



Right to information Act- 2005 and Public Service Delivery: A Study on its Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

The Right to Information Act (RTI) of 2005 is a landmark law that attempts to make the Indian Government more transparent and accountable and manage itself better by enabling citizens to request information from Government agencies. This research article examines how well the RTI Act has worked in improving the delivery of services and the administrative process, service delivery rates, and citizen engagement. The paper analyzes the impact of the RTI Act in terms of responsiveness of government departments, improvement of public services and reduction of corruption. It further looks into the barriers being met by the citizens as well as government officials in trying to implement the RTI provisions, such as bureaucratic red tapes, sluggish responsiveness, and the ignorance among the citizens. The paper emphasizes the shortcomings and achievements in the implementation of the Act through an assessment of case studies. The research findings contend that although the RTI Act has brought in some positive reforms, including increased levels of transparency and accountability, its potential is yet to be fully actualized because there is systemic problem, as well as opposition, at every level of governance. The paper ends with providing recommendations of enhancing the implementation of the RTI Act concentrating on enhancing



institutional support, raising the awareness of this act among the populace and closing the gaps in the provision of the public service

Introduction

The RTI Act 2005 is one of the largest steps forward in strengthening the transparency and accountability of Indian governance. The RTI Act was created with the point of making sure that central and state governments provide information to citizens upon their demand as the key goal. RTI Act has emerged as a great instrument in cultivating an informed and participatory citizenship (Kumaiyan, K. T., & Padalia, M. 2013).^[2] In India, with the bureaucratic opacity and corruption having become a long-standing menace to the effective provision of services, the RTI Act is expected to introduce that much more responsive and transparent government. The people can claim the right to access the broadest possible array of government records under the Act and this has promoted the increased transparency and accountability of the decision-making process of the state authorities. The implications of this are quite far-reaching both in the easiness that the programs of government are becoming increasingly scrutinized than ever before and also in enhancing the general quality and accessibility of the services provided by government. However, the RTI Act has encountered a lot of challenges in implementing it. Still, there is a question of bureaucratic obstacles, delays in information provision, its ignorance among the population, and insufficient preparation of those involved in the work of the civil sphere which is also accompanied with legal framework. In addition, the efficiency of the act in the provision of state services is also questionable. On the one hand, RTI has triggered dramatic shift in governance area in terms of uncovering issues of corruption, affecting policy changes, and causing the officials to perform in their positions in a more responsible manner. Conversely, this has resulted to a bi-polar effect on the day-to-day delivery of other services in the nation where most of the citizens have been compelled to languish in the challenges of accessing the right information at the right time (Kumar, S., & Shilpa. 2015).^[3] This paper is going to seek to examine the success of the RTI act to transform the nature of provision of the public service alongside its ability to bring much needed transparency, limit corruption and bring more accountability in the government systems.

Objectives of the Research:

- To evaluate the effect of Right to Information Act, 2005, towards creating transparency within the framework of public administration.



- To assess how effective RTI has been in changing the way the government is offering its services within government institutions.
- To explore the issues that the people and the authorities of the government encounter in implementing the RTI Act.
- To understand how RTI can help minimize corruption and at the same time promote accountability in the state.
- To give suggestions on how the RTI Act can be better implemented to allow more service delivery and governance.

Research Problem:

The research problem is made up of the question, whether the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 is useful in enhancing delivery of government services and ensuring transparency and accountability of the Indian governance system. However, despite the provisions put forward in the RTI Act that were meant to empower the citizens by giving them their rights of seeking information which is being held by the government, it has failed equally in the need to improve efficiency and standards of the government services. Despite the glamorous success stories associated with RTI concerning exposure of corruption and increasing the accountability of administration there are a few barriers to RTI. These include bureaucratic resistance, delay in responding, poor training at national institutions, and lack of knowledge in the society. Moreover, the RTI Act has resulted in more transparency that has not always been reflected in meaningful reforms in terms of day-to-day delivery of public services. There are still challenges on the smooth and correct dissemination of information by so many departments within the government. These complexities present a research problem of determining why the RTI Act has had limited effects on the delivery of public services and introducing the systemic obstacles that have limited its efficiency. Furthermore, the question of whether the RTI has managed to establish the culture of accountability and whether it has given rise to concrete improvements in the responsiveness of the public institutions needs to be addressed. This paper will seek to address the question of whether the intended benefits of the RTI Act are being achieved or there are still gaps in its application that are still hindering its potential in the areas of improving governance and quality of public services.

Review of Literature:

1. **Thulaseedharan, S. (2013). RIGHT TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN INDIA-A NEW LEGAL SCENARIO. Journal of the Indian Law Institute, 55(1), 59–72:** In this paper, the changing legal



regimes in India, especially the Right to Public Services and the RTI Act are discussed. It shows how these laws have changed the relationship between the citizens and the public institutions and how they have been helpful in guaranteeing the provision of services in good time. The paper critically reviews the implementation obstacles that are faced by these legal frameworks such as bureaucratic resistance and lack of awareness, as well as the positive contribution that they have made in terms of transparency and accountability in the provision of public services.

2. Suresh, & Shilpa. (2015). ACCOMPLISHMENT OF COMPONENTS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE THROUGH RTI ACT: A CASE STUDY. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 76(4), 985–989: This article evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the RTI Act in terms of its contribution to the good governance in India with reference to transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in the field of the Indian public administration. It talks about how the RTI Act has enabled citizen questioning of government actions and giving the right to the citizen to insist on better service delivery making the government become more open and accountable. Nevertheless, the paper also indicates the challenges of such as resistance by public authorities, bureaucracy and the absence of proper enforcement that discourage the full realization of the potential of the Act in effecting good governance.

3. Revolutionary Law? The First Four Years of India's Right to Information Act. *Public Administration Review*, 70(6), 925–933: This article examines the implementation of the first four year of the RTI Act, its role in governance, citizen participation and delivery of the public services. The paper also brings out the achievements, including the elevated transparency levels, empowerment of citizens and the discovery of corruption activities. Nevertheless, it also points out major barriers like slowness in the spread of information, inadequate infrastructure, and reluctance of bureaucrats. The paper sums up with the conclusion that, the RTI Act has produced a transformative effect but its full potential is limited by several systemic issues in the public administration.

4. Jenkins, R., & Goetz, A. M. (1999). Accounts and Accountability: Theoretical Implications of the Right-to-Information Movement in India. *Third World Quarterly*, 20(3), 603–622: The paper examines the theoretical background of the RTI movement in India including what it means in terms of democratic-state accountability. It follows the evolution of the RTI Act and its congruence with the elements of participatory democracy and transparency. The research contends that the RTI movement can transform the relationship between the state and individuals because it gives people the power to make public authorities accountable to them. Nevertheless, it also talks about the enclosure of



the Act, including the lack of awareness among people and hesitation in the willingness of state machinery to pursue transparency to the fullest extent.

5. Zuniga, N., Jenkins, M., & Jackson, D. (2018). Does more transparency improve accountability? Transparency International: This study examines the improvement of relationships between transparency and accountability in governance through the case study of RTI Act. The paper concludes that transparency tends to enhance accountability by visualizing the actions of the government to the people and exposing it to public scrutiny. Nevertheless, it is quick to point out that merely addressing the transparency aspect would not be sufficient, and proper institutional structures, implementation mechanisms, and accountability would also be essential in ensuring better public service delivery. The research paper concludes that the RTI Act has had a massively beneficial positive influence, but the mandate on accountability is an ongoing process.

Research Gap:

The identified research gap based on five articles on the Right to Information (RTI) Act focuses on various important areas that have not been completely covered or have not been deeply discussed. Although the RTI Act has made significant improvements to both transparency and accountability, issues of its overall effectiveness across the various sectors of the population and geographical locations could still be a matter of concern, particularly at the national level. Whereas some researches concentrate to success stories of RTI in exposing corruption and enhancing delivery of public services, little research has been conducted on the long-term effects of RTI towards instilling institutional change, and its capacity to drive policy reforms in different levels of governance. Also, the papers indicate the high risks of bureaucratic resistance, lack of awareness, and procedural delays, and there is no detailed investigation of the effective ways through which these barriers could be successfully addressed. Further, the analysis of the RTI Act has been performed in a theoretical manner with an emphasis on its conformity with democratic values, yet there is the gap in research on the socio-cultural and political reasons that impede full action of the RTI Act. The available literature also does not focus on the aspects of technological innovation that contribute to RTI, especially the digital availability of information. Furthermore, the effectiveness of RTI in different Indian states has not been discussed sufficiently, as well as the influence of regional imbalances on the implementation of RTI.

Research Questions:



- Q-1. What is the impact of the RTI Act, 2005 on transparency within the public service delivery mechanism?
- Q-2. How does RTI contribute to minimizing corruption within the government service delivery systems?
- Q-3. What is the level of citizen awareness and use of RTI as a tool to enhance access to services?
- Q-4. What is the response level of public authorities to RTI requests as regards service delivery?
- Q-5. What are the barriers to full implementation of RTI in achieving an accountable public service delivery?

Research Methodology:

The study is qualitative in nature and is solely based on secondary sources of data to assess the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act, 2005 in its endeavor to improve on the delivery of public services. This is a descriptive and analytical research clearly intended to interpret the existing literature, reports, and official data in order to assess the extent to which the RTI has had any contribution towards transparency, accountability and efficiency in the system of providing public services. Among the sources used, government publications and Annual Reports of the Central Information Commission (CIC) have been used, alongside audit reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), policy documents and reports of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the transparency and governance sector have also been used. Furthermore, peer reviewed journal articles, newspaper archives as well as scholarly research publications are also used to give a wider line of analysis and comparative contents. The case studies and review of legislation provided in the existing literature enable one to identify trends, bottle-necks, and success stories associated with RTI implementation. This secondary data is critically examined in order to make conclusions about the importance of the RTI Act in the enhancement of the efficiency and responsiveness of the systems of public services delivery.

1. Introduction to the RTI Act, 2005 and Its Objectives:

The RTI Act, 2005 is a landmark act in the development of democracy in India as it gave citizens the power to seek transparency and accountability of the government. The RTI Act was enacted by the Parliament of India and was published in the Gazette of India on 12th October 2005, amending the previous Freedom of Information Act, 2002. The core idea behind the RTI Act is to foster transparency



within the state operation by making information readily available to citizens (Raj, T. 2015).^[4] The Act is applicable at both central and state governments, local governments, in addition to the undertakings, NGOs in the public sector, and those that are substantially financed by the government. The RTI Act allows any citizen of India to seek information from a public authority to which the authority must answer within 30 days of acknowledging the request. The legislature provides that important information held by offices of government should be proactively disclosed to limit the workload and complexity of individual requests to establish a culture of institutional transparency. The underlying philosophy is that information wields power and availability of information bestows citizens with an understanding, questioning and participation power in the process of governance. It also provides that the Central and State Information Commissions shall be the appellate bodies in order to implement and settle grievances (Jain, A. 2012).^[1] Over time, RTI has become an effective means through which whistleblowers, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens perform their role regarding unearthing of corruption, inefficiencies, and irregularities within the institutions of government. Essentially, RTI Act is not only be a legal provision, but a democratic tool and measure to enhance the participatory governance and empower people to demand accountability in government institutions.

2. Role of RTI in Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Public Services:

The Right to Information Act, 2005 is the key that enables transparency and accountability in the provision of the public services in India. The RTI Act destroys the conventional culture of secrecy that has haunted Indian bureaucracy by giving citizens legal rights to information held by the government authorities. It puts the processes of decision making into the light where citizens can question how and why some policies are formulated, where money is spent and where services are provided (Riegner, M. 2017).^[5] Among the greatest influences of the RTI Act, one can name the possibility to reveal corruption, delays, and inefficiency in the public service delivery systems. Through RTI, citizens have secured information on a variety of subjects including ration distribution, pension payments, infrastructure projects, healthcare centers and even education programs. Such disclosures also provide a window of comparison between policy motives and practice on the ground and this makes the public officials to correct oversights and enhance delivery services. RTI is also a preventative mechanism. When officials can be questioned by the general population concerning their choices and practices, they become more cautious in their decisions and actions, which can encourage ethical governance. There is also the routine proactive publication of information including budgets, projects, beneficiaries and performance outcomes on official websites to increase levels of transparency without citizens placing



formal requests (Ruparelia, S. 2013).^[7] The RTI tool also enables the democratic check of power by letting civic society groups, media and watch dog agencies investigate misuse of authority or embezzlement of the government funds. The net effect is that the government is more responsive and accountable. Thus, the RTI Act is a cornerstone of good governance, where the government can be run transparently, equitably and in the interest of the people.

3. Impact of RTI on the Efficiency of Public Service Delivery Mechanisms:

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 has contributed significantly to the performance of the public service delivery systems as it injects a sense of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness within the government operations. The Act has also promoted elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy in government departments, record keeping, and meeting stipulated deadlines within which to deliver a service by necessitating prompt disclosure of information (Roberts, N., & Roberts, A. 2010).^[6] The internal restructuring exercise has aided in eliminating the delay and red tape procedures and enhancing the quality of service delivery. To exemplify, people have made use of RTI to complain about the delay in processing the ration cards, pensions, and income certificates. The uncertainty of facing action under the RTI makes the government personnel work more responsibly as well as work within deadlines. To a great extent, most departments have implemented reforms like computerization of record and grievance redressal systems which are indirect consequences of the heat provided by RTI requests (Singh, S. 2006).^[9] In addition, RTI has resulted in better tracking of welfare programs like Public Distribution System (PDS), MGNREGA, and health services. Using RTI, citizens and civil society have been able to report irregularities, thereby ensuring the target beneficiaries get services. The act also assists in the determination of systemic bottlenecks thus corrective administrative actions are set in motion. The effect is however varying across each region and department and is thus largely affected by the awareness of the people, readiness of the bureaucracy and institutional encouragement.

4. Challenges and Limitations in the Implementation of RTI:

The Right to Information Act, 2005 though has transformative intent suffers some challenges and limitations that limit the effective implementation of the Act as a whole. The problem of ignorance among citizens, especially those living on the margins and in rural areas, is one of the most critical ones. Most citizens do not know their rights under the Act or lack the ability to prepare RTI applications and take them forward (Sharma, A. 2017).^[8] This reduces the extent and the effectiveness of RTI as a mode of empowerment. The other significant challenge is bureaucratic resistance. Certain officials in



government consider RTI as a hazard and intentionally withhold or take time to release information. There is a high noncompliance with the ongoing need to disclose information proactively, and the same request of information is repeatedly received. Also lack of proper record management systems in government offices pose difficulties to the officials of providing the stipulated information within the stipulated time. Another issue of serious concern is the workload on Information Commissions. The large backlog of pending appeals and complaints, coupled with the understaffing and slow appointments of Information Commissioners means that there is slow redressal of grievances under the Act and its deterrence effect is diluted (SIRCAR, A. K. 2012).^[10] There have also been cases of whistleblowers and RTI activists being harassed, threatened or even becoming a victim of violence scaring them and others to using the Act. A decrease in the autonomy and strength of the Act in recent years has also been called into question by amendments and policy changes.

5. Policy Recommendations for Strengthening RTI and Public Service Delivery:

To improve the efficacy of the Right to Information (RTI) Act and improve service delivery to the masses, there are a number of policy initiatives that will have to be taken. To start with, more people need to be aware of RTI particularly in rural and marginalized societies. Specific awareness campaigns, training programs, and workshops to make citizens aware of how to draft RTI applications, the knowledge, and skills required to file RTI applications should be designed through the governments as well as the civil society organizations and educational institutes (Suresh, & Shilpa. 2015).^[11] Second, the development of capacity of the public officials is essential. The training must be directed at maintaining records, quickly delivering information and adhering to the standards of proactive disclosure. It should also focus on transforming the bureaucratic culture of secrecy to that of openness and serving the citizen. Third, e-governance and the digitization tools must further be embedded in delivery of public services. The development of user-friendly, centrally located online platforms where one can file an RTI request, track the status of the application and access information available under the RTI proactive disclosure provisions will go a long way in making the process simple, transparent and efficient (Kumar, S., & Shilpa. 2015) ^[3] Also, Information Commissions should be made stronger by providing due appointment of officers as commissioners, ensuring staffing and infrastructure that will facilitate reduction in backlog and timely disposal of appeal and complaints. There should also be a better legal protection that guards RTI activists against intimidation and retaliation, so that information seekers can have a secure environment. Lastly, a system of regular monitoring and evaluation must be institutionalized to provide an assessment of how well RTI is being implemented in departments and



states. There will be periodic audits and reporting to the masses to enhance accountability and instill the goal of ongoing improvement. All these suggestions are meant to help RTI become stronger, more viable and useful in terms of democratic governance and better delivery of service to citizens.

Research Findings:

The study shows that Right to Information Act, 2005 has played a significant role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the provision of the Indian public service. The secondary data also show that citizens are increasingly turning to RTI in order to get information on welfare schemes and activities of governments and expenditure and this has become a cause of scrutiny and pressure on governments to work more effectively. The Act has been instrumental in revealing corruption, delays and misutilization of government funds especially in fields like health, education, rural early employment and distribution of food. However, implementation challenges also exist, and they are seen in the research. The degree of ignorance among the general population within the rural and the marginalized areas remains a major bottleneck. The majority of the public authorities fails to respond to required positive disclosures, and insufficient record management hinders timely information disclosure. Further, issues of inadequate staffing and administrative backlogs exist regarding appeals backlog in the Information Commissions. However, despite its shortcomings, the RTI Act is a powerful tool that can be employed by both the people and the civil society to ensure good governance. The influence can be observed most prominently in regard to the participation of active citizens and institutional support. The findings show that reforms to be done regarding creation of awareness, information digitization and institutional boost are also needed to realise the potential of RTI Act in improving service delivery by government.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, The Right to Information Act, 2005 may be referred to as the milestone piece of the legislation process in the India move towards transparent and accountable governance. This secondary data based study finds that RTI has been significant in improving the provision of services in the area of public administration in empowering the citizens with a right to demand information, to question inefficiencies and to claim accountability by those in power. It has contributed towards revealing corruption reducing bureaucratic handicapping and increasing a responsive system of administration. However, RTI success is not always a constant since there are various implementation problems. The absence of awareness, inertia of bureaucracy, inadequate infrastructure and slowness in redress of



grievance by Information Commissions limit its full potential. The study also notes that proactive communications and online integration are not satisfactory in the majority of the departments and the relevant posting of the information on time. In spite of these challenges, The RTI act has become a significant instrument of the democracy under participatory governance. In order to enhance its effects, it is significant to empower institutional mechanism, digital platforms and people awareness and defend people seeking information. Through successful implementation, RTI can remain and shape the paradigm of provision of public services into a more transparent, efficient and citizen centered concept.

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