



Centre for Peace and
Development Initiatives

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CPDI Right to Information Watch

Editorial:

Pakistan is moving reverse on the path of granting citizen's fundamental right to know. Federal and provincial RTI laws are enacted but still await bona fide implementation. Paradoxically, the governments quick in passing RTI laws in Punjab and KP have now also slowed down to a snail's pace. Not only this, continuous efforts to amend in KP RTI act by the provincial government have also put RTI in jeopardy. Civil society and general masses are also raising demand for the establishment of oversight bodies in Sindh and ICT whereas the existing oversight bodies in Punjab and KP are also becoming pale with the passage of time. This is the classic example of government overlooking the promises and commitments that it once made about ensuring public access to information. Chapter 5 of [PML \(N\) Manifesto](#) focuses upon the effective legislation and implementation of right to information laws in Pakistan; however the current situation is utterly opposite. As compare to other south Asian and African countries, Pakistan is becoming stagnant on the path of RTI and open government partnership (OGP). Since we are running close to general elections 2018, it is high time that the government should safeguard and grant people's right to know by establishing oversight bodies to ensure implementation of RTI laws.

RTI Legislative Landscape

CRTI Strong Opposition of Proposed Amendments in KP RTI Act 2013

KP government once again tried to abduct citizen's fundamental right to know by proposing some [restrictive amendments](#) in the much appreciated KP Right to Information Act 2013. Out of 8 proposed amendments; many of them were restrictive in nature and could have curtailed fundamental right to know by creating hurdle in public access to information. With the timely, [strong and joint opposition of civil society's coalition on right to information](#) KP assembly has to disapprove the amendment bill 2018. KP RTI Commission also opposed the amendments and said that if the law should be amended in the light of democratic values only. On the other hand [KP Government departments are also violating rules on proactive disclosure](#).

Implementation of Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013 in limbo

Punjab Information Commission (PIC) i.e. oversight body in Punjab is working without its commissioners, the administrative staff is performing its functions to an extent but the actual

purpose of commission is not being fulfilled. In this situation, the government departments and PIOs are taking information requests for granted and does not provide information to requester because they are cognizant of the fact that no one is going to take strict action against them. The Punjab government has successfully nullified its own RTI system.

Judiciary is being the most active institution in Pakistan nowadays, owing to this fact, CPDI penned advocacy letters to Honourable Chief Justice and all sitting judges of the Lahore High Court to take Suo Motto notice of absence of information commissioners in Punjab Information Commission. It has been more than 10 months that the provincial government has not appointed Information Commissioners. First set of Information Commissioners completed their tenure in March/April 2017; new chief came for period of less than 2 weeks but resigned. CPDI and other civil society organization are training public information officers in Punjab but the weak and non-function enforcement mechanism has derailed the direct flow of information.

Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 awaits implementation

CPDI arranged a [press conference in Karachi Press Club](#) to raise demand for the rightful implementation of Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016 and establishment of Sindh information commission. The provincial government was supposed to establish commission within 100 days but outstandingly it has been more than 6 months that the government has not taken any measures to implement the law. CPDI also penned several advocacy letters to CM Sindh Murad Ali Shah, Secretary Information and Sindh Information Department, as response of these letters, information department maintained that the summary had been sent to CM office for establishment of Sindh Information Commission since Sep 2017 but the CM office has done little for the establishment of information commission till date.

Public Access to Information, still not ensured in federal

The Appellate body under new law i.e Pakistan Commission on Access to Information is not established yet. According to the Right of Access to Information Act, PM of Pakistan is bound to establish information commission within 6 months.5 months have elapsed but little has been done for the rightful implementation of the said Act, most of the RTI requests are not responded and information seekers have nowhere to lodge complaints.

RTI in Action

The weak RTI law in Balochistan, dysfunctional Punjab Information Commission, efforts of KP government to [dilute KP RTI Act 2013](#), non implementation of Sindh Transparency and Right to Information act and right of access to information act 2017 has made public access to information a dream in Pakistan. All the laws should be brought in public domain with rightful implementation. There is no use of making good RTI laws if they are not to be implemented.

Transparency and Right to Information Program

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