



MCF Right to Information Success Stories

In 2008-09, the Mountain Children's Foundation carried out a 1-year campaign to promote RTI awareness in rural communities by teaching young people about the RTI Act and how to file RTI applications.

Although the RTI Act was designed as a tool to create transparency and facilitate people in getting information from the government, RTI applications submitted by the children have actually resulted in some dramatic changes. The simple act of asking for information has spurred government officials to correct long-neglected problems. And complaints that were previously ignored are suddenly getting prompt attention because officials know they are being watched and held accountable. Listed below are just a few examples of the children's successes.

Getting a teacher to finally attend school:

In the remote village of Thati, in Tehri District, the primary school teacher came to school only about 10 days of each month. He had also failed to pay scholarship money that was due to some students. This problem had gone on for years, despite the villagers' complaints to local government officials.

Following the MCF's RTI workshop, Mahavir, a member of the Thati Bal Sangathan and student at the secondary school, submitted an RTI request asking how a primary school should be run and how regularly the teacher should attend.

In response 12 people from the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (the block-level office responsible for education) came to the village. They first tried to intimidate the children by saying kids could not file RTI requests, the children just asked the BSA officials to give them that in writing. (This in itself is remarkable – children in rural villages don't usually stand up to bullying bureaucrats.) Bemused by the confidence of the children, the officials decided to visit the school, found the teacher absent and sent for him. They then reprimanded him and ordered him to attend school regularly and pay the scholarships money to the students.

Since then, the teacher's attendance has dramatically improved and has paid the money due to the students. He did try to get Mahavir to retract the RTI request by threatening him, but thanks to strong support from MCF partner, Mount Valley Development Association, Mahavir stood strong.

Getting a road and bridge to school built after 5 years

In the village of Belwakhan near Nainital, there was great need for a road and a bridge to the local school. The budget was approved in 2002 for Rs. 75,000 but nothing was ever done. The children had to cross a rainwater gorge to get to school.

Manish, a member of the local children's groups filed an RTI application asking when the budget was passed and what funds were approved.

Very soon after, the bridge has been built, and the road is now under construction. Mahavir is now a hero to his family and the village.

Getting pipes cleared from the main road

In the village of Horawalla, large pipes intended for conducting a water canal underground had been obstructing the main road for several months. Because the other side was dug up for the laying of BSNL cables, the road was impossibly narrow and several accidents had taken place.

Devrat Varma, a member of the Horawalla Bal Panchayat wrote an RTI request asking when the pipes would be moved and who was responsible for any accidents that occurred.

A few days later, the JE in charge of the projects came to see Devrat and had the pipes removed.

Helping adults with the RTI

The children of the Khal Bal Panchayat in Tehri used the RTI to help two adults in their community.

The first, a widow was not receiving a widow's pension despite the fact that someone in the village had taken money from her to submit her paperwork to the Social Welfare Department. The children filed an RTI asking why she was not getting a pension and for a list of all the people in the village who were receiving pensions. The response from the Department was that her paperwork had never been received by the department, but if the paperwork was submitted, her pension would begin. The children helped the woman complete the forms and submitted them and she is now receiving a pension.

In the second case, a widower with a BPL electricity line got a bill for Rs. 5000. He was very poor and worked as a day laborer. Though he made many efforts to persuade the Electricity Department that the bill was a mistake, they refused to listen to him until the children of the Bal Panchayat submitted an RTI request. Very soon thereafter, a JE visited his home, found the meter to be faulty and replaced it and the Department waived the Rs. 5,000 charge.

Improving infrastructure

In at least four villages in four different districts, electricity has been restored or voltage has been improved after the children submitted RTI requests on the topic.

In Dehradun district, 5 major roads have been repaired, streetlights have been fixed, and garbage has been cleaned up following RTI requests.

Solving intractable problems

In Gairsain Chamoli, a child was unable to get a birth certificate as her father was not known. This was preventing her being admitted into the secondary school, and MCF partner organization, SBMA, had been working for several years to try to get her birth registered without success. A single RTI request resulted in her birth certificated being issued.

Even the experts are impressed

Dr. R.S. Tolia, Chief Information Commissioner of Uttarakhand, who was initially skeptical about the value of teaching children to file RTIs now says he believes it is one of the best ways to promote RTI awareness.

Mr. Harsh Mander, former country director of Action Aid, recently told us that he was impressed with the MCF's RTI campaign and had not heard of any other place where it was being used so effectively by children.