
Regional Workshop
Towards More Open and Transparent Governance in South Asia
New Delhi, 27-29 April 2010

Workshop Resolution

We, the supporters of the right to information, from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, having assembled in New Delhi, India in April 2010, while:

Drawing Attention to the commitment made by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), at its ministerial meeting in 2008, to guarantee through appropriate legislation, the right to information for all citizens, from governments and public authorities, to eliminate arbitrariness and corrupt practices and improve governance at the regional, national and local levels;

Reiterating our belief that the right to seek and obtain information from government and other institutions affecting the public is a fundamental human right and must be guaranteed for all persons in the South Asian region and that governments and public bodies have the duty to promote, protect and fulfill the fundamental human right to information;

Recognising that the exercise of the right to information is an indispensable precondition for building truly participatory democracies, thereby ensuring accountable governance and greater justice for all, especially for the deprived and the marginalised; and

Taking note of the experience of implementing right to information laws in other countries including Canada, Mexico, South Africa and the United States of America represented at the workshop;

Determine the following priorities at the national and regional level to promote the establishment and evolution of a transparency regime:

1. Country/National Priorities:

1.1. Afghanistan:

- 1.1.1. Develop regulations for the mass media-related constitutional provisions;
- 1.1.2. Establish a lobby group for action on RTI at the national level; and
- 1.1.3. Adopt a strong RTI law and provide for the establishment of an independent Information Commission.

1.2. Bangladesh:

- 1.2.1. Work towards developing a strong political will and commitment to implement the RTI Act from the Government and strong leadership from the Information Commission to implement the RTI Act;
- 1.2.2. Ensure institution building of the Information Commission with adequate financial and human resources and development of its capacity;
- 1.2.3. Ensure appointment of suitable designated officers in all public offices with a secure tenure of at least three years and provide them adequate training;
- 1.2.4. Improve the Government's records management system and build web-based database for all public sector agencies;
- 1.2.5. Adopt a pro-poor strategy for spreading awareness about RTI and implementing the RTI Act;
- 1.2.6. Establish community e-centres at all levels for ensuring easy access to development-related information and public services; and
- 1.2.7. Build central and local monitoring mechanisms to oversee the effective implementation of the RTI Act at all levels and stages.

1.3. India:

- 1.3.1. Implement proactive disclosure provisions better and more effectively;
- 1.3.2. Undertake more public education and awareness raising programmes and incorporate RTI syllabus in the school and college curricula;
- 1.3.3. Ensure uniformity in the RTI Rules notified by competent authorities and that they conform to the letter and the spirit of the RTI Act; and
- 1.3.4. Establish effective linkages between RTI and mechanisms for redressing people's grievances about public service delivery.

1.4. Maldives:

- 1.4.1. Overcome the culture of secrecy steeped in the lingering feudal mentality;
- 1.4.2. Adopt an RTI law that covers the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and private bodies;
- 1.4.3. Establish the office of the Information Commissioner and ensure that appointments are made in a transparent manner;
- 1.4.4. Build the capacity of civil society to understand and promote RTI; and
- 1.4.5. Train the media to report on RTI and other issues objectively.

1.5. Nepal:

- 1.5.1. Provide feedback to the constitution drafting process for including RTI as a fundamental right in tune with international standards;
- 1.5.2. Strengthen and empower the Information Commission;

- 1.5.3. Reform the RTI regulations in collaboration with civil society organisations;
- 1.5.4. Ensure that Government proactively strengthens the capacity of public authorities, including local government bodies, to implement the RTI Act; and
- 1.5.5. Ensure effective collaboration between civil society and the media for awareness raising, modeling RTI usage, capacity building of CSOs and monitoring compliance with the RTI Act.

1.6. Pakistan:

- 1.6.1. Reform the RTI law to conform to internationally recognised standards;
- 1.6.2. Build capacity of designated officers in all departments;
- 1.6.3. Improve proactive disclosure in government departments;
- 1.6.4. Adopt similar standards of proactive disclosure for civil society organisations;
- 1.6.5. Create linkages with other civil society at the regional level to reform the RTI law;
- 1.6.6. Initiate a civil society campaign to disseminate information about the recent constitutional amendment incorporating RTI as a fundamental right; and
- 1.6.7. Encourage donor agencies to adopt self-disclosure policies.

1.7. Sri Lanka:

- 1.7.1. Build the capacity of people to use disclosure provisions contained in existing laws at the local level;
- 1.7.2. Use the term 'access to information' while dialoguing with Government to establish a transparency regime;
- 1.7.3. Involve the mass media in the campaign for access to information;
- 1.7.4. Identify champions within the Government to press for the adoption of the access to information law;
- 1.7.5. Identify interested actors outside the Government and include them in the campaign; and
- 1.7.6. Encourage multilateral agencies to persuade the Government to include transparency and accountability standards in the implementation of development projects.

2. Stakeholder Priorities:

2.1. Governments:

- 2.1.1. Change the prevalent culture from secrecy to openness;
- 2.1.2. Provide adequate resources to implement RTI in public authorities;
- 2.1.3. Improve records keeping with particular emphasis on the classification, indexing, digitizing and archiving of records and adherence to a record retention schedule;
- 2.1.4. Utilise the existing potential of Information Technology to proactively make information more accessible to people;
- 2.1.5. Train and incentivise government functionaries with appropriate qualifications to implement RTI effectively;
- 2.1.6. Regularly upload on websites important decisions and minutes of meetings and quarterly and annual reports of all public authorities;
- 2.1.7. Spread awareness about RTI amongst people at the grassroots level;

- 2.1.8. Mandate the inclusion of RTI in school and college curricula; and
- 2.1.9. Link RTI to good governance and anti-corruption strategies and enact whistleblower legislation;

2.2. Information Commissions:

- 2.2.1 Ensure financial, staffing and functional autonomy for Information Commissions;
- 2.2.2 Ensure transparent and norm-based process for appointing Information Commissioners;
- 2.2.3 Ensure security of tenure for Information Commissioners;
- 2.2.4 Ensure a non-arbitrary process for removal of Information Commissioners;
- 2.2.5 Adopt norms to regulate the working of Information Commissions;
- 2.2.6 Identify objective criteria for determining the number of Information Commissioners; and
- 2.2.7 Develop common software to enable the Information Commissions to work more efficiently.

2.3. Civil Society:

- 2.3.1. Develop an e-network and other participatory action forums for advocacy and support mobilization;
- 2.3.2. Develop and disseminate a comparative study on RTI-related best practices and challenges through a regional platform; and
- 2.3.3. Promote a pro-poor approach to RTI.

2.4. Media:

- 2.4.1. Encourage media houses to cover RTI as a regular beat;
- 2.4.2. Provide in-field training for working journalists to understand their respective RTI laws and draft RTI requests;
- 2.4.3. Conduct high-level briefings of news editors to demonstrate the news flow benefits of RTI and to encourage them to commit time and resources for their reporters to pursue RTI-driven projects;
- 2.4.4. Create and maintain a website, with links to other RTI resources, for tracking RTI-related developments throughout the region and acting as a journalists' forum for RTI;
- 2.4.5. Create an annual South Asia journalism award for the best RTI-based stories; and
- 2.4.6. Include RTI in the curricula of schools and departments of journalism in the region.

3. Regional Priorities:

- 3.1. Promote inter-governmental exchange of best practices for improving transparency regimes;
- 3.2. Create a regional platform for Information Commissions to regularly interact with each other and with Information Commissioners in other countries;
- 3.3. Promote more intensive exchange of expertise and experience on RTI between activists and civil society organisations in the region;

- 3.4. Develop a web-based database of all orders and decisions of Information Commissions in South Asia to be maintained by a regional RTI resource centre;
- 3.5. Develop guidelines on internal disclosure policies for civil society organisations;
- 3.6. Develop a regional mechanism to provide technical assistance on RTI and advocate for the adoption of best practice RTI legislation.

We Further Resolve to join hands and support the establishment and the evolution of a right to information regime in each country of the region, and to collaborate with other regions of the world to strengthen the transparency regime at the global level.

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