

Project Report
on
'JAANKAARI'



ICT - Based Facilitation Centre under RTI Act

A Govt. of Bihar Initiative



155311

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PROJECT

REPORT

ON

**PROJECT "JAANKARI" AN ICT Initiative through Facilitation
Centre (Under the Right to Information Act, 2005)**

GOVERNMENT OF BIHAR INITIATIVE

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PROJECT : JAANKARI

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CHAPTER - 1

RIGHT TO INFORMATION-GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Objectives

The "Right to Information Act" was passed by Government of India in June, 2005 with the following objectives:

- (i) to provide for setting out practical regime of right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities;
- (ii) to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority;
- (iii) to set up Central Information Commission and State Information Commission and for matters connected therewith;
- (iv) to contain corruption and to hold governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed;
- (v) to harmonise revelation of information with public interests including efficient operations of the governments, optimum use of limited fiscal resources and the preservation of confidentiality of sensitive information.

1.2 When did it come into force ?

This central Act came into force on the 12th October, 2005 (120th day of its enactment on 15th June, 2005). Some provisions were made operational & enforceable with immediate effect viz. obligations of public authorities; designation of Public Information Officers and Assistant Public Information Officers; constitution of Central Information Commission; Constitution of State Information Commission; non-applicability of the Act to Intelligence and Security Organizations; and power to make rules to carry out the provisions of the Act.

Different States (except J&K), as also the central government were supposed to frame rules regarding cost to be charged for accepting applications filed under RTI Act, fees for filing appeals, formats for applications/ appeal/reports, Validity of e-transactions, etc. State of Bihar accordingly framed its sets of rules with prescribed formats and fees, etc in June 2006.

1.3 Who is covered ?

The Right to Information Act extends to the whole of India, except for the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

1.4 What does information mean ?

Information means any material in any form including records, documents, memos, e-mail, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a public authority under any other law for the time being in force.

1.5 What does Right to Information mean ?

It includes the right to –

- i) inspect works, documents, records;
- ii) take notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records;
- iii) take certified samples of material;
- iv) obtain information in form of print outs, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through print outs.

1.6 **Officers and their obligations-**

- a) What are the obligations of Public Authority ?
- b) What does a “Public Authority” mean ?
- c) Who are Public Information Officers (PIOs) ?
- d) What are the duties of a PIO ?

a) **What are the obligations of Public Authority ?**

To provide/disclose/make available openly:-

- i) the particulars of its organization, functions and duties;
- ii) the powers and duties of its officers and employees;
- iii) the procedure followed in its decision making process, including channels of supervision and accountability;
- iv) the norms set by it for the discharge of its functions;
- v) the rules, regulations, instructions, manuals and records used by its employees for discharging its functions;
- vi) a statement of the categories of the documents held by it or under its control;
- vii) the particulars of any arrangement that exists for consultation with, or representation by the members of the public, in relation to the formulation of policy or implementation thereof;
- viii) a statement of the boards, councils, committees and other bodies consisting of two or more persons constituted by it. Additionally, information as to whether the meetings of these are open to the public, or the minutes’ of such meetings are accessible to the public;
- ix) a directory of its officers and employees;

- x) the monthly remuneration received by each of its officers and employees, including the system of compensation as provided in its regulations;
- xi) the budget allocated to each of its agency, indicating the particulars of all plans, proposed expenditures and reports on disbursements made;
- xii) the manner of execution of subsidy programmes, including the amounts allocated and the details and beneficiaries of such programmes;
- xiii) particulars of recipients of concessions, permits or authorizations granted by it;
- xiv) details of the information available to, or held by it, reduced in an electronic form;
- xv) the particulars of facilities available to citizens for obtaining information, including the working hours of a library or reading room, if maintained for public use;
- xvi) the names, designations and other particulars of the Public Information Officers;
- xvii) such other information as may be prescribed & thereafter update these publications every year.

b) **What does a “Public Authority” mean ?**

It means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted :

- by or under the Constitution;
- by any other law made by Parliament;
- by any other law made by State Legislature;
- by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government and includes any-

- i. body owned, controlled or substantially financed
- ii. non-government organization substantially financed directly or indirectly by the appropriate Govt.

c) **Who are Public Information Officers (PIOs) ?**

PIOs are officers designated by the public authorities in all administrative units or offices under it to provide information to the citizens requesting for information under the Act. Any officer, whose assistance has been sought by the PIO for the proper discharge of his or her duties, shall render all assistance and for the purpose of contraventions of the provisions of this Act, such other officer can be treated as a PIO.

Department of Personnel & Administrative Reforms, Government of Bihar is the nodal/administrative department for coordinating all activities in accordance with the provisions of the Right to Information, Act, 2005. As per its instructions, all the government departments have notified their PIOs, and Appellate Authorities.

To assist the PIOs government has also notified Assistant Public Information Officer (APIO). Apart from officers of the department posted in State Secretariat headquarter, field officers in the 9 divisional HQ, 38 revenue districts and 534 Community development (CD) blocks have also been notified as PIOs /APIOs.

As depicted in the figures of the State (At a Glance as Annexure-I),it is apparent that a large number of developmental activities, especially in human resource development, health, poverty alleviation programmes, infrastructure development, road/building construction, industrial development, etc., are taking place for the benefit of common man. The developmental strategy for equitable and inclusive growth necessitates the need to leverage state's strength and core competence in such activities that harness our large talented human resource, fertile land favourable weather, rich historical legacy, etc.

Usage of "Right to Information" is expected to ensure transparency in observing procedures & perhaps result in optimal utilisation of resources. In the process, it was felt necessary to integrate transparency and process reform to simplify regulations and procedures.

d) **What are the duties of a PIO ?**

- PIO shall deal with requests from persons seeking information and where the request cannot be made in writing, render reasonable assistance to the person to reduce the same in writing.
- If the information requested for is held by, or its subject matter is closely connected with the function of another public authority, the PIO shall transfer, within 5 days, the request to that other public authority and inform the applicant immediately.
- PIO may seek the assistance of any other officer for the proper discharge of his/her duties.
- PIOs on receipt of a request, shall as expeditiously as possible, and in any case within 30 days of the receipt of the request, either provide the information on payment of such fee as may be prescribed, or reject the request for any of the reasons specified in the rules,
provided that where an application for information or appeal is given to a State Assistant Public Information Officer, as the case may be, a period of five days shall be added in computing the period for response.
- Where the information requested for concerns the life or liberty of a person, the same shall be provided within forty-eight hours of the receipt of the request.
- If the PIO fails to give decision on the request within the period specified, he shall be deemed to have refused the request.
- Where a request has been rejected, the PIO shall communicate to the requester –
 - (i) the reasons for such rejection,
 - (ii) the period within which an appeal against such rejection may be preferred, and
 - (iii) the particulars of the Appellate Authority.
- PIO shall provide information in the form in which it is sought unless it would disproportionately divert the resources of the Public Authority or would be detrimental to the safety or preservation of the record in question.

- If allowing partial access, the PIO shall give a notice to the applicant, informing:
 - a) that only part of the record requested, after severance of the record containing information which is exempt from disclosure, is being provided;
 - b) the reasons for the decision, including any findings on any material question of fact, referring to the material on which those findings were based;
 - c) the name and designation of the person giving the decision;
 - d) the details of the fees calculated by him or her and the amount of fee which the applicant is required to deposit; and
 - e) his or her rights with respect to review of the decision regarding non-disclosure of part of the information, the amount of fee charged or the form of access provided.

- If information sought has been supplied by third party or is treated as confidential by that third party, the PIO shall give a written notice to the third party within 5 days from the receipt of the request and take its representation into consideration.

- Third party must be given a chance to make a representation before the PIO within 10 days from the date of receipt of such notice.

1.7 What is not open to disclosure ?

The following is exempt from disclosure :-

- i) information, disclosure of which would prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, relation with foreign State or lead to incitement of an offence.
- ii) information which has been expressly forbidden to be published by any court of law or tribunal or the disclosure of which may constitute contempt of court;
- iii) information, the disclosure of which would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or the State Legislature;

- iv) information including commercial confidence, trade secrets or intellectual property, the disclosure of which would harm the competitive position of a third party, unless the competent authority is satisfied that larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information;
- v) information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship, unless the competent authority is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information;
- vi) information received in confidence from foreign Government;
- vii) information, the disclosure of which would endanger the life or physical safety of any person or identify the source of information or assistance given in confidence for law enforcement or security purposes;
- viii) information which would impede the process of investigation or apprehension or prosecution of offenders;
- ix) cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the Council of Ministers, Secretaries and other Officers;
- x) information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual;
- xi) notwithstanding any of the exemptions listed above, a public authority may allow access to information, if public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to the protected interests.

1.8 **Is partial disclosure allowed ?**

Only that part of the record, which does not contain any information which is exempt from disclosure and which can reasonably be severed from any part that contains exempt information, may be provided.

1.9 **Who is excluded ?**

Central Intelligence and Security agencies specified in the Second Schedule like IB, R & AW, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, Directorate of Enforcement, Narcotics Control Bureau, Aviation Research Centre, Special Frontier Force, BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISF, NSG, Assam Rifles, Special Service Bureau, Special Branch (CID), Andaman and Nicobar, The Crime Branch-CID-CB, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Special Branch, Lakshadweep Police. Agencies specified by the State Governments through a Notification will also be excluded. The exclusion, however, is not absolute and these organizations have an obligation to provide information pertaining to allegations of corruption and human rights violations.

1.10 **Monitoring and Reporting-**

The Central and State Information Commission shall prepare annual reports and also formulate its recommendations to be forwarded to the appropriate governments, which will cause these reports to be tabled in the Parliament or the State assembly, as the case may be.

CHAPTER - 2

Project "JAANKARI"-A Facilitation Centre Approach

2.1 Common experience and the empowerment of citizens

It's common experience that masses often are oblivious and ignorant about how the Government decisions are made. This lack of transparency acts as a barrier which prevents the masses not only from actively participating in the Governmental functioning, but also from raising questions and protecting from impaired or ill-advised decisions. Non-transparency also promotes and disguises official graft and favoritism. It's here that e-Governance can play an essential role in bringing the governmental policy and processes to light.

Government transparency should be embedded in the decisions of all ICT systems. For example, official corruption can be reduced by re-organizing activities, such as licensing, permit, etc, and creating an online monitoring system to track each application, whereby official could be identified and held personally accountable for any action or inaction at any stage. It was felt that highly-placed public officials can expedite transparency and accountability efforts by making their offices positive examples of openness. While putting services online, citizens should be given the ability to track the status of their applications.

Good patronage of any such system would require training of civil servants and provision of incentives to reform. There are many factors, e.g. class, race, ethnicity, geography, etc., which can, severally or interactively, disenfranchise the disadvantaged sections /groups.

Another factor, i.e. digital divide is fact emerging as a potent disenfranchise factor in this age of information Revolution. The Digital Divide is the chasm between those who have internet access and these who have not. The "have nots" cannot learn essential computer skills, cannot have benefits of e-Governances. E-Government must address this digital divide by working towards the bridging of this gap.

Bridging the digital divide entails much more than merely addressing the race, caste and class issues. If such a technology programmes has to succeed, then it must attempt to create new opportunities for the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, particularly the women, the aged and the most downtrodden people who are traditionally isolated from the

Government programmes. Such technology programmes must tackle the twin issues, of e-literacy and accessibility especially for the disadvantaged groups of the rural Bihar.

‘Gyandoot’ Project is an apt example how this digital divide can be bridged by connecting a remote part of rural hinterland to the e-government through the Internet in order to benefit the rural population. An effort can be made by enlisting grass root level Government officials/ workers, to teach basic computer skills, to create computer labs in local libraries or schools, with the goal of empowering the rural poor to explore opportunities beyond their immediate boundaries including the opportunities for increased civic participation.

Government of Bihar while making efforts for development on all fronts, is also keen on introducing transparency in the Government process. To ensure this, it has been consciously decided to implement the provisions of Right to Information (RTI) Act, effectively in the State. In all the Govt. Departments and District Offices, Public Information Officers (PIOs) have been designated and appellate authorities have been notified.

2.1 **Problems of the citizens:**

Keeping the above points in mind, by consensus it was felt that the most common problems being faced by the people vis-à-vis RTI are as follows:

- Many people cannot fill Form A, as mentioned in the relevant Rules or draft application. Some of them are illiterate and due to this factor alone, RTI cannot be used by a huge section of population.
- People do not know which Department to approach for different issues. And without this knowledge, it is impossible to file an RTI application easily.
- Even if one knows the Department, there are multiple Public Information Officers (PIOs) in a Department and it would be quite difficult for a person to know who is the right PIO, suited to his requirement.
- For an illiterate citizen in remote areas of the state, where many variations of different languages like Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Angika etc. are spoken, there was a need to have an interpreter/ intermediary who could communicate with individuals and translate the "need" in Hindi, Bihar's official language.

- Meeting government officials face -to-face & asking for information may not be an easy experience. Introducing an opaque level, that of a Facilitation centre, provides comfort level to the applicants. Sending the request-for-information application by post is not a comfortable option for the applicant as he is not sure if it would reach its destination in time. Demanding an acknowledgement would mean extra cost implications.
- Depositing application fee of Rs.10 is another nightmare. One has to either go in person to the concerned office to deposit cash or make a Demand Draft or a postal order. Apart from a financial implication, it also involves spending a lot of time investing Bank/post office
- With a population of approximately 85 million, Bihar is spread over an area of 94163 sq km. Many districts headquarter are located more than 200 km away from the state headquarter, at Patna, a repository of State held information. Traveling to Patna for submitting an application also involves money & time.
- If one does not the get "right" information, filling an appeal is even more complicated and tiring process.

It was therefore difficult to file an RTI application or to file an appeal. This was reducing RTI to be an affair of elite, urban, educated middle class only. Taking RTI to masses, including illiterates and to address all the above issues by means of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) concept of utilizing a Call Centre as facilitation Centre was thought to be a possible solution. Inputs from "Parivartan" and Sri Arvind Kejriwal helped in better formulation of the Project.

RTI Act has major role in promoting e-literacy, especially among the poor and disadvantaged sections of the society. And to ensure e-literacy, the factor of accessibility must also be taken care of. Governments must be sensitive to the special needs of poor, physically challenged and disable persons. It must design its services with appropriate interfaces suited to the disadvantaged persons. However, this accommodation and customization has significant cost implications.

The poor, disadvantaged and challenged section of the population can substantially benefit from e-government services, as they may not be able to travel to government officers or the downtrodden people may not be able to articulate their demands.

2.3 Solution- Project "JAANKARI" - an ICT initiative

Visualizing the ramifications of the RTI Act for people's empowerment and its effectiveness in reduction of corrupt practices in government offices, which result mostly due to holding of information and avoiding transparency, the State Government of Bihar decided to make provision of RTI Act more broad based and easily accessible to ordinary people. It was decided that ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) be innovatively and effectively employed for expanding the base of the RTI access and that a Facilitation Centre Called "JAANKARI" for RTI be set up, **for the first time in India.**

To give shape to State Government's desire and commitment for transparency and people's participation in Government process via RTI, it was decided that currently available Information Technology tools and Communication access should be used effectively to make "Information" available to a large number of people in a comfortable way. To overcome the digital divide and illiteracy incapacities, it was thought that the most universal of all communication i.e. voice communication over phone line be used for generating RTI applications. The Facilitation Centre was to be equipped more with more than 15 sets of Computers, (capable of being up graded up to 30 sets) Operators, necessary software for application, telecom interface and voice recording H/W & S/W. Facilities for its monitoring as well as qualitative analysis were also put in place. Special Secretary, Chief Minister Secretariat, Bihar was assigned to monitor and remove all administrative and technical bottlenecks in the Project. Authorisation was given to review all arrangements on regular basis with all the stakeholders i.e. Facilitation Centre, telecom department, the PIOs, Beltron, the administrative department, NGO and most importantly feedback from common man.

Bihar Government's RTI Facilitation Centre "JAANKARI" for filing RTI application with the concerned State government Department works on premium rate services of BSNL.

System designed to enable a citizen wishing to file an application for seeking any information under RTI Act, without any hassles of physical movement for purchase of postal order (for the requisite RTI application fee of Rs.10/-)going to the designated RTI Officer of the concerned department. The primary and mandatory requirement was to charge RTI application fee(Rs.10/-) from the citizen without physical transaction of money. This

could be fulfilled with the help of BSNL Premium Rate Services. BSNL's Premium Service is basically a special service for subscribing premium services like Doctor's Advice, Fortune Telling, Exam Results over telephone, by paying at a premium rate i.e. higher than the normal Call tariff. Later the Premium Service Provider gets his share of revenue from BSNL consolidated over a month.

All the facilities were quickly put up in place and the "JAANKARI" Facilitation Centre was located in the State Government's Software Technology Park in BISCOMAUN Tower, Patna. The State Government asked Beltron to procure the necessary hardware, software & authorised to operate it. The operation was outsourced to a government neutral agency. The Facilitation Centre executives were not from government and hence were unbiased. The Software was designed in consultation with officials who had been operating another e-Janshikayat software from CM Secretariat.

Under the overall supervision of CM Secretariat, the state public sector undertaking Bihar State Electronics Development Corporation Ltd. (BELTRON) was entrusted with the responsibility of operationalising the RTI Facilitation Centre within a time period of 2 months. The Chief Minister aptly gave the name "JAANKARI" for the Facilitation Centre. Necessary amendments were made by the State Government in the relevant rules to lower the fees for filing first and second appeal to Rs. 10/- each, to enable e-transactions through phone call to receive payments. Executive Orders were issued and the Facilitation Centre "JAANKARI" was designated and authorised to receive phone calls from public at the pre arranged premium rate i.e. a call costing Rs. 10/per call (rupees ten per call) to take care of the prescribed application fee and generate RTI application on behalf of the caller. Arrangements were made by Beltron to have PRI E-I lines of BSNL dial (15311) terminated at the Facilitation Centre. Besides premium rate call number, another five digit number dial (155310) for help line on normal tariff was also made available for general enquiry on RTI and application status etc. Both these numbers have been widely publicized for public knowledge and consumption.

Normally BSNL provides Premium Rate Service through its IN Platform using 12 digit no. with access code 1867 xxxx xxxx. Premium Rate Services are normally accessible only to STD subscribers. To make the RTI Facilitation Centre facility accessible to every citizen of Bihar from all telephones, special 6 digit code of level 1 i.e. Dial **155311** has been allotted by the Department of Communication, Government of India. A special

mechanism was evolved for extending the premium rate services without involving IN Platform. Premium Rate charge was generated by the Local/TAX exchange itself. Of course this required a huge effort in opening of the "RTI Call Centre Code" in all the main exchanges of Bihar.

In the present technical arrangement the RTI Facilitation Centre Code Dial **155311** (and also the RTI enquiry code **dial 155310**) has been routed to Patna Tandem Exchange. From Patna Tandem Exchange all Calls originated through out Bihar, are routed to EWSD local exchange, Patna from where a PRI (Premium Rate Interface) line has been terminated in RTI Facilitation Centre EPABX, located at BISCOAUN Tower.

Charging of Calls are done as below :

- (i) **RTI application filing dial number (RTN) 155311** – 10 pulses from One India Subscriber, 8 pulses (Rs.9.60) from Non-India One Subscriber being charged immediately after the answer of Facilitation centre agent. This initial charge is valid for 5 minutes duration after which subscribers is charged @ 60 second pulse rate.
- (ii) **RTI helpline/enquiry dial number (RHN) 155310** – Normal Facilitation Charges.

For all the RTI application filing Calls CDRs (Call Detail Records) for code dial 155311 are being generated at EWSD exchange Patna.

The Facilitation Centre executives were trained and sensitized. They were to receive calls and covert the voice demands into "electronic format", compatible with RTI, Act. Since issues involved varied with each request and it was difficult to pinpoint the exact PIOs dealing with the issue, One senior administrative officer was made available to Facilitation centre to help in co-ordinating with PIOs and departmental heads. The official was well versed with the governmental system and its "Rules of executive Business" which assigns specific work to a department and also mentions its delegated powers. This is the first and unique experiment aimed at RTI empowerment of people.

The fully equipped Facilitation Centre for RTI was pre tested first and then inaugurated by the Hon' able Chief Minister on 29th January 2007 The Facilitation Centre is operational since then on all working days.

2.4 Procedures for filing “Request for Information”:

- The Government after realizing a Facilitation Centre, advertised two phone numbers to the public. One of the numbers is RTI Help-line Number (RHN) and the other number is RTI Application Number (RAN).
- RHN is an ordinary number with hunting line facility with normal Call charges. If any citizen wants to get any help about how to use RTI, he can use this number.
- When a person calls up RAN, he is asked to give his name, address, what information does he want and from which department does he want that information. This conversation is voice recorded and also typed on computer simultaneously by the Facilitation Centre executive receiving the call request.
- If the citizen does not know the department concerned, then the Facilitation Centre staff will help him identify it. But in some rare cases, even the Facilitation Centre staff would not know about the exact department. To deal with such cases, the Government has assigned a government official to oversee the operation-centre. The official knows the functioning of each department and the relevant issues connected with it. So, he can supervise the operations at the centre and can facilitate in ascertaining the correct PIO/APIOs.
- Many ordinary citizens may not even know what types of information to ask for. They would just know their problems. Facilitation Centre staff would be trained to help and deal with such cases. A good amount of handholding is required to help the not-so-literate people. A patient, effective conversation with a caller results in generation of one application.
- Once an RTI application has thus been filled the Facilitation center (FC) will confirm its contents with the caller again & than take two copies of it and send the first copy to the applicant. Each of these generated applications will have a unique reference number, which will be assigned by the computer S/W, itself . This reference number can be quoted on the helpline to ask for the application's content (with proper mechanism to respect one's privacy and address the security issues).

- The Second copy will be sent to the concerned PIO by one of the following methods :
 - If the PIO has access to e-mail, it will be sent through e-mail. This is the quickest and cheapest way to transmit application.
 - If he does not have access to e-mail, the application will be faxed to him.
 - If the neither has access to e-mail nor to the fax, it will be sent to him by post.
- The PIO will have 35 days (from the date of receipt of application in CC) to provide information. During this period, the PIO should prepare information and send it to the applicant directly.
- The Facilitation Centre will have provisions to remind the PIO on 34th day, as delay in reply without adequate reasons may invite penal action from the appellate authority or the information commission.
- If applicant has not received the information or is not satisfied with the information received, he can call up the Facilitation Centre again and express his dissatisfaction after telling his reference no.
- His dissatisfaction will be voice recorded and typed. This will become his first appeal, which would be forwarded to the first appellate authority in the same manner as the RTI application was done in the first place, with a reference number.
- The first appellate authority will deal with the appeal as he normally does. The results will be communicated to the applicant directly.
- If the applicant is not satisfied with the first appellate order, he can similarly file his second, appeal. This will be submitted to State Information Commission.
- Both first and second appeal will have the requisite charges of RAN i.e, Rs. 10/per Facilitation. Suitable amendments were made in the Rule by the state government to make similar fee for 1st and 2nd appeal.

2.5 Training/Sensitization Programmes for Stakeholders

Special arrangements were made to train the Facilitation Centre executives and concerned PIOs to acquaint them with issues of the "JAANKARI" Project at Bihar Institute for Public Administration & Rural Development, (BIPARD), Patna BIPARD has the mandate to train and sensitize officials of various departments with different seniority) on RTI issues. Details are also enumerated at Annexure- V.

CHAPTER – 3

Present Status of “JAANKARI” Project

"JAANKARI" Project under RTI, can be construed as an e-governance investment. The Government must regularly monitor, evaluate and do mid-course adjustments of its programmes, so that the desired objectives are achieved. E-Governance investments must engender enough rewards in terms of positive enfranchisement of the traditionally disadvantaged groups for continued Government support for such projects. The calculation of rewards in such a case is subjective and hence, very difficult. One possible way to calculate it can be the Benchmarking, which may include both quantitative as well as qualitative measures. Some of the possible measures are - reduction in average time for processing citizen requests or applications; reduction in number of complaints about the level and quality of government services; increased registration and / or turnout; in government services increased citizen participation in local government or elections; lower costs to government in delivering services and increased revenue.

The “JAANKARI” Facilitation Centre” Communication network was established in consultation with B.S.N.L., the largest telecom service provider in the country. Presently, its service is operationalised in the entire state of Bihar comprising of 19 telecom districts with 1162 exchanges. More than 10.62 lakh telephone subscribers are covered within the purview of this Project. A Total of 38475 villages with 85 million population of Bihar have benefited from this facilitation project.(Details at Annexure-II)

On request from the Government of Bihar, Ministry of Communication & IT Government of India allotted level 155310 & 155311 for RTI Facilitation Centre Helpline & RTI application filing respectively vide letter No. 16-3/2003-BSII (Vol-11) dated 25.02.07 with unrestricted accessibility. The centre became operational on 29-01-07, and is functioning on all working days during office hours. 30 Callers can be heard and assisted on RAN line at a time. RHN live is effectively being manned for rendering all assistance on RTI matters.

Between 29-01-07 and 15-03-07 i.e., 34 working days, 1292 Calls were received by "JAANKARI", out of which 494 voice Calls resulted in creation of as many applications under RTI, Act (Details are given at Annexure-III). Mostly the queries pertained to Public Information Officers (PIO) of department of Human Resource Development, Home, Personnel & Administrative Reforms, Urban development and Revenue & Land Reforms (Details at Annexure-IV). In 17 cases, applications were generated as first appeal and sent to the concerned appellate authorities.

CHAPTER - 4

Socio-economic Benefits of "JAANKARI "Project

4.1 WIN- WIN SITUATION

India is a democratic republic. People are masters and they elect popular government, accountable to the masses. The government while executing any project like "JAANKARI" should create measurable goals during planning stage and then review these benchmarks to ensure that people are getting the intended benefits. People use right to information to obtain details of the works carried out by a Government Department or the manner in which the money was spent by that Department. The information contained in these records can then be compared with the field situations. While a positive correlation boosts people's confidence in its elected government, a wide variation may be sufficient indication of presence of "malaise" in the System.

It is for the first time that a Facilitation Centre has been established to benefit the citizens of the state under the provisions of Right to Information. This is a unique experiment, first of its kind in India and is aimed at "information empowerment" of the people. Various technology issues and RTI knowledge base issues are continuously being handled to ensure quality and coverage.

For RTI, the normal practice followed by governments are cumbersome in the sense that the application has to be filed in prescribed Form A. Many of the citizens are illiterate and are not able to make use of RTI. Hence, to overcome the digital divide and illiteracy incapacibilities, the Government of Bihar has utilized the most usual of all communication i.e. voice communication over phone line. The advantage of the voice communication is that phone facilities are present in almost each of the 38475 odd revenue village and available to a large population. Ease of communication is the key to this project's success.

As explained earlier, now all the relevant information is a phone call away thus, enabling the citizens to get access to information under the control of public authorities. By doing this, the Government is fulfilling the objective of promoting transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. It is also containing corruption and holding governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the masses.

This innovative use of RTI Act will also promote e-governance by disseminating useful information among the masses, especially the disadvantaged sections.

The concept of e-government initiatives is essentially citizen-centric and it largely depends upon how many citizens get involved in it, and for that purpose the efforts to foster civic engagements are crucial.

The citizen is at the core of the concept of e-governance, which is directed inter alia, at improving the life of the masses by cutting cost and bringing in efficiency in governance. Policy-makers must keep the citizen centric vision while designing governance systems. Policy designers should endeavor to encourage stakeholders both government and non-government to interact and come to with a shared vision of e-governance and its goals. And once this shared vision has been clearly defined and crystallized, the leaders must step in and communicate it not only to the masses but also to the implementing agents.

The facilitation Centre approach seeks to address all the above issues. In brief “JAANKARI” Facilitation Centre” Project is a win-win situation to citizens, government and BSNL.

The advantages can be enumerated as follows :

4.2 Advantages to Citizens :

1. Sitting at home-Power of information is just a phone call away. Project application was designed after wide consultations. Citizen is the focus of the initiative,
2. No hassles of physical movement to PIO Office for filing RTI application,
3. Money saved by way of travel time/lost as well as for making drafts/Postal order from Bank and Post offices,
4. Government bears the cost of the Facilitation Centre, cost of transmitting the application to the concerned PIOs as well as substantial cost on providing the premium call service,
5. The Project keeps in mind differences in local culture when seeking to engage citizens,

6. Even writing the application is done by Facilitation Centre executive,
7. Citizen's handicap arising out of linguistic variations can also be overcome by the Facilitation Centre executives, who would screen and do the necessary handholding,
8. No need to know the dynamic "Rules of Executive Business" of the government i.e. which issue is to be referred to which department.

4.3 Advantage to Government :

1. Empowerment of common man, resulting in better compliance,
2. Unique application of a combination of state of the art communication technologies for providing facilitation to citizen,
3. Man-hour saving for collection of RTI application in individual Departments by Centralizing it at The Facilitation Centre,
4. "JAANKARI"-first device of its kind in the country, announces the positive intentions of the government loud and clear,
5. Introduces transparency in government,
6. Creates peer pressure and enabling environment for the government's delivery system,
7. Project data analysis also indicates area of improvement as well as sectors demanding state intervention.

4.4 Advantage to BSNL :

1. Opportunity to exploit technology for public facilitation and empowerment,
2. Additional source of Revenue in terms of revenue sharing,
3. Additional popularity among public.

4.5 Recommendations for future:

Based on the experience gathered till date, it would be desirable to make the project self sustaining. Some of the recommendations are as follows:

1. Increase e-governance in all departments as back-end system, so that e-interface between all the stakeholders is established at lower costs ,

2. Its potential to act as "one-stop shop" for many government services would be an added attraction for enhanced delivery systems,
3. Set performance criteria and measure progress i.e., beyond its current mandate,
4. Continue wide consultation to upgrade the technology application, possibly to address "complaints and demands" of the disadvantaged sections of the society,
5. Incentives be given to private sector entrepreneurs to build and sustain access points in rural Bihar, which is also a demand driven phenomenon.

Bihar: At a Glance

Bihar is located in the eastern part of the country (between 83⁰-30' to 88⁰-00 longitude). It is an entirely land-locked state, although the outlet to the sea through the port of Kolkata is not far away. Bihar lies mid-way between the humid West Bengal in the east and the sub humid Uttar Pradesh in the west which provides it with a transitional position in respect of climate, economy and culture. It is bounded by Nepal in the north and by Jharkhand in the south. The Bihar plain is divided into two unequal halves by the river Ganga which flows through the middle from west to east.

Physical Features

• Latitude	21 ⁰ -58'-10"~27 ⁰ -31'-15"N
• Longitude	82 ⁰ -19'-50"~88 ⁰ -17'-40"N
• Rural Area	92,257.51 sq kms
• Urban Area	1,095.49 sq kms
• Total Area	94,163.00 kms
• Height above Sea-Level	173 Feet
• Normal Rainfall	1,205 mm
• Avg. Number of Rainy Days	52.5 Days in a Year

Administrative Units

• Divisions	9
• District	38
• Sub-Block	101
• SD Blocks	534
• Panchayats	8,471
• Number of Revenue Villages	45,103
• Number of Urban Agglomerations	9

• Number of Towns	130
- Statutory Towns	125
- Non-Statutory Towns	5
• Police Stations	853
- Civil Police Stations	813
- Railway Police Stations	40
• Police Districts	43
- Civil Police District	39
- Railway Police District	4

Key Statistics- as per 2001 Census (Provisional)

• Population	8,28,78,796
- Male	4,31,53,964
- Female	3,97,24,832
• Population (0~6 Years Group)	
- In absolute Numbers	1,62,34,539
	Male: 83,75,532
	Female: 78,59,007
• Literacy	3,16,75,607
- In absolute Number	
	Male: 2,09,78,955
	Female: 1,06,96,652
- Percentage of Total Population	47.57%
	Male: 60.32%
	Female: 33.57%
• Decadal Population Growth (1991-2001)	130
- Absolute	1,83,48,242
- As Percentage	28.43%
• Highest Decadel Growth at	Sheohar District (36.16%)

• Lowest Decadal Growth at	Nalanda District (18.64%)
- Civil Police Stations	813
- Railway Police Stations	40
• Density of Population	880 per sq kms
- Highest Density	Patna, 1471 per sq kms
- Lowest Density	Kaimur, 382 per sq kms
• Sex Ratio (Females/Thousand Males)	921
- Highest Ratio	(Siwan) 1,033
- Lowest Ratio	(Patna) 873
• Highest Literacy Rate	Patna, 63.82%
• Lowest Literacy Rate	Kishanganj, 31.02%
• Average Population of a District	22,39,967

**1. Details of Telecom access and Facilitation Centre's operations
(as on 15.03.2007)**

A. Telecom Access

1. Inauguration : 29.01.2007
2. Telecom Service Provider : Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd.
3. Service Operationalised : Entire State of Bihar comprising of 19 Telecom Districts & 1162 exchanges.
4. No. of Subscribers Covered : 9.62 lakh landline users & 1 lakh WLL users i.e. a total of 10.62 lakh, telephone users.
5. District to be covered with exchanges : 38 revenue districts of Bihar have been covered.
6. No. of Telephone Exchanges in Bihar : 1162 Nos. including RAXs, medium and small exchanges. (All of them operational with 155310/15311 access)
7. Population Covered : 38475 villages with 85 million i.e, population of Bihar.

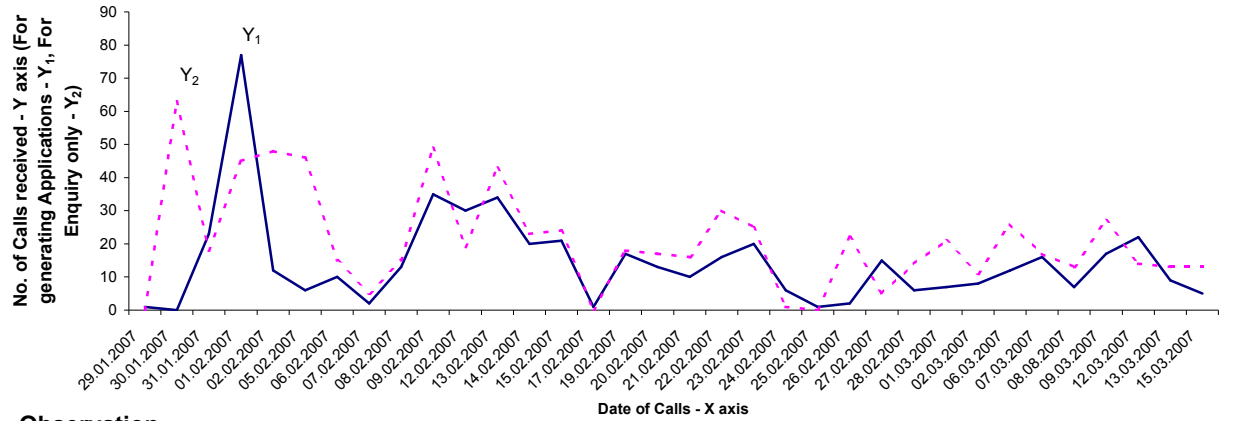
Note: 1) The process of implementing Rs.10/Facilitation/5 minute for RTI application, is new for the Service provider. It required lot of technology/software and legal/commercial issues to be resolved, which was done in consultation with BSNL and Bihar government.

B. Facilitation Centre Operation

(as on 15.03.2007)

1. Location : Software Park BISCOMAUN Tower, Patna
2. No. of Seats : 12 (2 shifts, from 9.30 AM to 6 PM)
can go upto 30 depending on peak usage.
3. Help Line for enquiry : 155310
4. Access for filling Application : 155311
5. Inauguration : 29/01/2007 at 5.30 PM
6. No. of Calls received till date : 1292
7. No. of Calls for enquiry : 716
8. No. of Application Generated : 494
9. No. of Application dispatched to : 494
PIOs of various Deptt. by
Courier/e-mail
10. No. of Voice Calls recorded : 1292
11. No. of drop Calls : 172

Status Report on JAANKARI PROJECT, Govt. of Bihar



Observation

Standard Deviation for Y_1 data(calls for application) =14.370, Standard Deviation for Y_2 data (calls for enquiry only) = 15.482 Correlation between Y_1 and $Y_2 = 0.426$, Median for $Y_1 = 12$, Median for $Y_2 = 17.5$ Range for $Y_1 = 0-77$, Range for $Y_2 = 0-63$, Average for $Y_1 = 14.529$ Average for $Y_2 = 21.058$

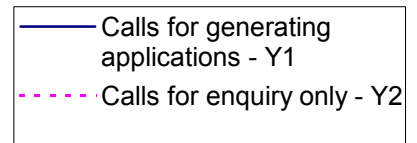


Figure 1

Departmentwise report of the applications

SR.NO.	Organisation Name	First Application/ First Appeal
1	CHIEF MINISTER SECRETARIAT	20
2	DEPT. OF CABINET SEC. AND COORDINATION	8
3	DEPT. OF PERSONNEL & ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS	46
4	DEPT. OF HOME	62
5	DEPT. OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT	114
6	DEPT. OF WELFARE	7
7	BOARD OF REVENUE	1
8	DEPT. OF REVENUE AND LAND REFORMS	22
9	DEPT. OF REGISTRATION	3
10	DEPT. OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATION	3
11	DEPT. OF FINANCE	8
12	DEPT. OF FOOD SUPPLY & COMMERCE	7
13	DEPT. OF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION	8
14	DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH & ENGINEERING	5
15	DEPT. OF MINOR IRRIGATION	3
16	DEPT. OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION	15
17	DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE	11
18	DEPT. OF CABINET (VIGILENCE)	3
19	DEPT. OF TRANSPORT	4
20	DEPT. OF EXCISE & PROHIBITION	4
21	DEPT. OF LABOUR, PLANNING & TRAINING	3
22	DEPT. OF MINES AND GEOLOGY	0
23	DEPT. OF WATER RESOURCES	14
24	DEPT. OF RAJBHASHA	1
25.	DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE	4
26.	DEPT. OF ART, CULTURE AND YOUTH	4

27.	DEPT. OF ENERGY	20
28.	DEPT. OF HEALTH, TREATMENT & FAMILY WELFARE	25
29.	DEPT. OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT	11
30.	DEPT. OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	1
31.	DEPT. OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT	29
32.	DEPT. OF COMMERCIAL TAXES	3
33.	DEPT. OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT	0
34.	DEPT. OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS	0
35.	DEPT. OF FOREST & ENVIRONMENT	5
36.	DEPT. OF TOURISM	1
37.	DEPT. OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY & FISHERIES	1
38.	DEPT. OF INSTITUTIONAL FINANCE & PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION	0
39.	DEPT. OF INDUSTRY	0
40.	DEPT. OF SUGARCANE DEVELOPMENT	0
41.	DEPT. OF CO OPERATIVE	5
42.	DEPT. OF NATIONAL SAVINGS-FINANCE	2
43.	DEPT. OF ELECTION (CABINET)	0
44.	DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE	2
45.	DEPT. OF DIRECTORATE-SOLDIER WELFARE BOARD	0
46.	DEPT. OF PRINTING SECRETARIAT	0
47.	DEPT. OF REO AND PANCHAYTI RAJ	1
48.	DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION	1
49.	DEPT. OF LAW	3
50	DEPT. OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT	4
	TOTAL -	494

DEPT. = DEPARTMENT

Sensitization of Stakeholders

Training of officers on Right to Information Act and relevant issues.

Officers of The Bihar Institute of Public Administration & Rural Development (BIPARD) were sent for training to YASHADA, Pune during 28-30 Nov. 2005. YASHADA has been earmarked as National Resource Centre for training on right information issues.

2. Senior officials of the government & Departmental Secretaries were acquainted with the provisions of RTI Act, in Dec. 2005. The Secretaries were requested to notify PIOs and APIOs in their respective department which was done in time.
3. During Dec, 2005 and again in mid June, 2006, 3-days workshop were arranged for PIOs and APIOs of various departments of the Govt. to make them aware of the roles and duties of PIOs and APIO.
4. Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop was held during Feb.-Mar., 2006 in which altogether 187 officers were trained as Master Trainers. These officers were assigned the role to train officers on posted in the field, RTI issues.
5. District Magistrates of the entire state were asked to get at least 50 officers trained on RTI Act by the Master Trainers. This resulted in creation of a pool of Trainers in 38 revenue districts, who continue the sensitizations programmer.
6. Senior IAS, BAS, other state service officers and representatives of NGOs were given trained in RTI, matters.
7. 25 officers, attended training for pensionary and other retiral benefits were also given training on RTI issues during 4-8 Dec. 2006, More than 250 officers of different departments and categories, including college teachers were given training on the RTI issues during Jan.-Feb. 2007. All Facilitation Centre executives were given training and sensitized on centre's functioning in Jan, '07.
8. A Directory was published by BIPARD in simple and lucid language containing detailed information about the provisions and benefits of RTI Act. This can readily be used by PIOs, APIOs & common people.

Apart from this the electronic media, cinema-hall, wall-writing & pamphlets are being used for widespread publicity of Right to Information Act.



Madhubani Painting