

## Perceptions of Citizens on RTI as Promoter of Good Governance

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### Abstract:

Right to Information (RTI) refers to the right of every citizen to access information held by or under the control of public authorities. Information is crucial for good governance as it reflects and captures Government activities and processes. It is said that information is the oxygen of democracy. If people do not know what is happening in their society, if the actions of those who rule them are hidden, then they cannot take a meaningful part in the affairs of the society. Access to information not only promotes openness, transparency and accountability in administration, but also facilitates active participation of people in the democratic governance process. The Right to Information law of 2005 signals a radical shift in our governance culture and permanently impacts all agencies of state. The effective implementation of this law depends on three fundamental shifts: from the prevailing culture of secrecy to a new culture of openness; from personalized despotism to authority coupled with accountability; and from unilateral decision making to participative governance. Obviously one single law cannot change everything. But this fine legislation is an important beginning. Its effective application depends largely on the institutions created, early traditions and practices, attendant changes in laws and procedures, and adequate participation of people and the public servants.

**Introduction:** Right to Information (RTI) refers to the right of every citizen to access information held by or under the control of public authorities. Information is crucial for good governance as it reflects and captures Government activities and processes. It is said that information is the oxygen of democracy. If people do not know what is happening in their society, if the actions of those who rule them are hidden, then they cannot take a meaningful part in the affairs of the society. Access to information not only promotes openness, transparency and accountability in administration, but also facilitates active participation of people in the democratic governance process.

Right to information can be used as an effective tool to usher in a regime of good governance. The major characteristics of good governance include: strategic vision and consensus orientation, participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Transparency means that decisions are taken openly and enforced in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It requires that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided to all the stakeholders in easily understandable forms and media.

The right to information act is a path making legislation which brings to light the secrecy of administration. It is an effective means to promote democratic ideology. The act is powerful instrument to fight against corruption. By realizing this significance the Second Administrative Reform Commission had prepared a detailed blueprint for revamping the public administrative system. The second Administrative Reform Commission, government of India has published its first report in-Right to Information: Master key to good governance. Through this report the commission directly mentioned that access to information can empower the poor and weaker sections of society to demand and government information about public policies and actions, thereby led to welfare of all.

Good governance and right to information are complimentary to each other. An action whatever form of government it pursues must fulfill the aspirations of common man. Good governance is the only avenue, which can provide guaranty the life of individuals. Good governance is characterized by-political accountability, availability of freedom, bureaucratic accountability, availability of information, effectiveness, efficiency, law abiding citizen and cooperation between government and society. As such the Right to information is a natural corollary of good governance. The enactment of RTI act 2005 introduces an open and transparent government and gives every citizen right to seek and receive information to make administration more responsible and transparent which means good governance. So, World Bank once rightly remarked,—Right to information is an integral part of good governance.

Review of literature:

Monika Malik and RichaDawar (2014)<sup>1</sup> in their paper highlight the role of RTI Act in achieving the objective of “good governance” of Indian government.

As per the views of authors with the advent of the RTI Act, citizens have found a tool to bring in transparency and accountability at all levels of Governance. In particular, the RTI Act has a much higher impact on the quality of life of the poor and marginalised section of the society. The authors conclude that the power of the Act is still to be fully realized. The citizens, Government, media and Civil Society

Organizations need to do a lot to attain the intended objective of the Act and to address various issues and constraints in accessing the information under the Act.

Munish Kumar and Neha (2015)<sup>2</sup> in his paper tries to highlight the role played by major stakeholders or entities to improve the RTI regime in the country and importance of RTI act to ensure good governance in India, along with some problems or challenges faced during the implementation of RTI act. The paper also tries to find out some suggestions which may be helpful in effectively implementing the RTI act.

Rouf Ahmad Bhat (2015)<sup>3</sup> in his paper tries to highlight the role of RTI in good governance and some recommendations for successful implementation of RTI act. The author discussed how RTI act has empowered the common people, promoted good governance, strengthened participatory democracy and reduces corruption. The author concludes that the governments, instead of waiting for the common people to seek the information, must voluntarily make all the information available to the people. It will not only promote good governance but also increase the trust between government and the people it governs.

According to Atma Ram (2015)<sup>4</sup> the main objective of RTI is to establish good governance which encourages sensibility towards transparency, accountability, people participation and people willingness in place of privacy and Red Tapism. RTI Act defines the system to get information from government departments and binds the officers to provide demanded information.

Keshabananda Borah (2013)<sup>5</sup> in his paper tries to highlight the basic guidelines of RTI act, the relationship between Right to information act and good governance and the issues relating to RTI act. In concluding part, the paper provides some core recommendations for successful functioning of RTI act. Attempt has also been made to make a distinct comparison on RTI legislation between India and developed nations

## OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:

The objectives of the present study are to examine the perceptions of citizens on the different provisions and other content of Right to information Act 2005.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:** Present study is based on primary data collected from sample size of 150 citizens in the Anantapur district on the RTI Act 2005. The data is collected through well structured questionnaire representing different provision of the Act. The statistical tools used are percentages. The period of study is 2017-18. The sample size of the study employees from the five sections of the Municipal corporation namely establishment section, public grievance section, planning section, works section and budget section.

## DATA INTERPRETATION

### Agents of Awareness of RTI

The citizens will come to know the Acts passed by Parliament or State Legislature through various means. Table 5.19 gives the details of agents of awareness of RTI Act as reported by sample information seekers.

**Table 5.19**  
**Agents of Awareness about RTI Act**

Sl. No.	Awareness channels	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Through media	64	42.67
2	Through Govt. Officials	38	25.33
3	Through the Local Leaders	29	19.33
4	Through Others	19	12.67
<b>TOTAL</b>		150	100.00

Source: Field Data

As per table 5.19 a preponderant majority i.e. 42.67 per cent of sample respondents came to know about Right to Information Act through electronic/print media. Around 25.33 per cent of sample respondents came to know about RTI Act by government officials. Through local leaders nearly 19.33 per cent of sample information seekers, came to know about RTI Act. Others like non-government officials, retired government employees, Panchayat Raj members etc are the agents of awareness, in case of 12.67 per cent of sample information seekers. The study makes it clear the media has decisive role in making the citizens to become aware of Right to Information Act in the study area.

### Purpose of RTI Act

The main purpose of the RTI Act as per the knowledge of sample respondent information seekers is presented in table 5.20.

**Table 5.20**  
**Main Purpose of RTI Act as per the Sample respondents**

Sl. No.	Purpose	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Seek the information from Govt. Offices	110	73.33
2	Seek the information from Private offices	27	18.00
3	Seek the information from private individuals	9	6.00
4	Seek the information from All	4	2.67
TOTAL		<b>150</b>	100.00

Source: Field Data

It is clear from table 5.20 that a preponderant majority i.e. 73.33 per cent of sample information seekers stated that the main purpose of the RTI Act is to seek information from government offices. The Act, as per the opinion of 18.00 per cent of respondents is to seek information from private offices. The main purpose of the Act is to seek information from private individuals as reported by 6 per cent of respondents. The Act is intended to seek the information from all as per the knowledge of 2.67 per cent of sample information seekers. The study reveals that large number (110 out of 150) of sample respondents correctly recognized the main purpose behind the enactment of Right to Information Act.

### Awareness on the Provisions of RTI Act

The right to Information Act contains several provisions. Among them on five important provisions, the knowledge of sample information seekers was sought during field survey. The same is presented in table 5.21.

**Table-5.21**  
**Awareness on the Important Provisions of RTI**  
**(Multiple Responses) N=150**

Sl. No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Time limits for disposing information	55	36.67
2	Information up to 20 Years	27	18.00
3	Proactive Disclosure of Information	49	32.67
4	Organisations exempted under the RTI Act	26	17.33
5	Grounds for rejection of Information	16	10.67

Source: Field Data

As per table 5.21 the awareness levels of sample respondents on important provisions of the Act seems to be very poor or poor. About 36.67 per cent of sample information seekers are aware of the time limits on disposing information by officials. The knowledge on the proactive disclosure of information in government offices is limited to 32.67 per cent sample information seekers. Nearly 17.33 per cent of sample information seekers are aware of the exempted organisation under the RTI Act. Providing information up to 20 years is known to 18 per cent of sample respondents. Only 10.67 per cent of sample respondents are aware of the grounds on which the Information officers may refuse to provide information.

### **Knowledge on the Persons/ Agents of Seeking Information**

The particulars of the respondent's knowledge on the Persons/institutions, who can seek information under the RTI Act is given in table 5.22.

**Table 5.22**  
**Respondents Knowledge on the persons who can seek information under the RTI Act**

**(Multiple Responses) N=150**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Persons/ Agents seeking information</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Citizen	125	83.33
2	Group of persons	71	47.33
3	Association/Society	49	32.67
4	A registered company	12	8.00

Source: Field Data

Table 5.22 reveals that as many as 83.33 per cent of sample information seekers are aware that the citizens can seek the information under the RTI Act. A registered association or society can also seek information as per the knowledge of 32.67 per cent of sample information seekers. Group of persons can seek information as per the knowledge of 47.33 per cent sample respondents. A registered company can seek the information under the RTI Act as per the knowledge of 8 per cent of respondents.

#### **Awareness on the agents of Information Providers**

The awareness of the sample respondents on the information providers in a particular office is presented in table 5.24.

**Table 5.24**

#### **Respondents Knowledge on the agents of Information Providers**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name of the officer</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	APIO	80	53.33
2	PIO	56	37.33
3	Appellate Authority	10	6.67
4	Don't know	4	2.67
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Data

Table 5.24 makes it clear that more than half of the respondents reported that Assistant Public Information Officer (APIO) provides the information. As per the

knowledge of 37.33 per cent of sample information seekers, the Public Information Officer (PIO) provides the information. Nearly 6.67 per cent of sample declared that Appellate Authority provides the information. The remaining 2.67 per cent of sample not responded.

### **Awareness on Fee and fee exemption**

As per the RTI Act the information seekers have to pay certain amount to get the information. The awareness of sample respondents on the fee exemption for the persons Living Below Poverty Line (BPL), The knowledge of sample respondents on the fee structure is given in table 5.25.

**Table 5.25**

### **Respondents Awareness on Fee Charges for disclosure of Information under the RTI Act**

Sl. No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	
		Fee charges	Fee exemption
1	Yes	90 (60.00)	52 (34.67)
2	No	60 (40.00)	98 (65.33)
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>

It is evident from table 5.25 that nearly 60 per cent of sample respondents reported that they are aware of the fee charges for disclosure of information under the RTI Act. However, 40 per cent of sample respondents are not aware of fee charges for the disclosure of information under the RTI Act. It is regrettable to note that nearly 65.33 per cent of sample respondents are not aware of the fee exemption to BPL citizens. Only 34.67 per cent are aware of the exemption to BPL citizens.

### **Awareness on Application Fee**

The application of information seekers has to accompany with certain fees for obtaining information. In Andhra Pradesh the application fees ranges Rs.5 to Rs.10. In case information is sought from public authorities at village level there is no fees. Besides BPL citizens are also exempted from fees. Table 5.31 gives the details of fees amount paid by sample respondents along with their application.

**Table 5.31**  
**Application Fee Paid by Sample Respondents**

Sl. No.	Amount	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Rs. 5	41	27.33
2	Rs.10	73	48.67
3	Nil	30	20.00
4	Don't Know	6	4.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Data

It is clear from table 5.31 that nearly 48.67 per cent of sample information seekers paid Rs. 10 towards application fee. About 27.33 per cent of sample respondents paid Rs. 5 towards application fee. No application fee is paid by 20 percent of sample respondents. About 4 per cent of sample information seekers denied to respond.

#### **Purposes for Seeking Information**

Generally every citizen seek information with a particular purposes. The purpose behind seeking information as per the sample respondents is given in table 5.33.

**Table - 5.33**  
**Purposes for Seeking Information by Sample Respondents**

Sl. No.	Purpose	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	To Clarify the doubts of misuse of funds	85	56.67
2	To know the list of Beneficiaries	12	8.00
3	To ascertain Corruption charges	47	31.33
4	Other	6	4.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field data

It is evident from table 5.33 that as many as 56.67 per cent of sample information seekers sought information to clarify the doubts of misuse of funds. About 31.33 per cent of sample respondents sought information to ascertain corruption charges. Nearly 8 per cent of the beneficiaries sought the information to know the list of beneficiaries under a particular scheme or programme. About 4 per cent of sample respondents sought information for research purpose, to know the procedures, to confirm the nepotism of officials etc.

## Details of Information Provided

The information authorities have to provide the information within stipulated times. Moreover, they have to provide complete and correct information. As such the sample respondents were asked “whether the information provided within time limit and comprehensive?” The responses to this question were registered and presented in table 5.34.

**Table 5.34**  
**Respondents’ Responses on the Details of Information provided by PIOs**

Sl. No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentages
1	Complete Information	130	86.67
2	Incomplete Information	20	13.33
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>
1	Within Time Limit	127	84.67
2	Not within Time Limit	23	15.33
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>
1	PIO/APIO certified Information	146	97.33
2	PIO/APIO not certified Information	4	2.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field data

The data in table 5.34 shows that the Public Information Authorities provided complete information to 86.67 per cent of sample respondents and the remaining 13.33 per cent received only partial information. About 84.67 per cent of sample respondents received information within time limit. Nearly 15.33 per cent not received information within time limit. The information given by public authorities is certified by concerned PIO/APIO as per the responses of 97.33 per cent sample information seekers. In case of 2.67 per cent respondents, information is not certified.

### Free of Cost Information

As per the Act, the failure to provide information within the specified period is a deemed refusal. If the information is provided after the specified period, it shall be given free. As such the sample respondents who reported that they can't get information within time limit were further asked, "whether you got information free of cost after time limit". The responses to this question are registered and presented in table 5.35.

**Table 5.35**

#### Number of Respondents obtained Information at Free of Cost

Sl. No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentages
1	Yes	144	96.00
2	No	6	4.00
<b>Total</b>		150	100.00

Source: Field data

As per table 5.35 a preponderant majority i.e.96 per cent of sample information seekers got information free of cost after the completion of time limit. Whereas, the remaining 4 per cent of sample information seekers reported that they did not get information at free of cost. When enquired about the reason, the respondents stated that they are not aware of this provision of the Act.

### Complaining to Information Commission

As per the RTI Act, the applicant was directly make a complaint to the State Information Commission if the authorities has not provided the information in time and if the authorities give false or incomplete information. Moreover, the applicants can complain in case if the concerned authorities refuses to accept application or ask unreasonable fee. Keeping in view of this, the respondents were asked "whether you made any complaints to State Information Commission under the circumstances"? The responses to this questionnaire registered and presented in table 5.36.

**Table 5.36**  
**Number of Sample Respondents complained to State Information Commission**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
1	Complained	16	10.67
2	Not Complained	74	49.33
3	No idea on the Provision	60	40.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** Field data

It is evident from table 5.36 that only 10.67 per cent made complaints to State Information Commission for one reason or other reason. Around 49.33 per cent of sample information seekers not made any complaints to information commission. It is pertinent to note that as many as 40 per cent of sample information seekers have no knowledge about the complaining to Information Commission.

#### **Number of Years Information Sought**

The Right to Information Act declared that the authorities have to provide information relates to a period prior to the date of application. As such the respondents were asked "How many years of information you sought from concerned Department". The responses to this query were presented in a table format in table 5.37.

**Table 5.37**  
**Number of Years Information Sought by Sample Respondents**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
1	Below 5 years	83	55.33
2	6 to 10 years	32	21.33
3	10 to 15 years	20	13.33
4	16 years and more	15	10.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field data

Table 5.37 reveals that large number of sample information seekers sought information relating to less than 5 years. About 55.33 per cent of sample respondents sought the information of less than 5 years. The information sought by 21.33 per cent of sample respondents extends to 6 to 10 years from the date of application. Nearly 13.33 per cent of sample respondents demanded the information relating to last 10 to 15 years. The remaining 10 per cent asked 16 and above years of information.

**Verification of Records and Reports:** The RTI Act allows the citizen to verify the records and reports with certain limitations. Table 5.38 gives the details of number of sample respondents verified records and reports in respective government offices.

**Table – 5.38**

**Number of Sample Respondents Verified Records and Reports**

Sl. No.	Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentages
1	Yes	59	39.33
2	No	91	60.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field data

It is evident from table 5.38 that the number of respondents verified records and reports or parts thereof, is limited. Nearly 39.33 per cent of sample respondent information seekers verified records and reports. A preponderant majority i.e., 60.67 per cent sample information seekers not verified any records or reports.

## FINDINGS

1. The study makes it clear that nearly 42.20 per cent of sample respondents came to know about Right to Information Act through electronic/print media. Around 25.43 per cent of sample respondents came to know about RTI Act by government officials. Through local leaders nearly 19.65 per cent of sample information seekers, came to know about RTI Act.
2. As per the study a preponderant majority i.e. 73.33 per cent of sample information seekers stated that the main purpose of the RTI Act is to seek information from government offices.
3. The study reveals poor knowledge of sample on the various provisions of RTI Act. About 35.67 per cent of sample information seekers are aware of the time limits on disposing information by officials. The knowledge on the proactive disclosure of information in government offices is limited to 32.67

- 4 per cent sample information seekers. Nearly 17 per cent of sample information seekers are aware of the exempted organisation under the RTI Act. Providing information up to 20 years is known to 16.33 per cent of sample respondents. Only 9.33 per cent of sample respondents are aware of the grounds on which the Information officers may refuse to provide information.
- 5 It is clear from the study that as many as 82 per cent of sample information seekers are aware that the citizens can seek the information under the RTI Act.
- 6 The sample information seekers also poor with regard to the exact year of the enactment of RTI Act. . As per the knowledge e of 58.96 per cent of sample information seekers the RTI Act was enacted in 2006. Nearly 10.98 per cent of sample information seekers reported that the RTI Act come into existence in 2007.
- 7 It is clear from the study that more than half of the respondents reported that Assistant Public Information Officer (APIO) provides the information. As per the knowledge of 37.33 per cent of sample information seekers, the Public Information Officer (PIO) provides the information. Nearly 6.33 per cent of sample declared that Appellate Authority provides the information.
- 8 As per the study nearly 61 per cent of sample respondents reported that they are aware of the fee charges for disclosure o information under the RTI Act. However, it is regrettable to note that nearly 65.33 per cent of sample respondents are not aware of the fee exemption to BPL citizens.
- 9 The study reveals that good number (57.67 per cent) of sample information seekers sought information to clarify the doubts of misuse of funds. About 31.67 per cent of sample respondents sought information to ascertain corruption charges. Nearly 7 per cent of the beneficiaries sought the information to know the list of beneficiaries under a particular scheme or programme. About 3.66 per cent of sample respondents sought information for research purpose, to know the procedures, to confirm the nepotism of officials etc.
- 10 As per the study nearly 39.67 per cent of sample respondent information seekers verified records and reports. A preponderant majority i.e., 60.3 per cent sample information seekers not verified any records or reports.
- 11 The study reveals that the attitude of officials towards information seekers is not affable as reported by 62.33 per cent of the sample.
- 12 It is evident from the study that as many as 93 per cent of sample respondents opined that the Right to Information Act is useful to contain

13 corruption. The RTI Act is essential to facilitate proper functioning of democracy as reported by 73 per cent of sample respondent information seekers. Nearly 67.67 per cent mentioned that the RTI Act is useful to hold government accountable to the governed.

13 It can be found from the study that majority (52 per cent) of sample respondents rated the Right to Information Act as good. While 12.33 per cent rated the Act as very good. Average scorings were given by 24 per cent of sample respondent information seekers. On the other hand 11.67 per cent of sample respondents are unable to give any ratings to RTI Act.

#### Suggestions:

☞ A massive awareness campaign is necessary to educate the citizens about the RTI Act and encourage citizen involvement. The awareness program must especially target the vulnerable categories of citizens such as: (i) women; (ii) farmers and rural families; and (iii) middle and working class, for whom most

of the social benefit schemes of the Government are targeted. For this purpose, RTI awareness and education needs to be aggressively pursued using the appropriate medium of communication. Also adequate budget needs to be allocated by the appropriate Governments for this initiative.

- ☞ A conducive and facilitative environment at Government offices is a necessary condition to ensure that the citizens are able to apply and receive information in a convenient manner.
- ☞ About 54.33 per cent of sample suggested for the establishment of department wise RTI monitoring committees.
- ☞ A comprehensive information management system (IMS) should be developed by each public authority for storage and retrieval of data and information that may be shared with anyone who seeks to inspect and use the information for development purposes. Not only the institutional capacity but also the individuals associated with various public activities should also be trained and equipped with facilities to cope with the demand for sharing of information.
- ☞ In order to properly manage the demand for information, a concerted effort would be needed to create mass awareness among the people to promote information literacy. A multimedia approach should be adopted to educate and train people as to how to decide and select what information should be sought for and that from where and how? Besides, they should be educated as to how to make best use of information for effective participation in

- ☞ economic and political processes. This alone can ensure cost-effective use of the provisions of the RTI Act.
- ☞ An office should be set up in each State as a repository of expertise, to monitor all records.
- ☞ Information on the RTI should be included in school syllabi to improve awareness. Government should come out with a special postage stamp of Rs. 10 towards payment of RTI fee nationwide.

## CONCLUSION

The Right to Information law of 2005 signals a radical shift in our governance culture and permanently impacts all agencies of state. The effective implementation of this law depends on three fundamental shifts: from the prevailing culture of secrecy to a new culture of openness; from personalized despotism to authority coupled with accountability; and from unilateral decision making to participative governance. Obviously one single law cannot change everything. But this fine legislation is an important beginning. Its effective application depends largely on the

institutions created, early traditions and practices, attendant changes in laws and procedures, and adequate participation of people and the public servants.

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