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Empowering People and Administration through Information Is a Challengeable Task a Case Study of Right Information Act

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Abstract

This Research study focuses on the descriptive analysis of empowering People and administration through knowledge and awareness about procedure of Right to Information Act among There are many different human rights which are having universal values based on dignity, freedom, equality and justice but Right to information Act helps citizens to be informed and ensures the transparency in work of government for smooth functioning of democracy. It was a curiosity to know the knowledge and Information of procedure to People and Administrative officers about procedure of Right to Information Act was assessed with the help of questionnaire developed by researcher himself.

Keywords: Empowering, Knowledge, Information and Awareness.

Introduction

The Right to Information Act, 2005, which was implemented from 12th October 2005, is considered as landmark legislation in the history of Indian democracy. The second Administrative Reforms Committee Report (June 2006) remarks 'Right to Information' as the master key to good governance. Access to information can empower the people and particularly the weaker sections of the society, to demand and get information on various development schemes implemented for them thereby ensuring participatory governance and the effective and efficient use of public money. Experiences in the State in these years prove that the Act has the potential to bring about far reaching changes in governance, strengthening democracy and containing corruption, if used in its true letter and spirit. However, the implementation has been fairly slow in Kerala with mixed trend. Inspire of the earnest effort taken by the NGOs, RTI activists and the ATI (IMG), the Act was not so vibrant till 2007. The cases illustrated by few NGOs and citizens groups show instances where information sought using RTI (which were earlier denied) has helped in 'containing corruption' and making bureaucrats accountable for their action. However, no serious effort has been taken so far to document the success stories and also to find its impact on good governance. There is a general feeling among bureaucrats that the law is widely misused, and is only paralyzing Government and has not been in any way contributed to improved governance. It is felt that only individual cases are taken up rather than macro level issues affecting larger interest of the society and the common man. A concerted collective effort is required for undertaking social audit using the information collected with RTI to highlight the existing flaws in the programmes designed for the poor or the society at large.

Empowerment of the act

Right to Information Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense. It goes without saying that an informed citizen is better equipped to keep necessary vigil on the instruments of governance and make the government more accountable to the governed. The Act is a big step towards making the citizens informed about the activities of the Government. The Right to Information holds within it the right to seek information, as well as the duty to provide information. Assertion

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of RTI makes the public officials answerable for the actions of the public accountability, places the rules, regulations and decisions in the public domain (transparency), compels the public authorities to act with sensitivity to public demands and expectations (responsiveness), bridges the gulf between the public authority and the citizenry (participation), leaves the public officials with no option but to adhere to the normative uniform behaviour in a given set of circumstances (predictability) and ensures service delivery consistent with the purpose and objectives by the public authority (efficiency & effectiveness). In recognition of the need for transparency in public affairs, the Indian Parliament enacted the RTI Act in 2005. While RTI is implicitly guaranteed by the Constitution, the Act sets out the practical regime for citizens to secure access to information on all matters of governance. The Act has the objectives of bringing about greater transparency in functioning of public authorities, informed citizenry for promotion of partnership between citizens and the government in decision making process, improvement in accountability and performance of the government and reduction of corruption in the government departments. Transparency, accountability, informed citizenry and reduction in corruption being the critical elements of good governance, the Act looks forward to realization of greater good for the larger spectrum of citizens. Breaking new grounds, the Act is explicit in bringing about a paradigm shift in the citizen-administration engagement¹. Right of access to information encompasses right to participation, accountability and transparency and realization of the right holds the promise of promoting and strengthening citizen led initiative for good governance

Need and Significance

The RTI Act has empowered ordinary citizen to ask for even basic information which they could never get before. Hence, creating awareness is very important. The more aware and informed the citizen, the more responsive or careful official will be. We being a responsible citizen of country cannot leave the fate of our program me and policies, in which we spend thousands of crores of rupees each year, to the care of the bureaucracy alone. The active participation of the people and of people's elected representative is a must for the success of all our development endeavors. Hence the researcher realized the need of project to find the awareness among the public. So the public chosen for this project was the People and Administrative Officer who are expected to be updated with knowledge and aware about happening around us. They are considered to be most influential in society. So, it was important to know the knowledge and awareness of procedure of People and Administrative Officers about RTI Act. This research was one of the attempts made to know the actual condition of knowledge about this powerful right provided by parliament of India to the pupils to participate in good governance. The Right to Information (RTI) holds within it the right to seek information, as well as the duty to provide information. Assertion of RTI makes the public officials answerable for the actions of the public entity (accountability), places the rules, regulations and decisions in the public domain (transparency), compels the public authorities to act with sensitivity to public demands and expectations (responsiveness), bridges the gulf between the public authority and the citizenry (participation), leaves the

public officials with no option but to adhere to the normative uniform behavior in a given set of circumstances (predictability) and ensures service delivery consistent with the purpose and objectives by the public authority (efficiency & effectiveness).

Citizen's RTI, seen in a holistic perspective, is the cornerstone of all entitlements as access to information leads to securing other entitlements. Exercising the right, a citizen can actively engage the public authority in securing information on "Why the problem has occurred" "Who deals with the problem", "What action has been taken to solve the problem The National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) was founded in 1996. Its founding members included social activists, journalists, lawyers, professionals, retired civil servants and academics, and one of its primary objectives was to campaign for a national law facilitating the exercise of the fundamental right to information.

The international organizations like Common Wealth Human Rights Initiative strongly advocates that the Right to Information (RTI) is fundamental to the realization of rights as well as effective democracy, which requires informed participation by all. CHRI educates the public about the value of RTI and advocates at policy level for guaranteed access to information. The contribution of Common Wealth Human Rights initiative for the enactment of the national Right to Information Act in India was through providing aid to discussions, analysis of the Freedom of Information of Act and recommendations to the National Advisory Council, to all the Cabinet Ministers and members of the Parliament.

In response to the pressure from the grassroots movements, national and international organizations, the press council of India under the guidance of its Chairman Justice P.B. Sawant drafted a model bill that was later updated at a workshop organized by National Institute of Rural Development and sent to Government of India, which was one of the reference paper for the first draft bill prepared by Government of India. For some political and other reasons the bill could not be taken up by the Parliament.

Implications of the Right to Information

The coverage of the right to information act-2005 is very wide. Several institutions build through the Constitution, Parliamentary Acts, State Legislative Assembly and Council Acts, Government Organizations, private organizations and NGOs, which are receiving substantial financial support from either state or central government come under the purview of the right to information Act. All these institutions are bound to give the required information to the citizens within a prescribed period of 30 days for the normal information, information relating to human rights within 48 hours and 45 days for the information from the third party. If the given time period is expired in giving the information to the concern citizens, then there will be a penalization of the Public Information.

Major Issues in Rural Development Governance

In the Indian Administration especially in the administration of Rural Development there were many hurdles, in terms of lack of enough awareness amongst stakeholder groups especially the beneficiaries and that to beneficiaries belonging to Below Poverty Line. The hurdles like delays, corruption and un-transparent governance etc.

we're prevailing very much. In this context the enactment of Right to information Act – 2005 is really a path breaking legislation to Since Independence numbers of schemes were introduced to improve the life of rural poor, lot of money and other resources were invested to reduce poverty through employment generation and self-employment programmers for rural population. Rural Housing, Sanitation, Educational, Health and other programmers were implemented. Even the approaches and strategies have been continuously revised and implemented with new vigor. Despite lot of investments and efforts the desired results are not achieved in the areas like poverty alleviation and employment generation or to say in securing development of rural population. The rapid review of literature especially related to available evaluative literature of Rural Development Programmes identifies certain issues responsible for failure of RD programmes. We have identified 32 specific issues in rural development governance ensure all the citizens well informed participation in governance through access to information Communication.

- Delays / Deliberate delays
- Wastage
- Wrong beneficiary selection
- Un-transparent system of rural development Governance
- Transfer of Money/Benefits to Non-Poor
- Dependency on Government
- Poor participation of beneficiaries
- Middlemen / Agencies take away the funds
- Poor control of government agencies with poor beneficiaries
- Lack of coordination
- Paperwork based Implementation Complexities

RTI with Rural Development

The scope of RTI is very huge and covers each and every sphere affecting governance. The whole movement of RTI got birth because of failure of Rural Development initiatives. The RTI has such potentials and with the use of such potentials citizens, civil society organizations, media, activist groups and NGOs etc. have got the opportunity to intervene in the Rural Development Governance and make the Rural Development Management process people friendly / participatory. RTI is an instrument in the hand of people not only by using the act but even with mere enactment itself there are chances that wrong doers will think twice before doing wrong because they are answerable to what they have done it, why they don't have done it, why they have done it for this group and why not for that, why they have done it there and why not there. Thus a kind of balance and equity will be achieved in the process of governance cutting down the injustice to weaker sections. RTI has made common citizen so powerful that he can question the decision taken for him. He can ask the expenditure incurred. He can ask for list of beneficiary as well as the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries and can scrutinize the authenticity. There is huge potential in this act to contain corruption.

Conclusions

Right to Information Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our

democracy work for the people in real sense. It goes without saying that an informed citizen is better equipped to keep necessary vigil on the instruments of governance and make the government more accountable to the governed. The Act is a big step towards making the citizens informed about the activities of the Government.

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