the above mentioned card holders made? Provide a copy of the documents submitted by the cardholders for the same.
3. When was the last survey for the BPL selection in the above mentioned village done? Provide a copy of the survey report, also specify the name and designation of the survey officer.
4. What were the criteria/yardsticks employed for the various families in the BPL selection survey? Provide a copy of the related governing orders/rules/directions.
5. Was a review done after the above mentioned survey? If, yes then provide a copy of the related documents.
6. Provide a copy of the governing order/rules and directions related to the review.

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7. Was a case of any irregularity reported during the survey? If yes, then what action was taken on the complaint? Provide a copy of the related details.

I am a BPL card Holder, So, I am exempt from payment of fees. My BPL Card No. is : 80393. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/ Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request, where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours sincerely,

Rajkumar
S/o, Bedilal
Village- Gulrahai
Gram Panchayat- Gadhakatra
Shankergarh, Allahabad

Details of Hand pumps

Public Information Officers
C/o, C.D.O. Office, Karvi
Chitrakoot, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information regarding the Hand Pumps of Village Bharthol:

1. According to your records how many Hand pumps have been installed in the above mentioned village? Provide a list of such Hand Pumps with the following particulars:
 - a. Name of the place where the Hand Pumps is installed
 - b. Date of installation of the Hand Pumps
 - c. Expenditure (amount) incurred on the installation of the Hand Pumps
 - d. Under/from which head has this payment been made
 - e. What is the present condition of the Hand Pumps(working/not working/closed)
 - f. How many times have the Hand Pumps been repaired after being installed? Provide the chronological details.
 - g. Provide the details of each repair expenditure.
2. Are these Hand Pumps checked/inspected regularly by the government? Provide the details of the officers/employees with their names, designation and duties responsible for the same.
3. When were the Hand Pumps checked/inspected the last time? Provide the name, designation and duties of the officer/employee responsible for the same.
4. What is the basis on which the number of hand pumps to be allots /installed in a village is decided (population / area /

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expanse / others). Provide an attested copy of the rules, regulations, directions and the governing orders for the same.

5. Has the purity of the drinking water from the Hand Pumps been tested/verified/checked? If yes, then provide the name and designation of the officer/employee responsible for the same and also provide an attested copy of the enquiry/test report.
6. Do the villagers bear a part of the expenses incurred on the installation/repair of th Hand Pumps? If yes, then provide an attested copy of the governing orders and directions regarding the same. Provide a list of the villagers (name and addresses) from whom the payment for the above mentioned Hand Pumps has been taken/extracted

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request., where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours faithfully,

Details of electrification

Public Information Officers
C/o, Executive Engineer's Office
Energy Department
Behraich

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Kindly provide information related to the electricity system of the Taj Khudai village.

1. According to the departmental record in which villages is electricity supplied?
2. How many houses in the above mentioned village have an electricity connection? Provide the names and addresses of each such house.
3. If the electricity facility is not available in the village, then specify the reason.
4. Which block does this village fall into? How much funds have been allocated for the electrification of the block in the past ten years. Specify the yearly details.
5. Has a contractor/agency been employed for the electrification and its maintenance in the block? If yes, then provide the following information:
 - a. Work/purpose for which the expenditure was incurred
 - b. Brief description of the work/purpose
 - c. Approved fund/amount for the work/purpose
 - d. Date of approval of work/purpose
 - e. Position/ state of completion of work or the ongoing work
 - f. Name of the agency responsible for getting the work done

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- g. Date of commencement of work
- h. Date of completion of work
- i. What is the rate at which the contract for work has been given?
- j. How much money has already been paid?
- k. An Attested copy of the sketch of the work
- l. When and on which basis the decision for getting the work done was taken? provide a copy of the decision
- m. Provide the names of the Assistant Engineer and the super intending engineers who supervised the work and approved the payments. Which part of the work was supervised by him?

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request, where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours faithfully,



11

Action Research Villages

Press Releases

Villagers in India question the Government on public accounts and accountability

Villagers in India will now question the Government. They will demand answers regarding the welfare and developmental schemes being carried on by the Government in their villages.

A campaign to facilitate the same is being launched from the 9th of December in five districts of Uttar Pradesh namely: Faizabad, Bahraich, Banda, Chitrakoot and Allahabad. The campaign will try to cover more and more villages in its ambit.

Workers and volunteers from various organisations involved in the propagation, spreading awareness and struggle for the right to information 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 Kabir and Parivartan, and the local workers from approximately ten organisations, who are dedicated to the cause of this noble mission 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 concerned departments.

In the initial stage, this campaign will cover six villages. Extensive workshops will be organised. Volunteers working for the cause of RTI will be personally present in the villages. Filing around 300 RTI applications from each village in various Government departments in the following few months is the aim of this campaign. The common villager will now have the opportunity to ask questions regarding his 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.

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Chingari, an NGO working in the villages of Chitrakoot and Banda will be actively participating in this campaign. Mr. 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 the 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 the houses allotted to them under the Indira Awaas Yojana, 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 villages will definitely change.'

On the 9th of December, 2006, a workshop will be conducted in the 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 the 10th of December the same schedule of events will be carried on in Taj Khodai Village and on 11th December, in New Basti Nishaad Nagar of Bahraich District. On the 12th of December, a meeting regarding the problems encountered while submitting the applications to the various Government departments with the Bahraich administration will be organised.

On the 13th of December, volunteers involved with campaign will meet the Information Commission of Uttar Pradesh. From the 14th of December to 19th of December similar activities will be carried on in the villages of Banda, Allahabad and Chitrakoot.

Villagers have raised some basic and fundamental issues

Pure kumhai village of Faizabad district of UP has dawned into the beginning of the new era of the campaign of Right to Information. Pure kumhai village of the Bishanpur Panchayat consists of 45 families and today, on the very first day of the

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campaign, 35 of these families have filed applications under the Right to Information Act 2005, seeking the details of their own money and their rights. Mostly, these families are facing the problems in the public distribution system. Ration dealer provides the ration at higher prices and the quality of the ration is also very poor. Twenty families of the village have raised the questions related to this issue and asked the officers of the ration department the details regarding the action taken on the malpractices of the ration dealer. As per the rules, the ration dealer is required to put up a board in the ration shop, giving details of the availability of the ration, how much has been distributed and at what price the ration is available. None of the ration shops in the village have put up such boards. The villagers have sought the information that how far the officials are responsible for non-compliance of the rules and the poor distribution of ration. If the villagers succeed in this experiment and they start getting quality ration at the correct price, then the scam in the ration distribution in all parts of the country, estimated at 27,000 Crore rupees, can be checked.

Apart from this, the villagers have also sought information regarding the non-availability of free medicines in the community health centres, non-availability of nutritional food at the Anganwadi centres, misappropriation of the free studentships/ scholarships at the local schools, etc. The students of the village informed that they are not given their scholarships. They also informed that the money received for development of library, sports, etc., is also not spent properly.

Today was the first day of the Right to Information Campaign in the villages – ‘Mere Gaon ka Sawal’. This campaign is the first of its kind. Today, people from the neighbouring villages are also participating in the campaign, where a five member team of the Delhi based organisations – Kabir and Parivartan – discussed the local issues with the villagers and helped them in drafting the application under the Right to Information Act. Mr. Avdhesh Dubey, of the local organisation ‘Paani’, has taken the responsibility to get these 35 applications under the RTI Act to be submitted to the concerned Public Information Officers, along with the villagers.

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In the campaign, the villagers were also apprised of the experiments and success stories of the use of the Right to Information Act in different parts of the country. This campaign targets at filing at least 300 applications under the RTI act from this village itself in the coming months. Similar campaign will be launched in four other villages of the Bahraich, Banda, Allahabad and Chitrakut districts of UP. The campaign focuses at informing the villagers about the Right to Information Act and to encourage them file at least 300 applications in coming days.

Fundamental Questions from the forest villages of Uttar Pradesh

This is the dawn of a new wave of freedom struggle for the inhabitants of forest villages situated on the banks of Katarnia Ghat, Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. People exchange slogans of 'Jai Azaadi' as pleasantries here. The right to information is serving as a volatile weapon in their unique struggle for freedom.

The discriminatory policies of the Uttar Pradesh Government have robbed off their freedom. The villagers are being alienated from the benefits of the welfare and developmental schemes enjoyed by the other Indian villagers. A few years ago, the Government had declared the forests of Katarnia Ghat as a sanctuary and had stopped taking taxes from the villagers. Later, the villagers were declared as encroachers and orders were passed to oust them from their lands. Though the villagers have the relevant documents to prove that they used to pay taxes till 1994. Now, with the help of the Right to Information, they have not only started checking the Government records to revolt against the unfair policies of the State Government and the forest department, but are also raising questions regarding their basic amenities.

RTI experts from Delhi based organisations like Kabir and Parivartan and the Dehat Sanstha of Bahraich District organised a workshop in the village and explained the advantages of the use of the right to information. The villagers, enthused with the knowledge of this right, drafted and filed applications to the forest department. People also asked questions regarding their day-to-day problems arisen from the unfair policies of the Government in their RTI applications.

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For example, Swaroopa Devi of Nishaad Nagar had not been able to gain from the life insurance policy of her husband since past two years as she did not have the residence proof due to the biased rules and regulations of the Forest Department. She filed an application to the LIC of India to enquire about the residence details mentioned in the form while purchasing it so that she could be proved the legal heir to her husband's policy amount.

Eleven-year-old Aarti of Nai Basti works in the forest to earn a living for her mother and her siblings. Her family has not been able to gain from the social welfare schemes as the discriminatory policies of the forest department have declared them as encroachers. Sixty villagers of Nai Basti have been given ration cards from the nearby Kotedar of the village. But, the ration is being refused to them as they have been declared encroachers in Nai Basti. Out of these deprived villagers have filed in RTI applications in the Ration Department and questioned about the ration records. This distressing situation is pushing the village youth into illegal and anti social activities. Some of them have taken refuge in the Maoist ideology. But now, they are seeing the Right to Information as a new hope. If the Bahraich administration and the UP Government do not pay heed to this alarming situation, it will be difficult to stop the youth from taking to anti social activities. To take the Right to information to the villagers, to empower them with the RTI, a campaign – 'questions of my village' – is being carried on in five villages of Uttar Pradesh. In these villages, extensive workshops to spread awareness about Right to Information amongst villagers will be organised. A minimum number of 300 applications to be drafted and filed by the villagers in various Government departments is the aim of this campaign.

Workers and volunteers of the campaign met the Information Commissioners of Uttar Pradesh today and told them about the plight of the villagers and the discriminatory policies of the Government towards them.



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Action Research Villages The Second Phase

In the first phase, numerous RTI applications on diverse issues were filed in every village. These applications manifested the dreams of the villagers into reality. As soon as RTI applications were filed, the monthly ration for which villagers had to make repeated requests to the Kotedars, was now made available by the Kotedars themselves who distributed it among the villagers. The schools in which school dresses had not been distributed till the end of the session were distributed with immediate effect.

Meetings with the villagers

In the midst of these achievements, the Second Phase of the campaign was started in the villages. Once again, meetings were held with the villagers. A special aspect of these meetings was that the villagers themselves came forward to file RTI applications on issues concerning them. First and second appeals for RTI applications in the first phase were also filed.



Monthly Meetings

The local volunteers of the campaign and the volunteers collaborating at the national level regularly conduct monthly meetings. In these meetings, they discuss the activities undertaken in their region, their achievements and the problems faced by them. They learn from one another's experiences and adopt policies accordingly.



Training on RTI to Selected People in the Village

In every village, there were some people who wanted to make the maximum use of the RTI in as many cases as possible. They were trained separately. These people proved to be of immense help to the local volunteers/workers as they assisted them in filing RTI applications on sensitive/ serious issues like scams involving the Village Pradhan, etc. They also created awareness and enthusiasm among the rest of the villagers.

Information Centre

When the inhabitants of other nearby villages, where the campaign was being carried out, heard of the successful filing of RTI applications, they also started going to the local RTI volunteers for filing RTI applications regarding the problems faced by them. To help such villagers, five information centres were opened at the village, tehsil and the district levels. There is one volunteer always present at these centres. Their main work is to file RTI applications and to help the villagers in following up the matter.



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Action Research Villages More Success Stories

Villagers found a new way of development

Development and welfare were a distant reality for the inhabitants of Sidkahna Jot Keshav Village of Bahraich District, Uttar Pradesh before December 2006. The village neither had proper roads nor any drainage system. The villagers had never got the benefits of the Indira Awaas Yojna scheme, leaving their dwellings in dilapidated condition. When the aggrieved villagers came to know that they could now question the Government for their miserable conditions using their right to information, they saw a silver lining. On the 28th of November, 2006, five inspired residents of the village filed in RTI applications and questioned the district administration: Why have the roads and the drains of the village not been made? Why have no allotment under the Indira Awaas Yojna been made in the village? They also asked for a copy of the survey list prepared by the Government of India for the allotments under the Indira Awaas Yojna scheme.

The administration immediately got alert and the construction of the roads and drains began in the Sidkahna Jot Keshav Village. The cheques for the construction of the houses under the Indira



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Awaas Yojna scheme were also disbursed. A two kilometre long road and drain have already been constructed till now and the construction work is in full swing. In all, 32 villagers have been allotted the houses under the Indira Awaas Yojna and a list containing the names of the villagers eligible for the allotment under the scheme has been displayed on the village wall.

Wages received after three years

Pahadi Kala Village is situated at a distance of approximately 40 kilometres from Allahabad. Three years ago, 15 labourers were hired in order to clear the village pond off the lotus flowers. The wages totalled upto 3000 rupees at the completion of the work. The contractor refused to pay the wages by exerting undue influence. The labourers complained to every possible authority concerned, including the Police Commissioner but to no avail.

Almost after three years, an application was filed under the RTI Act, questioning the Police Commissioner as to the action taken on the complaints of the aggrieved labourers. Right away, the entire administration got into action and the Police Commissioner himself went to the village and ensured that the contractor paid the wages to all the labourers in his presence.

Effective Use of RTI is changing the face of the villages

One of the biggest achievements of the present Government is the National Employment Guarantee Scheme. The Government, through this scheme, sought to ensure at least 100 days of employment to each citizen. But like all other schemes, this Employment Guarantee Scheme too is operational only on paper. And, this is being revealed through the information gathered under the RTI Act.

Under the 'Action Research Villages' campaign, one of the five villages in which a transformation is being sought through the RTI Act is Panchampur village in Banda district. When the villagers came to know that such a law exists, under which they can question the Government, they demanded a complete description of the activities being carried under the Employment Guarantee Scheme along with

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a photocopy of the muster roll. On receiving the required information, the villagers carried out a door-to-door verification, which revealed lots of scams under the said scheme. Lakhs of rupees had been siphoned off in the name of planting trees in place of only six year old trees. Thousands of rupees were spent on the construction of such roads which do not even exist in the village. It was shown in the reports that rupees 7000 had been spent on the construction of a chabutra (or a raised platform) which the villagers claimed to have built themselves by volunteering to do so ('shramdaan').

All these facts revealed in the verification were given to the media. As soon as these scams were made public, the administration got into action and soon an enquiry committee was set up for re-verification of the work done under the EGS.

On the other hand, when the villagers came to know that the money which was supposed to be spent on the development of the village but has been bungled up by the village sarpanch, they started questioning the Sarpanch as to where the money had been spent. Subsequent to the pressure exerted by the villagers through the RTI Act, construction of the village chabutra and plantation of trees is in full swing.

Last installment under the Indira Awaas Yojana received after four years

Having spent her entire life in a hut, when Savitri came to know that she had been allotted a house under Indira Awaas Yojana, she was very happy that she would have a pucca house of her own. However, soon she realised that things were not that easy as she somehow managed to get the first two installments but for the third installment, she had to run from pillar to post. More so because she did not give bribe to the concerned officers. After running around for sometime, she gave up and accepted it as her fate.

Being a resident of such a remote village, when Savitri somehow came to know of her rights under the RTI Act, she reached the Shivrampur block with the help of **Kabir** where a RTI camp was being organised. She then filed an application under the RTI Act

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2005, requiring information from the administration regarding the status of her last installment under the IAY. She submitted the application herself, in the Block office on 23rd May 2007. Within two days, the BDO called her and paid the pending installment, requesting her not to proceed with the RTI application.

SDM office rushed to village

On 19th December 2006, a meeting of the RTI workers and the villagers was held in the Gulrahai village, under which applications of 75 people were drafted under the RTI Act. These applications were concerning ration cards, BPL list, village communal land, patta, etc.

BDO Shankargarh had provided the necessary information by 01-03-07 but the same had not yet been provided by SDM Bara, public information Officer-Tehsil Bara, District Basic Education Officer, Allahabad, Chief Medical Officer, Allahabad and District Food and Supply Officer, Allahabad. The first appeal was made to the District Magistrate, Allahabad. When no information was received, a second appeal was made to the State Information Commission on 24-04-07. The Commission took the matter seriously and summoned the public information officers and the applicants to its office.

Immediately after receiving the Commission's notice, SDM, Bara went to the Gulrahai village alongwith Tehsildar, Kanungo, Lekhpal on 21-06-07, met all the 19 applicants and almost 200 villagers examined the Khasra-Khatauni and gave all the necessary information required by the villagers. A poor widow got her 'antyodaya card' made. These officers helped two people in getting a piece of land usurped by the powerful people of the village.

Naimuddin got his new marksheet

Naimuddin from Shah Pur Jat, a student of class Tenth, had appeared for his final exams in 2003. When he got his marksheet, there was a major mistake in his marksheet as his year of birth was mentioned as 1980 instead of 1988. Now a tough time awaited Naimuddin. After approaching the Secondary Education Board, he was told to pay bribe for a correction in his marksheet. But it was impossible for Naimuddin to arrange 5000 rupees. Finally, he met Mr.

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Jitendra Chaturvedi of 'Dehat' who encouraged him to use the RTI. Within four months of using RTI, Naimuddin got his new marksheet.

Nurse's visit became regular

A nurse named Kamini Shukla, was posted for the basic health facilities in Nagar Taj Khudai. But, Shukla never wanted to visit the village. But, RTI has now changed the scenario. After raising questions regarding the 'Tikakaran Abhiyan' (or 'Vaccination Campaign') record under RTI Act, Shukla reached the village and started to cry. Finally, she accepted that she did not have any record. Now, Shukla is ready for a regular visit and 'Tikakaran'.

Corruption-free Kanji House

Kanji House is a place (like prison) where cattle are kept. And to get back the cattle, it is necessary to pay a penalty. People from Nai Basti and Bhawaanipur had been complaining for years that the Kanji House officials impose penalty without following any rules or regulations. Jung Hindustani, an RTI activist, used the RTI Act and asked some questions regarding the Kanji House. He asked about the rate fixed for penalty. Within a month, Jung Hindustani got the copy of the Government order of rate fixed for penalty. There was a huge difference between the rate fixed by the Government and the penalty charged by the Kanji house official. Jung distributed the copy of Government order and now, no villager pays ??? penalty.



14

Action Research Villages

The Information Commission

There was a lot of excitement about the scale and the positive impact of the campaign amongst the volunteers, but the news from the Information commission was not very encouraging, it was rather quite disappointing. Discussions with the volunteers and the villagers about the experiences with the State Information Commission brought forth the following issues:

1. The hearing dates are given after many months of filing the appeals
2. The Information Commissioners favour the Government Officers at the hearing and the appellants are usually not heard
3. The Information Commissioners have shown no interest in imposing penalties on the faulty public information officers who are proving to be the bottlenecks in the flow of information
4. The Appellant has to make many visits to the Commission for a hearing on a matter
5. No compensation is given to the appellants for the pecuniary losses and mental harassments faced by them
6. The case is closed without providing the information
7. The officers usually do not comply with the orders of the Commission and no further action is taken against them

These problems were quite disconcerting for the campaign. The unfavourable attitude of the bureaucracy was also an impediment in

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

the flow of information and it was doubtful whether RTI applications filed during the campaign would get a response. Under such circumstances, Uttar Pradesh State Information Commission would have to play a very important role. So, a series of meetings were organised with the various Information Commissioners. The first meeting was organised in the state capital Lucknow, in which the activists and the campaign volunteers discussed about the Action Research Village Campaign, the aspirations of the villagers, the potential impact and results of the campaign, etc., with the State Information Commissioners. Furthermore, the Information Commissioners were invited for open forums in the villages. The first such meeting was organised in Chitrakoot. The meeting was attended by Department PIOs, RTI activists, campaign volunteers and the villagers. The meeting was chaired by the Information Commissioner Mr. Virendra Saxena himself. All the participants at the meeting put forth their view points.

The Information Commissioner informed that most of the RTI applications are very ambiguous. The applicants are unclear about the information they seek. He said that most of the RTI applications are mostly complaints and seek grievance redressal. Even the appeals are mostly complaints. He explained that the commission is responsible for the provision of information and is not a Grievance Redressal Forum. He emphasised upon the fact that the RTI applications should be drafted properly. The villagers need to be oriented on drafting applications. He pointed out that if the applications are clear and then it would be easy to fix accountability on the concerned officers and penalties could be imposed.

The first of these open forums were also attended by the villagers who had effectively used Right to Information to their advantage. They narrated their experiences at the meetings. The Information Commissioner confessed that sitting in the court rooms of the commission, it was difficult to ascertain that the mass usage of this Act could have such a far reaching impact. The villagers also intimated the Commissioner about the hurdles posed by the Government staff and officials in filing the RTI applications. In the afternoon, the Information Commissioner called for a meeting with the PIOs in the presence of the villagers. The meeting was coordinated by social activists. The Commissioner advised the public

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Information Officers to actively provide the information sought by the applicants, provided they do not fall in the ambit of Section 8 of the RTI Act. The PIOs also spoke about the problems they faced while providing the requested information. For example, one of the PIOs pointed out that sometimes the applicants were so indiscreet in their queries that to gauge the information sought is very difficult. The Information Commissioner suggested that in such an instance instead of prolonging the provision of information, the applicant should be consulted and asked about the information he requires. This would mutually resolve the problem and then there would be no need for the applicant to unnecessarily visit the Commission. Some of the applicants also cited instances wherein they had not received justice from the commission. The Information Commissioner assured that he would definitely like to compensate for the lapses on part of the Commission.



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Action Research Villages **The Chain Reaction**

Self expansion can be considered the biggest success of the campaign. Lots of residents of other villages have got operational apropos Right to Information by reading or hearing about the 'Mere Gaon Ke Sawaal Campaign'. Taking inspiration from the campaign, a few village youth have formed groups to spread awareness and boost the use of Right to information amongst the common villagers. Volunteers in large numbers are joining hands with the local level organisations to propagatate the cause of Right to information. People from the nearby cities have also started using the right to Information after hearing about the campaign.

Two successful examples of the campaign are very encouraging. Chittora is a village near Taj Khodai. The people of Chittora village had filed RTI applications to question about the Panchayat expenditures and the development schemes of the Government to deal with the problems related to the drainage and sewerage system and the absence of the any outlet for dirty water in the village. The District Administration immediately passed orders for the construction of drains in the village. A two kilometre long drain has already been constructed and construction work is in full swing in the village.

Similarly, in Lakhimpur Khiri, a district situated near Bahraich district, the STD booth operators of Tikunia block were being troubled by the officials of the telephone department who were demanding bribes from them. They were not being provided the CC card facility by the Exchange, due to which they were incurring losses. Within a week of filing RTI applications in the Telephone Department, their problems were solved.



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The village residents were explained the importance and concept of Right to Information with the help of various successful examples of implementation of the RTI Act. The villagers were encouraged to use the Act to get the information regarding problems related to their day to day lives. A minimum number of 300 applications to be drafted and filed by the villagers in various Government departments to bring about a stoppage in the corrupt practices of the bureaucracy was the aim of this campaign. It was decided that from each of the villages, Questions related to various public and personal issues like school dress, mid day meals, scholarships, ration card, electricity problems, roads, water, transport, bribery, etc., will be raised and RTI applications would be filed with the help of the volunteers of this campaign in great numbers. Dissemination activities like wall paintings, road march, posters, street discussions, etc. were also undertaken.

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Action Research Villages Sample Applications

Details of Pending work in any Department

Public Information Officers
B.D.O. Office, Karvi
Chitrakoot, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

I had made an application for the following reason (copy of application is attached) but no satisfactory action has been taken on my application so far.

Please provide the following information with respect to the same:

1. Please provide the daily progress made on my application.
2. Please give the names and designations of the officials with whom my application was lying during this period. Please intimate the periods when it was lying with which officer and what was the action taken by that official during that period.
3. Please give the proof of receipt and dispatch of my application in the office of each of these officials.
4. According to your rules or citizens' charter or any other order, in how many days should such a matter be dealt with and resolved. Please provide a copy of these rules.
5. The above officials have not adhered to the time limit mentioned in these rules. Are these officials guilty of violating

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these rules and hence guilty of misconduct under their conduct rules. Please give a copy of their conduct rule, which they have violated by violating the above mentioned rule.

6. These officials have caused serious mental injury to me by making me run around all this while. Are these officials guilty of causing mental harassment to the public?
7. What action can be taken against these officials for violating all the above rules and for causing mental agony to the public? By when would this action be taken?
8. By when will my problem be resolved now?

Thanking you,

MLA Development Fund

Public Information Officers
C/o, DM Office, Allahabad

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

1. Please intimate the constituency in which the following address falls:

Village	-	Gulrahai
Gram Panchayat	-	Gadhakatra
Block	-	Shankergarh
District	-	Allahabad

2. Please provide the following details for all the works awarded during the period 2002 to 2006 for this whole constituency out of the MLA Constituency Development Fund:
 - a. Name of work
 - b. Brief Description of work
 - c. Amount sanctioned
 - d. Date of sanction
 - e. Status of completion
 - f. Name of agency
 - g. Date of commencement
 - h. Date of completion
 - i. Rate at which work awarded
 - j. Amount paid
 - k. Copy of sketch
 - l. How was the decision taken to carry out this work?

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

- m. How much money was allotted to him during the current year and how much has been carried over from previous years?
3. Out of the above, projects worth how much money have already been sanctioned?
4. How many projects worth how much money are awaiting sanction?

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately. If you feel that the above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005. Also, as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request., where I may if required file my first appeal.

Thanking you,
Neeraj Kumar

Scarcity of Medicines in Hospitals

Public Information Officers
CMO Office, Behraich

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information regarding Government hospital at Chitora.

1. What is the total amount of money spent on the purchase of medicines between 01-04-2006 to 30-11-2006 ? Provide a copy of the register (purchase and stock) for the same months.
2. What is the total amount of money spent on medicines which were distributed free to the patients in the above mentioned period? Provide a copy of the register which contains the list of the number of patients who received the free medicinal facility, their names, addresses etc.
3. Provide details (name, designation and contact) of the officers appointed for the purchase and distribution of the medicines in the hospital.
4. Provide complete details (with name and contact address) of the agencies from which the medicines were purchased in the above mentioned period.
5. What kinds of ailments come under the purview of free medicinal facility in this hospital?
6. What is the basis on which medicines are distributed free in the hospital?

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005. Also, as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request., where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours sincerely,

Pawan Kumar

Details of Mid Day Meals Scheme

Public Information Officers
District Basic Education Officer
Chitrakoot, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Kindly provide the following information under the Right to Information regarding the Primary School of Bharthol.

1. Provide details of the mid day meals scheme of the above mentioned school with the following particulars:
 - a. Provide the details of the food materials supplied to the above mentioned school between 01-01-2006 to 30-11-2006 with monthly details.
 - b. According to the departmental records the above mentioned food materials were to be distributed to how many students?
 - c. Which ration dealer/agency supplied the above mentioned food materials? Provide complete details.
 - d. On what basis was the above mentioned ration dealer/agency selected? Provide an attested copy of all the rules and directions issued by the government regarding the same.
 - e. Provide an attested copy of all the departmental orders regarding the supply of food materials to the school
2. Provide an attested copy of all the governing orders/directions issued by the government and the department for the better implementation and maintenance of standards of the Mid Day Meals Scheme.
3. Provide an attested copy of all the rules / regulations / laws / directions issued by the department to combat black marketing / corruption in the Mid Day Meals Scheme.

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4. Did the Department receive any complaint regarding the Mid Day Meals from the above mentioned school? If yes, then provide the related details containing the name of the complainant, address, action taken on the complaint. Was an enquiry conducted in this regard? If yes, provide a copy of the enquiry report.
5. If some school is unable to utilise the full amount of the food supplied due to some reason, then what provisions have been made by the department for the disposal of such food material? Provide an attested copy of the rules/directions regarding the same.
6. Kindly provide an attested copy of the rules, regulations, directions, orders and circulars regarding the Mid Day Meals Scheme.

Yours sincerely,

Details of the Action Taken on the Old Age Pension Application

Public Information Officers
B.D.O. Office, Shankergarh
Allahabad, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

I had made an application for Old age pension in your department (copy of application is attached) .No satisfactory action has been taken on my application so far.

1. Please provide the daily progress made on my application. Please give the names and designations of the officials with whom my application was lying during this period. Please intimate the periods when it was lying with which officer and what was the action taken by that official during that period.
2. Kindly provide the list of names and designations of the officials who were supposed to take necessary action on my application but did not do so.
3. Provide the details of the officials/employees (names, designation and address) responsible for the selection of the beneficiaries of the Old Age pensions.
4. According to the rules and regulations of your department, what is the stipulated time within which the Old Age/widow pensions should be approved? Was this time limit adhered to in my case? If no, then provide the details of the official/employee with the name, address and designation, responsible for such discrepancy.
5. What action will be taken against such officer/employee who shirks from work and causes problems for the people? When will this action be taken?
6. Since when (date) did I start receiving my Old Age pension?

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7. Provide a list of all applications which were received by the department after the receipt of my application. Mention the following details in the list:

Name of the applicant
Application number
Date of Application

Brief details of the action taken on the application
(approved/disapproved/pending)

The reason for disapproval of the application

Date of action

10. What are the eligibility criteria for Old Age pensions? Kindly provide an attested copy of all the Government orders/directions regarding the same. Also provide the details of the process of selection of the beneficiaries of the Old Age pensions.

Yours faithfully,

Details Related to A.N.M

Public Information Officers

C.M.O. Behraich

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to the ANM working in the Nagar Taj Khudai Gram Panchayat.

1. Provide the following regarding the ANM working in the above mentioned Gram Panchayat :
 - a. Name
 - b. Designation
 - c. Date of taking charge in the Gram Panchayat
 - d. Description of duties/responsibilities
 - e. Time of reporting for duty daily
2. Provide a copy of the attendance register of the last six months of the said ANM.
3. Provide a list of the Vaccines and the medicine distribution done by the said ANM in the last one year with the following details:
 - a. Name and address of the beneficiary/recipient
 - b. Name of the medicine and dot/Vaccines provided
 - c. Date of provision of the dot/Vaccines
4. What action can be taken against the ANM if she does not do field visit of the village on time? Kindly provide a copy of the related rules/regulations and directions.
5. Provide a copy of complaint (if any) against the said ANM for not being punctual or being absent from work with the following information:

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- a. Name of the complainant
- b. Brief description of the complaint
- c. Date of complaint
- d. Description of the action taken on the complaint
- e. Name, designation and address of the officer who took action on the complaint

I am depositing the application fee (Rs.10/-) separately. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request., where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours faithfully,

Jitendra Chaturvedi

Description of the Job Card, Employment and Unemployment doles under the NREGA

Public Information Officers
B.D.O. Office, Naraini
Banda, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

Provide the following information related to the Panchampur village of Naraini block:

1. How many applications for employment job card have been received under the NREGA from the above mentioned village? Provide a list of such applications with following details:
 - a. Name and address of the applicant
 - b. Application Number
 - c. Date of application
 - d. Brief description of the action taken on the application (Job Card made/not made/under process)
 - e. If the job card was not made then specify the reason
 - f. Date on which the job card was made
2. How many people out of the people who have been given the job card have applied for work? Provide a list of such people with the following information:
 - a. Name and address of the applicant
 - b. Date of application
 - c. Name of the work given
 - d. Date on which the work was given
 - e. Amount of payment made for the work and the date of payment

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- f. An attested copy of that part of the register where the details of the payment have been noted
 - g. Specify the reason if the work was not given
 - h. Are they being given the unemployment doles
3. Provide a list of the villagers who are receiving or have already received the unemployment doles under the NREGA with the following particulars:
- a. Name and address of the applicant
 - b. Date of application
 - c. Date on which the unemployment dole was given
 - d. Amount of payment made unemployment dole and the date of payment
 - e. An attested copy of that part of the register where the details of the payment have been noted

Thanking You,
Rajabhaia Yadav

Details of Indira Awaas Yojna Scheme

Public Information Officers
B.D.O. Office, Chitora
Behraich, UP

Sub: Application under the RTI Act, 2005

Sir,

I am a resident of Sidkahanajot Keshav village of Chitora Block. I am homeless and yet i have not been allotted a house under the Indira Awaas Yojna Scheme. Provide the following information regarding the same:

1. Am I eligible to receive the benefits of the Indirs Awaas Yojna Scheme according to governmental records? if no then specify the reason.
2. If yes, then why have I not been allotted a house under the Indirs Awaas Yojna Scheme? Provide the names and designations of the officers/employees responsible ensuring that I receive the benefits of Indira Awaas Yojna Scheme .
3. How many people from my village have been allotted houses under the Indira Awaas Yojna Scheme in the last 5 years? Provide a list of such allottees with the following information:
 - a. Name of the beneficiary
 - b. Date of allotment
 - c. Basis of allotment.
4. Provide an attested copy of the attendance register of the Gram Sabha in which the selection of the beneficiaries of the Indira Awaas Yojna Scheme was done.
5. Have the above mentioned allotments been done on the basis of the BPL List. Provide an attested copy of the BPL list of the above mentioned Panchayat.

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6. Provide an attested copy of all the governing orders/directions/rules/regulations related to Indira Awaas Yojna Scheme allotments.

I am a BPL card Holder. So, I am exempt from payment of fees. Copy of my BPL card is attached. If you feel that above requested information does not pertain to your department then please follow the provisions of Section 6(3) of the RTI Act, 2005/Also as per the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005 please provide the details (Name and Designation) of the first appellate authority w.r.t to your department with the reply to the above request, where I may if required file my first appeal.

Yours faithfully,

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Action Research Villages

Complaint Under RTI Act

To,

The Chief State Information Commissioner
State Information Commission, UP
Lucknow

Sub: Application for Complaint u/s 18 for non adherence of the provisions of the Right to Information Act, 2005.

PIO or the Department against whom the complaint is being made:

PIO,
Social Wealfare Department,
Karvi, Chitrakoot, UP

Sir,

I had tried to file an RTI application with the above mentioned Department but failed because the PIO refused to accept my RTI application.

I humbly request you to pass the orders to the said department to accept/file my RTI application and take action against the PIO/Department Head by imposing a monetary fine.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

Bhagwat Prasad
Akhli Bhartia Samaj Seava Sanstha,
Ranipurbhat, Sitapur, Chitrakoot
Date: 12.02.2006

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Action Research Villages Appeals Under RTI Act

First Appeal

To
First Appellate Authority
C/o District Magistrate Office
Banda, UP

Date:02.02.2007

Ref.: My application under RTI act 2005 dated 16 December 2006.

Sub.: Filing the First Appeal against the CPIO under section 19 of the RTI Act Regarding.

Sir,

With reference to my application under RTI Act, 2005, dated 16 January 2007, I have to state that: I filed my application on 16 December, 2006. The fee under RTI Act was paid through IPO, dated 16 December, 2006 to the Public Information Officer, for obtaining certain information regarding two list of BPL card holders of Panchampur village of Naraini block.

Even after the expiry of the statutory 30 days as explained in RTI Act, 2005, I have not received any information so far.

I, therefore, request you to please direct the CPIO to furnish the information to me at the earliest. As the information is not received till date, the CPIO may also be directed to furnish the information for FREE as provided in the RTI Act, 2005.

I would also like to request you to inform me the date and time of the hearing of the matter, which I would like to either attend personally or be represented by my duly authorised representative.

Verified the contents of this appeal on 2 February 2007 at Banda.

Thanking you,

Rajabhaia Yadav

Second Appeal

To
Chief State Information Commissioner
State Information Commission, UP
6th Floor, Indira Bhawan
Lucknow (U.P.)

Date:02.02.2007

Sub: Appeal under Section 19 of the RTI act, 2005

Name and address
of the applicant : Bhagwat Prasad

Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa
Sansthan, Ranipurbhat, Sitapur,
Chitrakoot

Name and address
of the CPIO : PIO, Social Welfare
Department, Karvi,
Chitrakoot, UP

Information Sought : RTI application attached.
Annexure 1.

Reply Received : Public information officer had
not given any information.

Brief fact of the appeal : The Appellate Authority did not
give any hearing or information.

Grievance against the reply of Appellate Authority:

Aggrieved, I filed the first appeal on 12.02.2007. The Appellate Authority did not give any hearing in the matter.

The Appeal: The CPIO should be directed to provide all the information sought in the initial application within a week. and impose the penalty to PIO, under section 20(1) and also under section 20(2), action should be taken against the Public Information Officer.

Request to the Commission: I would urge that I should be intimated about each hearing at the commission. I would also like to be present in each hearing.

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Verification: Verified the contents of this appeal on the 15.03.2006 at Chitrakoot.

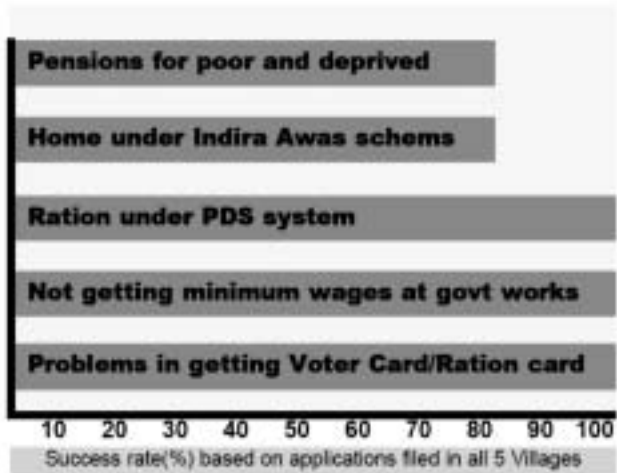
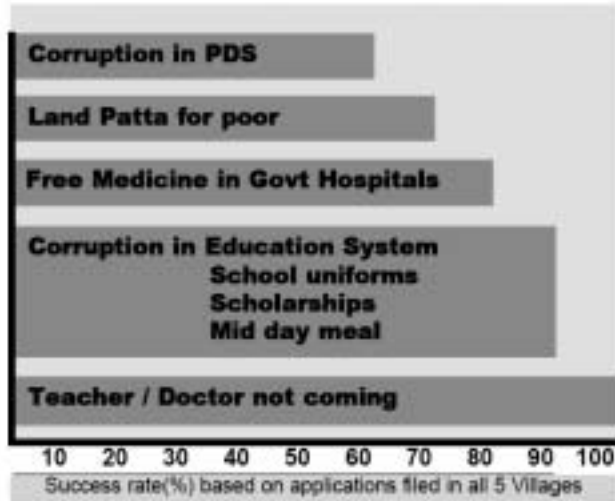
Yours truly,

(Bhagwat Prasad)

Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan
Ranipurbhat, Sitapur
Chitrakoot (U. P.)

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

RTI Impact on Corrupt Government Systems in Villages



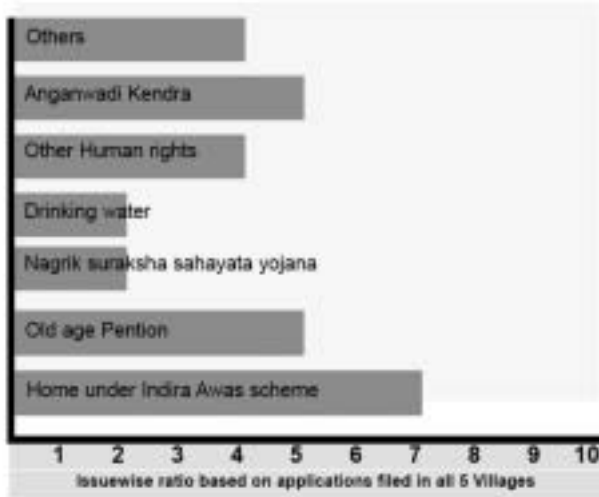
RTI Impact on day to day individual problems of Villagers

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

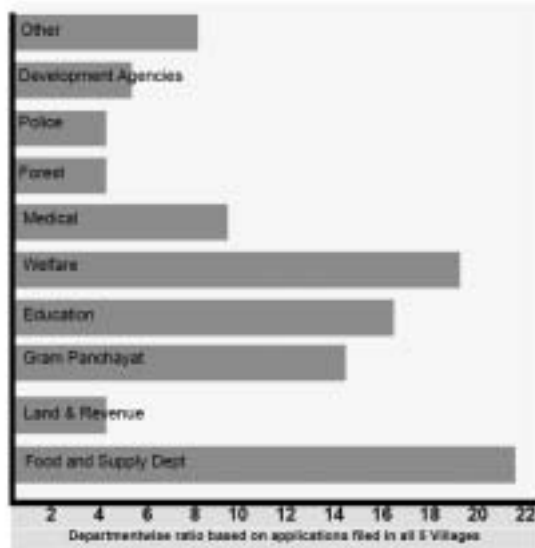


Breakup of applications filed under RTI on most common issues

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

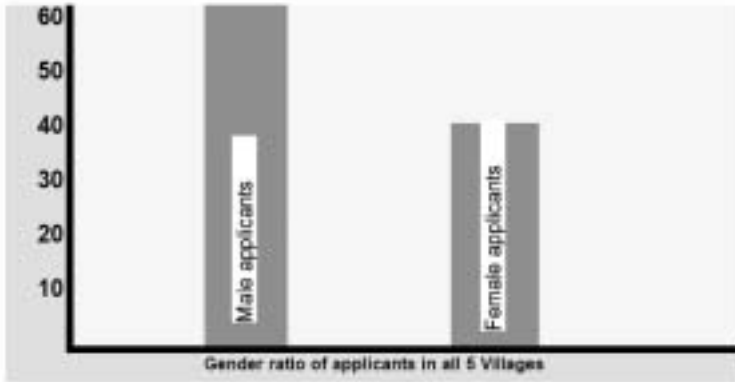


Breakup of applications filed under RTI on most common issues

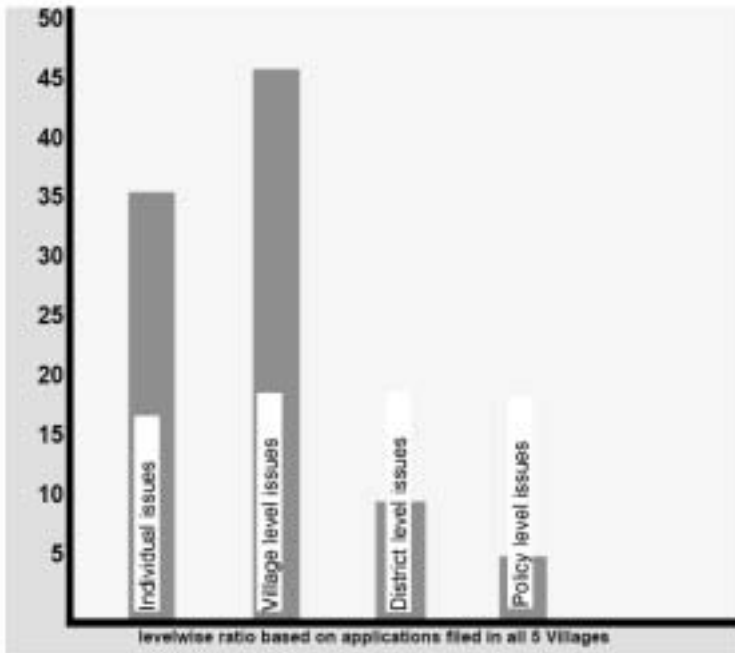


Departmentwise breakup of applications filed under Right to Information

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Gender Breakup of RTI Applicants



Level of applications filed under Right to Information



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Action Research Villages The Media Support

The Media (electronic and print) and the District Administration machinery extended full support to the Campaign in the first month. Newspapers like Indian Express, Asian Age, Hindustan, Dainik Jagran, Amar Ujala, etc. not only covered the entire campaign but also highlighted the issues raised in the campaign in their daily reports. As a result, the District Administration got alert.

The Bahraich District Administration has set up an enquiry committee of high officials to tour the impoverished villages of the district. A notice has been served to the absentee school teacher Mr. Promod Dixit by the Primary Education Officer and a new teacher has been appointed in the Pre-secondary school of Panchampur village, by the Banda District Administration.

Another important development is that the RTI application submission/filing system has improved considerably in all the districts under the purview of the campaign. Earlier, the applicants were either rebuked or some frivolous reason was given by the concerned official for not filing their applications. Under the campaign, groups of villagers, and various RTI volunteers drafted and filed around 50-60 RTI applications in almost all the departments of the district, even in those wherein none of the applications were filed till now. The biggest stumbling block was the fact that the clerks and even the officials of the concerned departments did not have full knowledge about the Right to Information Act, 2005. In some departments, the RTI experts and volunteers essentially explained the provisions of the Act and the responsibilities of the Public Information Officers to the clerks and the officials. Through this process, the common villager has also gained confidence and is no more inhibited to face the official machinery.

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

Janne ka Haq

Doodarshan's national news channel telecasts a weekly special programme on Right to Information. The programme-*Janne Ka Haq* is telecast every Saturday at 10.30am. It focuses on success stories of RTI and discussions on contemporary issues related to RTI. The programme also incorporates a live phone-in segment, wherein subject matter experts respond to RTI-related audience queries. Special episodes on the Action Research Village Campaign were regularly telecast for over a month. This mass coverage went a long way in spreading awareness regarding of the campaign.



'हिन्दू जीवन दर्शन स्वयं पर आधारित'

II



कई दिनों से बंद बढ़ा बना अन्य केन्द्र, किसान पोषण

III

दैनिक जागरण ११ सितम्बर, १९७६

जागरण सिटी

बहराइच

'सशक्त हथियार साबित हो रहा है सूचना का अधिकार'

सूचना का अधिकार

सूचना का अधिकार, ३० सितम्बर '७६ के बाद ही शुरू हुआ था। इससे पहले सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव था। सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव ही सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव है। सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव ही सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव है। सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव ही सूचना का अधिकार का अभाव है।

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NGOs to help villagers exercise RTI Act

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, DECEMBER 8

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. Bhagwati 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 Kahir 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 Awas 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 villages 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 realise 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 Tij Khodai Village and the next day at New Basti Nidhaad 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.

यूपी के पांच गांव अब बदलेंगे पूरे देश की तस्वीर!

नई दिल्ली। उत्तर प्रदेश के पांच गांवों के जरिए देश के सामने एक नवीन रस्ती खोने वाली है। ये पिछड़े और सुदूर इलाकों के गांव सूचना को अपना हथियार बना कर न सिर्फ अपनी तस्वीर बदलेंगे बल्कि पूरे देश के सामने भी उदाहरण रखेंगे। सूचना के अधिकार के लिए काम करने वाले जनसंगठनों का दावा है कि एक साल के अंदर ही इन गांवों में सरकारी कामों में भ्रष्टाचार की जगह विकास ले लेंगे। इस आंदोलन से जुड़े लोगों की रणनीति होगी कि आरटीआई कानून के इस्तेमाल से इन पांच गांवों की क़ाया फलट कर इन्हें पूरे महिदल के तौर पर रखा जा सके।

इस योजना में लक्ष्य रखा गया है कि इन पांच गांवों में खर्च होने वाली सरकारी रकम का एक भी पैसा बिना जनता की जांच के न रह पाए। यानी आम लोग भी हर सरकारी काम की जांच करने का अपना हक जान सकेंगे। अगली बार जब उनके इलाके में कोई सड़क बने तो उसकी जांच के लिए सिर्फ वे सरकारी अफसर ही मौजूद नहीं रहें जिनका भ्रष्टाचार में एक ठप हिस्सा होता है, बल्कि वे गांव वाले भी उसकी जांच करें, जिनकी जिंदगी पर उस



भ्रष्टाचार पर नकेल कसने
के लिए कवायद शुरू
आरटीआई बना हथियार

सड़क के बनने या नहीं बनने से अंतर पड़ने वाला है। ऐसा वे सूचना का अधिकार कानून के तहत एक आवेदन के जरिए कर सकते हैं। वे आवेदन कर अपना क्षेत्र में बनी सड़कों की लंबाई, जगह, उन पर आए खर्च और निर्माण में उपयोग की गई सामग्री आदि के बारे में पूरा ज़्यादा मांग सकते हैं। रख हो आगे एक सड़क बनाए जाने के दौरान या बन जाने के बाद साइट इन्स्पेक्शन की मांग भी कर सकता है। इस योजना के लिए उत्तर प्रदेश में बहराच के दो और बांदा विचकूट व कैजाबाद के एक-एक गांव चुने जा रहे हैं। (छवरी)



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Action Research Villages The Way Ahead

Undoubtedly, the Action Research Village Campaign has not only created awareness about RTI in the five targeted villages but also in places other than the villages selected for the campaign. Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn from the RTI campaign:

- It is evident that if the RTI is used on a large scale, it can bring about a significant change in the villages. It can at least prevent the misuse of the funds earmarked under various schemes for the development of the villages and for the help of poor villagers.
- The money that is spent on creating awareness about the RTI and its publicity is much less as compared to the amount which can be saved with the proper and frequent use of the RTI. It is therefore necessary to conduct more and more such promotional campaigns on RTI as well as to encourage villagers to make regular use of the Act.
- It is also imperative that rather than a few organisations, the Government itself comes forward to take this responsibility. Villagers and Civil Society organisations can provide the necessary support.

A point to be noted here is that the villagers played a prominent role in the campaign. What questions are to be asked? Which issue is more important? Who will ask the questions? How many people will collectively raise what issue? All such matters were addressed by the villagers themselves. The campaign volunteers/coordinators or any other organisation did not try to impose their views on these people. Even the poor and illiterate women chose their own

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES



issues/subjects/questions, got the applications drafted and filed with the help of the volunteers.

Therefore, it is necessary that the Planning Commission, the Rural Development Ministry and any such organisation makes the provision for an accountable and transparent arrangement in their budget, whose management and control is in the hands of the villagers themselves, rather than an officer or a minister. And, the Right to Information can provide the best foundation for this campaign.

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Action Research Villages

Names and Addresses of the Partners

KABIR:

Kabir is a communication initiative in the area of the Right To Information (RTI) Act, 2005, working primarily to spread awareness about the RTI Act, and to reiterate its importance in the successful creation of a developed, modern India. It collects instances of the success of the Right To Information Act in securing a better future for our citizens, or even in simply making the Government more accountable and efficient. Then, disseminate these success stories by various means such as through the print and electronic media. **Kabir** also serve to further people's knowledge of the RTI Act by organising RTI training camps, workshops, lectures, seminars and discussions. Apart from this, **Kabir** serves to bring together activists from across the country to further enhance the potential of spreading RTI awareness unilaterally across the country.

Kabir can be contacted at: *kabir.rti@gmail.com*, +91-11-22485139

ABSSS

ABSSS has regenerated the self-esteem and confidence of marginalised people in poor and deprived villages of Bundelkhand, which is an area of powerful upper castes known as Dadus'. They have marginalised the local people - who are mainly Kols and Dalits - economically, socially, culturally and politically since time immemorial. These marginalised people have started challenging their exploitation and bondage and are increasingly controlling resources to improve their lives.

ABSSS can be contacted at: *absssckt@gmail.com*, +91 9415310662

ACTION RESEARCH VILLAGES

DEHAT:

Development Association for Human Advancement (**DEHAT**) works in villages of Bahraich district in U.P. Works with Dalit and backward communities. **Major issues addressed** – Denial of due entitlement rights on land; Inadequate sources of livelihood; Deprivation of the reference community from realising basic constitutional rights; Almost non-existent facilities of education and health in the reference villages; Minimum wages not being paid on agricultural farms; and Child labour.

DEHAT can be contacted at: *dehat_vo@rediffmail.com*, +91 9415054079

POOREST AREAS CIVIL SOCIETY (PACS) PROGRAMME

The Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme is the single largest anti-poverty programme being implemented in India by a network of Civil Society Organisations. Supported by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by Development Alternatives and Pricewaterhouse Coopers (P) Ltd, the PACS Programme focuses on the 108 poorest districts of India. Over 80% of India's poorest districts are located in the states of Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

PACS has reached out to 94 districts, 468 blocks and 19,467 villages. It has reached out to the most backward areas in the Programme States, which lack infrastructure and adequate Government services. It has implemented 178 projects (half of which are network projects) in partnership with approximately 665 civil society organisations till date.

PACS has promoted approximately 40,000 diverse Community Based Organisations (CBOs) across the six Programme States, of which 35,000 are Self Help Groups (SHGs) with largely women as members. The remaining groups are working as 'pressure groups' as well as issue based groups for grassroots coordination and advocacy.

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Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme

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