

RIGHT TO INFORMATION ON WHEELS

A REPORT FROM EAST GARO HILLS DISTRICT

After the enactment of the Right to information Act in 2005, many campaigns and workshops were organized at various levels to generate awareness and understanding about Right to Information so that people are empowered to use the Act to bring in greater transparency in administration. However, the impact of the Act as seen from the number of applications filed was very poor in East Garo Hills District and in many Government Offices in the District not even a single application has been filed till date. In 2006-07 the number of applications filed under Right To Information in various Government Offices in the District is 23 and in 2007-08, the number is 25. This lack of awareness is primarily because of the fact there are very few NGO's and other Civil Society Organizations to take the RTI movement forward. Realizing this, the District Administration, in collaboration with the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute, Shillong started RTI on Wheels Campaign.

The basic idea was to take the message of RTI to the people rather than calling the people to classrooms workshops and seminars. The venues for the campaign were the market places and the strategy was to present the Act in a simple and easily understandable way through dance, drama and skit. The campaign kicked started on 02.08.2008 at Rongjeng and ended on 09.09.2008 at Adokgre.

Venues:

Twenty market places were chosen in the whole District for the campaign at Rongjeng, Darugre, Dobu, Williamnagar, Rongsak, Samanda, Sonsak, Nangapa, Wageasi, Rongmil, Dainadubi, Dams, Bangsi Apal, Mendipathar, Resubelpara, Bajengdoba Rari, Chibongga, Kharkutta and Adokgre.

Resource Persons:

The Office of the District Public Relation Officer (DPRO) was made the Nodal Office for campaign. The DPRO, Mr. R. Muksor, the SDPRO, Mr. W.G. Momin were the main resource persons. The SDO (C) Resubelpara Mr. S.R. Marak and the BDO's of the five C&RD Blocks also delivered talk on the Act in their respective jurisdictions. Representatives from the NGO's like MRDS (Meghalaya Rural Development Society) also participated as resource persons. Two SHG's of MRDS, as also teams of students from Williamnagar College and Sacred Heart School were roped in to perform songs, skits and dramas relevant to the RTI theme.

Strategy:

To draw large crowds and to ensure participation of maximum number people, market days were chosen. The RTI on wheels team comprising of resource persons and cultural troupe after reaching the venue first starts an informal interaction with the people asking them what they knew about the Act. Then a song or skit or drama is presented to capture the interest of the public. Then a small speech is made presenting the Act and explaining how each member of the public can use the Act. Leaflets and booklets in the local language are distributed and this is followed by another song/skit and then an interactive session.

Public Response:

The public response and participation in the campaign was mixed. In many places like Rari, Bajengdoba, Khurkutta, Rongjeng, Songsak, Adokgre and Samanda the response was very positive. The people wanted to know more about the Act and demanded a workshop cum seminar should be organized in the areas. During the interactive session, a number of question were asked and the people were very appreciative of the authority for organizing this programme. However, in places like Williamnagar and Mendipathar, the response and participation was lukewarm. This may be due to the fact that being Urban areas, the people might be already aware of the Act. The

Campaign targeted to reach about ten thousand people in the District. About one thousand people actually signed in the attendance register. However, the reach of the campaign is nearly ten thousand considering the fact that many people did not sign in the register due to illiteracy and other factors.

Achievements:

The campaign has spread the message of RTI to a large number of people who were hitherto not aware of the Act and their rights. The campaign has given momentum to the RTI awareness in the Districts. However, more needs to be done to sustain this momentum.

Suggestions and follow up:

To carry forward the momentum generated by the programme, the District Administration has decided to make training on RTI as part of the training being imparted to village for NREGS. A district level workshop of all NGOs will be organized to sensitise them to RTI Act and how the Civil Society can use this Act to make the Administration more transparent and accountable.

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