Words from Executive Director

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country's Right to Information landscape is rapidly changing with Punjab and Khyber Pukhtunkwa Governments implementing laws in their provinces. The sector experts have declared both of these laws as very good and it is hoped that these laws will be helpful in free flow of information. We have some reservation about the Punjab's ordinance where penalty regime has not been included in the law.

The Punjab Government officials have indicated that such penalty regime would be included in rules that would be formulated subsequently. We would, however, demand that such penalty regime should be included in ordinance and the version presented in the assembly for enactment should contain necessary sections elaborating penalty for officials who willfully deny information.

Amer Ejaz
Executive Director

Greetings from Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives-CPDI

It is ironical that provinces demand greater financial and political autonomy from the federation but do not deliver the same to the third tier of government. The operating principle seems that while fiscal and political autonomy is good for the provinces, it is not as good for districts. Seen in this context, the provision in Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2013 that chairpersons of district health and education authorities will serve till the ‘pleasure’ of the Chief Minister seems hardly surprising. At the district level, health and education sectors employ largest number of workforce and consume major chunk of budget allocated for a district. It is only logical that district leadership should be entrusted to run the affairs of education and health sectors in order to improve service delivery in these critical sectors. However, all irrefutable arguments in favor of meaningful devolution at the district level find no buyers in the power corridors of provincial governments. Hence, real and meaningful devolution is sacrificed on the altar of political convenience. Slogans of good governance will remain hollow until and unless the third tier of government enjoys administrative, political and financial autonomy to run its own affairs through greater public participation.

Zahid Abdullah
Project Manager (RTI)
Strengthening Public Accountability - STAEP

CPDI has recently completed, one of its major governance related project “Supporting Transparency, Accountability and Electoral process in Pakistan” (STAEP). The project started in August 2009 aimed at nurturing the culture of public accountability that would lead to transparency, inclusiveness, public participation and openness in governance at all levels and would also contribute in the efforts to strengthen the democratic institutions, improve electoral process and make it more reliable through trained, active and sustainable volunteer groups i.e. Constituency Relations Groups (CRGs) for advocacy campaigns.

The volunteer groups established in 12 National Assembly Constituencies of six districts raised 3,672 issues of public importance, raised 717 Public demands for Resolution of these issues and carried out 200 Advocacy Campaigns in favor of these demands, more than 200 information requests were also filed in support of the advocacy. CRGs monitored 1,773 Government Institutions to ensure public accountability.

In order to increase number of voters CRGs identified low CNIC registration pockets with special emphasis on female voters. CRGs organized 425 CNIC registration camps facilitating 39,152 CNIC registrations out of which more than 20,000 were women.

In order to promote volunteerism and to partner with active volunteers for their participation in different advocacy and election observation activities, total 2023 youth (777 female, 1246 male) were profiled in all six districts; above mentioned figure does not include 5231 volunteers profiled for short term observation of general elections in 2013 out of which 3127 were finally deployed on election day.

Regional Conference on Women in Policing in South Asia

CPDI’s representative attended a two-day regional conference “Women in Policing in South Asia” that was organized by CHRI with the support of Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Kathmandu, Nepal on 25th and 26th of November. The conference attracted participants from Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Pakistan that included both retired and serving senior police officers and experts from NGOs on the subject. The conference served to elevate the understanding of the participants on the issues faced by women police officials in the region and provided an adequate forum to discuss the necessary steps required to overcome the prevailing challenges.

The country presentations provided a thorough analysis to supplement a deeper understanding of the appalling scenario of women policing in the four countries. Police officials shared insights and personal experiences to limelight the endeavors that have proven successful in their countries to strengthen women’s role in policing.
Right to Information at Glance

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Law Ineffective without KP Information Commission A Research study about the provincial right to information law, first promulgated as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Ordinance 2013 on August 17, 2013 and later turned into an Act of provincial assembly on October 31, 2013. CPDI and CGPA combined conducted this research that shows that public officials do not respond to information requests filed under right to information law of the province and transparent functioning of government departments in the province still remains a pipe dream.

- Seminars conducted on Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Ordinance 2013 in Sargodha and Jhang. Main objective of these seminars was to highlight the salient features of the ordinance and put suggestion to improve the ordinance.
- 15 RTI Sessions with University and College students in Lahore, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Khushab, Jhelum and Jhang. Major purpose was to aware the youth about the power of RTI, and to identify some young RTI champions via essay completion on Right To Information.
- Stalls at Public Places in Rawalpindi, Sargodha and Jhang to aware public about the use of RTI. RTRI brochure/pamphlets were distributed among the public.
- CPDI in Collaboration with Consumer Watch Pakistan (CWP) developed "CPDI-CWP MODEL RIGHT TO INFORMATION BILL" for Federal Tier of Government and shared with elected representatives.
- A 2 days training conducted for Civil Society Activists and Journalists on "Using KP Right to information Act 2013 For Investigative Reporting and Attainment of Fundamental Rights" in Mardan. Mr. Zahid Abdullah and Mr. Saleem Iqbal conveyed about the conceptual underpinning or KPK RTI Law and its use in investigative reporting.
- 4 RTI Information Counters established in Districts courts of Abbottabad, Masehra, Mardan and Peshawar. Purpose of these information counter was to aware the public about the process of filing information requests. Numbers of applications have been filed to facilitate the active citizens.

FATIN Workshops on RTI

CPDI has organized a series of workshops on Right to Information (RTI) in the month of November 2013, with the support of Friedrich Noumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) aiming to engage students of leading universities of Islamabad including Quaid-E-Azam, Iqra, Fatima Jinnah Women and Preston University to provide a platform through which students can interact with each other on issues related to RTI and learn the benefits and process of utilizing their fundamental right to information from RTI experts. Mr. Saleem Iqbal, Shahid Jatoi, Syed Kausar Abbas and Komal Mughal from CPDI moderated different sessions on RTI.

CPDI has invited media experts including Mazhar Abbas, Fareeha Idrees, Waseem Badami, Asma Chaudhry and Beenish Saleem to make the workshop utilitarian to students so that youth can understand the importance of access to information by using Right to Information. Workshop was based on group activities, interactive sessions and motivated speeches from guest speakers.
Mr. Adeel Jadoon coordinator of youth welfare society Nawansher is running a private school under the supervision of his father (Principal) in Bohu Di Gali a village of District Abbotabad. He had submitted the application in the office of the Chairman Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Abbotabad on 30th January 2009 asking Board Officials to visit the school for registration. On account of casual and unprofessional approach which is usual in public offices of the country; Board Officials did not bother to visit the school till July 2013. During this four and half year period Mr. Adeel visited the office several time requesting the officials to visit the school but all in vain.

On July 07 Mr. Adeel Jadoon participated in the monthly awareness meeting conducted by Centre of Peace and Development Initiatives in Nawansher. he came to know about Right to Information and learned to write an information request under 19 A constitutional clause. Two days later to training, Mr. Adeel decided to write an information request under 19- A to Chairman Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education inquiring information about procedure that how long an application takes entire time for process and registration of school. The copy of application was also sent to Secretary Elementary & Secondary Education, Provincial Ombudsman and Registrar High Court Peshawar Abbotabad Bench for information.

After four days of submission of the information request Mr. Adeel received a phone call from the Board Office requesting to set time for visit of school. Consequently Secretary accompanied with other staff from Abbotabad Board visited school and briefed the school administration about gaps in documentation for school registration process. Inspection team ensured Mr. Adeel that Little Scholars School will be registered soon just after fulfillment of registration requirements.

Mr. Adeel shared with CPDI team that “I have been visiting Board Office for last four and half year and was hopeless but thanks to CPDI –Citizen Voice Project which informed me about Article 19- A and guided me to resolve an old issue within few days” he further said that he has shared his story with friends suffering similar kind of problems and all of them are motivated to refer right of information (RTI) through writing information requests to different public bodies to get required information.

Rating System and Media Content

Rating System is the significant topic of discussion on media these days. The core objective of TV ratings is to measure how much people are watching which channel at what time and which content or program where there are two ways to calculate TV ratings, one is dairy system which includes a door to door survey through a questionnaire and other is more, sophisticated transparent and reliable system done electronically through a device known as “peoples meter” that function through in-built GSM technology, gather the data and transfer it to the server of hosting organization that further prepare the ratings by using a specific methodology. Peoples meter measures three things every 30 second that are, (1) the frequency tuned in TV or the channel, (2) the time when a household is watching and (3) how many people have pressed their button at that time.

Nowadays, there is a great debate around the world that TV content is rating driven so to understand the system of ratings and its impacts (if any), CPDI has organized a series of focus groups in different cities to involve major players from both media and advertising site to understand the rating system and its impacts on TV content. It is learned that ratings is not the only problem but one of the problems because of which the quality of content on electronic media is compromised. The only source of income for private channels is advertisements so they give more value to ratings and always keep trying to improve the numbers to get maximum ads for their channel. Medialogic, a company preparing ratings for TV in Pakistan do not claim the ratings of entire country but only those cities where their people’s meters are installed. Content of TV channels is losing the quality because of limited resources that is why the programs of crime and reenactments are commonly seen in almost every news channel. There should be an independent regulatory body which should have to be responsible for regulating not only the TV channels but also the private organizations that are providing ratings to advertisers and media houses. Pakistan Broadcast Association (PBA) and Pakistan Advertisers Society (PAS) should play their active part to make the rating system more reliable and transparent and at last Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) should make decisions independently and follow the code of conduct they made for regulating electronic media in Pakistan.
The key to practical democracy is the active involvement of the citizens in every aspect of governance; and budget as an imperative instrument of governance is no exception. However, the budget-making process in Pakistan has been closed and largely opaque and people in general have little opportunity to participate in the process that affects the quality of their lives directly. Transparency and good governance is at the heart of CPDI’s advocacy. “Strengthening Civil Society to Improve Accountability” is a National Endowment for Democracy funded project where we act as a mediator for the needs of NGOs and the public for information about the budget and participation, running awareness raising programs through public hearings and generating publications to demystify the budget and highlight important issues. This work is done with the help of our budget group, Citizens Network for Budget Accountability (CNBA), which believes that civil society can add value to the economic choices our government makes, and that wider participation in the budget process can help broaden agreement on these choices. Public participation and easy access to budgets is only possible when citizens have the right to access these documents.

The 21st century is rightly categorized as century of information technology where sharing and dissemination of information is rapid and cheap. Further proactive disclosure is hallmark of transparent governance and this can very easily be achieved through an interactive website. A government which is not ready to share information with public can never gain their confidence. It was observed in a study conducted in April 2013 that out of the thirty six districts of the Punjab, only six districts have functional websites. Other districts either have nonfunctional websites or no websites at all. This was not understandable in this age of technology! As a result of this study, CPDI recommended the district governments build an open and easy to understand district government’s website.

For this very reason it was important that each district should have its own website where the budget of that particular district is placed. One significant step taken by CPDI is to give these district governments the technical support for developing their website where important information about management, financial transaction and development projects can be placed. This would be a footstep towards open and transparent district government. In the first stage, MOUs have been signed with 6 districts and their website construction has started. Training is being given to the government officials of these districts on how to upload documents and maintain the website.

CPDI official website CPDI-Pakistan.Org this month hit the spectacular number of 1,700 plus visitors. Each visitor stayed for more than 3 minutes on average that indicates the strong interactive interface and the content of the website to keep a strong bond with the visitors. According to the statistics of the most reliable source, Google Analytics, around 85% of the traffic is visiting from Pakistan and remaining from United States, United Kingdom and other parts of the world. The website is equally popular on the social media including Facebook Fanpage and Twitter Profile and diverting enough traffic towards the website by engaging maximum number of visitors and facilitating them with development and consultancy services.

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