

# MASS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON RIGHT TO INFORMATION

## **OBJECTIVE:**

A unique campaign that will engage more than 5 voluntary organizations and five cultural troupes and media to create awareness among rural people especially among SHG members about RTI and its use for good governance.

The aim of the campaign is to implement 05 blocks in Khurda district covering 05 Panchayat through 05 NGOs to spread awareness and facilitate the use of the Right to Information to ensure a transparent and accountable government.

- RTI helps expose corruption.
- RTI helps a worker fight for his rightful employment.

## **REACHING THE MASSES:**

The experience of the RTI regime since its enactment has been rather mixed. While significant positive developments have taken place at both supply and demand ends, the most glaring deficiency at the demand side has been the lack of awareness on RTI and community mobilization, particularly in the rural hinterland. Massive efforts are required to raise citizens' awareness of their right to demand information. While the resourceful citizens are in any case able to access information, it is the disadvantaged groups for whom support systems need to be put in place to encourage and enable them to perceive, articulate and successfully obtain information which typically impinges on their livelihoods and survival.

Mass awareness campaign on RTI assumes importance when strategies are planned to reach the larger masses and disseminate basic information on the Act and how to use it. It involves utilization of all mass media channels (TV, radio, and press, general print materials) to disseminate a sequence of basic messages on RTI in a coordinated fashion aimed at a loosely segmented target population. It is important that a campaign is recognized by the general population as a cohesive programme no matter which channel of the mass media is used. This section gives a brief insight and introduction to mass awareness and a step-by-step process involved in undertaking such a campaign. The steps include the following.

- **Identifying Target Population:** Identifying segments of population to be reached is an important decision to make.
- **Drafting a Strategy:** The overall theme and tone of the campaign should be developed based on the philosophy of the Act and research undertaken. "... the Act is the most powerful act in the world. It deepens the democratic spirit and people should take up the campaign openly for its effective implementation."
- **Developing Messages:** Catchy, innovative messages should be developed on the basis of the philosophy of RTI, which could include posters, banners, advertisements, radio jingles, booklets, pamphlets etc.
- **Implementation:** The campaign can be planned depending on exhaustion and comprehension of the messages by the target groups. All media materials should be ready and disseminated at the same time.
- **Monitoring:** It is essential to carefully monitor the implementation and impact of the campaign to ensure that the materials have been disseminated, and to access the target groups participation.
- **Evaluation and Documentation:** Documentation of the activities will be undertaken as part of the campaign and an evaluation should be planned to assess the campaign, re-programme, and re-launch it with greater knowledge. For visible impact awareness campaigns must be continuous undertaken over a period of time.

## **RTI & THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY:**

The process of governance encompasses the political, social and economic aspects of life which have an impact on each individual, household, village, region or the nation. Governance improves when the processes of decision-making and implementation of decisions enable the key actors like the Civil Society. Good Governance is the equivalent of purposive, responsive, participatory, development-oriented, citizen- friendly, citizen-caring, public management committed to improvement in quality of life of the people. Civil society has a very important role in ensuring good governance. Using RTI CSOs can:

- Be involved in basic service delivery & provide necessary Institutional basis to the RTI movement.
- Act as grassroots organizations to promote collective Action using the RTI.
- Take up education and awareness programmes to Mobilize people.
- Represent and negotiate citizens' interests vis-à-vis the State.
- Promote social equity by accessing information.
- Use the RTI in promoting rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights.
- Use RTI to audit the performance of a public authority.
- Demystify RTI to provide for access to information.
- Work closely with government as strategic partners.
- Keep a vigil on how the law is being interpreted by pios,.
- Public authorities and information commissions.
- Disseminate important decisions of information Commissions.
- Facilitate learning by publishing relevant information.

## **PLANNING THE CAMPAIGN**

After the training in consultation with the members of the NGO partners the dates for the mass awareness campaign were fixed. The mass awareness campaign will be planned in the following phases.

- The Training of Trainers (ToT) – (7th – 8th April)
- The Mass Awareness Campaign – (10th April – 15th April)
- Filing of Application (21st April – 26th April)
- Follow up activity for 1st appeals (1st week of May)
- Follow up activity for 2nd appeal (1st week of June)
- Public Hearing (June 2010)

## **The ToT will cover following issues:**

- RTI and good governance
- Introduction to concepts like transparency, accountability and paRTicipation
- Orientation on the history of the RTI legislation
- Proactive Disclosure under the RTI Act (Section 4(1)(b)
- Public authorities and their functionaries for disclosure of information (PIOs, APIOs and Appellate Authority)
- Information Commissions – Central and State
- RTI and the role of Civil Society Organizations
- RTI and the role of Media
- Procedures of filing applications and appeals under the act Fees and charges applicable under the Act
- Information availability in various departments Civil Society Organisations as public authorities
- Case studies and success stories on RTI
- Mass awareness and RTI
- Social Accountability tools

- Social Audit and RTI training (ToT) etc.

## **NGO PARTNERS:**

- Jeevan Rekha Parishad (JRP) for Chandaka Tribal Panchayat
- VJSS for 01 Panchayat in Khurda
- BIKASH Dhara
- SOURAV
- READY TO SERVE

## **APPLICATION FILING**

The application filing activity under the campaign was undertaken from the 21st to 26th May 2007. It was during this phase of the campaign, a number of public meetings were conducted. The purpose of these meetings was to help the community file applications requesting information. Meetings, Type of CSOs participated CSOs which participated include:

- Rights-based organizations
- Farmers unions
- Issue-based institutions
- Voluntary Associations
- Citizen's Groups
- Activist Organizations

National Implementing Agency - Capacity Building for Access to Information Project Mass Awareness Campaign on Right to Information 13 and discussions were conducted to attract the attention of community in this regard. In addition to the community, the public meetings were attended by representatives of a variety of CSOs in the district. These meetings were convened to discuss the process of filing applications for information. This was the critical phase of the campaign where problems encountered were shared and strategies were planned to address them Issues of convergence were also discussed. For example, institutions working on farmers or primary education were able to discuss how RTI can be useful for the activities that they are undertaking as part of their organizational objectives. A number of issues were raised by the participants and the community in these public meetings. In addition to discussions on RTI issues raised by the community in the public meetings include:

- Land related issues (MRO & MPDO functionaries)
- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- Special Economic Zones
- Schemes and entitlements
- Public Distribution System & Health Services
- Loans and subsidies provided by banks
- Services provided by rural and urban local bodies
- Child Rights and Labour
- The community will also be guided by the resource persons on application filing.