

Right to Information & The Children of Uttarakhand



11th - 12th October 2009
Dehradun



Uttarakhand Information Commission

उत्तराखण्ड सूचना आयोग

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The Right to Information and the Children of Uttarakhand 11th - 12th October 2009 Surabhi Palace - Dehradun

The 12th of October marked the 4th anniversary of the RTI Act. It also marked the successful conclusion of a year-long campaign by the Mountain Children's Foundation (MCF), and supported by Asha for Education (SV), to teach young people across the state of Uttarakhand about their rights under the law and how to use it to improve their communities.

The MCF celebrated the children's efforts in a 2-day workshop on 11th – 12th Oct. Eighteen MCF partner organisations, from the 12 participating districts of Uttarakhand, sent 72 children to participate in the workshop and share their experiences and achievements of the past year. Also attending were the State Chief Information Commissioner Uttarakhand, Dr. R.S. Tolia, Dr. BP Maithani, one of the architects of Uttarakhand's RTI policies, and community and RTI activists from Dehradun and beyond.

The main objective of the workshop was to showcase the efforts of the children and the organizations that supported them, display their success stories, and demonstrate to the children, communities and guests who attended the workshop that RTI is a powerful tool for empowering the community and improving local governance.

11 October – 1st Day

The program started with the traditional lighting of the inaugural lamp. The Chief guest of the program was Dr B.P. Maithani, who has provided training and support to the MCF and our partner organizations and guided the children during the campaign. He was very impressed with how much the children had achieved. Prof. Painully (Social Activist), Cyril R Raphael (Patron MCF), and Mahesh Pandey (RTI activist from Kanpur U.P) also graced the occasion. Other prominent guest were Florence Pandhi (Friends of Doon), Malavika Chauhan (Himmothan), children from Swayam Socail welfare organization Rishikesh, members from Karuna Vihar, children from Purkul Development Association, and several members of the media. More than 150 people attended the workshop.



Dwarika Nauni, State Coordinator of the MCF's RTI program, gave a detailed description of the yearlong program¹ that covered 104 villages involved 3,682 children and resulted in the filing of 479 applications. He highlighted the fact that the children during the first state workshop had raised a pertinent question of

¹ See Annex 2 for details

whether they, as children, could file RTI applications. Dr. Tolia had confirmed that any citizen of India was empowered to file an RTI application. This was an important point as, over the course of the year, the children frequently encountered government officials who told them kids could not file RTI applications. Dwarika went on to give details of the children's success stories and the dramatic changes their RTIs had brought to their communities.²

He shared some of the problems that the children had to face, which included being threatened by local officials for filing RTIs, lack of understanding of the rules of the RTI act by government officials at the block and village, excessive cost charged for the revenue paper, RTI's not being accepted, etc.

He also shared with the audience some interesting data³ that had been collected by the children in their villages and compiled by MCF to show the strides made by the program in one year. Some relevant figures are listed below:

1. Percentage of people who had heard about RTI was 26.38% which has risen to 87.24% by the end of the year's campaign
2. Percentage of people who knew about RTI was 9.09% which has risen to 57.11% at the end of the year's campaign
3. Percentage of people who had used RTI Act was 0.35% which has now risen to 4.73% at the end of the year's campaign

Mr. Mahesh Kumar an RTI activist from Kanpur, U.P., shared his experience with the group. One example he quoted was about the campaign where 1200 students had filed applications to discover why they had failed in their class 10th examinations. They encountered many difficulties but eventually the education department had to give them photocopies of their answer sheets, which was a big achievement.

Eight children then shared their experiences in using the RTI Act in the past year.

- 1 Manish (village Jeolikote) talked about his application for information that resulted in a bridge and road to a school getting built after 7 years! (The project was sanctioned in 2002 but nothing was done until this RTI application, at which point the work quickly moved forward).
- 2 Devrat (village Horrawala) shared his stories about how his application got huge pipes removed from the road in his village,
- 3 Sapna Arya's (village Belwakhan) application got the school to open the toilets for the children's use regularly
- 4 Divya Tomar (village Pipaya) wrote a application for information on the ANM for their villages. The



² See Annex 1 for details

³ See Annex 3 for End Line and Base Line Data

ANM has been sent to visit those villages

- 5 Rajkumar (village Khatima) spoke about how his application asking about the ration shop has ensured that the ration shop opens regularly and the community is told when the ration comes to the village.
- 6 Kamal Bhandari's (village Champawat) application demanded to know about the school wall that was said to be completed. He received a reply and the village pradhan has promised to complete the school wall.
- 7 Yogesh (village Askote) shared how his application about the school walls caused a furor in the school until the RTI application was explained to the teachers and then they suggested issues that Yogesh should seek more information on, such as the leaking roof, etc. He received information about the funds for repair and maintenance, which he shared with the school authorities.
- 8 Kaushlesh (Dehradun) shared his frustration with the answers that he had received but assured the audience that he would not rest until he got the right answers.
- 9 Kavita Mehra (village Mangoli) said that in response to her application on the anganwadi (Govt child crèche) and the mid-day meal she was told that the anganwadi would be started in her village and an instruction came for her village school to provide meals in accordance to the menu set down. She was pleased to report that the meals were now being given in accordance to the menu. She also recited a poem she had written about the Right to Information with details of its process and how it could be used.



Dr B.P Maithani said he was happy to see the work done by the children and was impressed that they had filed 479⁴ applications. He also expressed appreciation of the fact that the children had filed application on issues that were relevant to the community as a whole.

He said that the challenge before the Information Commission was how to spread awareness and said that “the MCF network is a fantastic/ extraordinary altruistic network that not only spreads awareness about RTI but actually uses the right as well. I would like to felicitate Aditiji, Cyrilji and members of the MCF who decided to work with children to be able to access information for the good of the community”. He also said that the use of RTI can make a positive impact on the children's future.

Mr. Cyril R Raphael (Patron MCF) said that, 7 years ago, the Governor of Uttarakhand, Mr. Barnalaji, had met with a delegation of children of the state of Uttarakhand and had impressed upon them they were the ambassadors of the mountains and should therefore map a path for themselves and their communities. A beginning had been made with the RTI Act.

⁴ See Annex 4 for Break up of application sent by the children

The visitors were requested to have a look around and see all the work the children had put into filing their applications and the responses received thereof. The guests spoke with the children & asked them about their experience. The children also met reporters from NDTV, ZEE TV, ETV, SAHARA TV and several newspapers. Each interaction was on a one-on-one basis where the children expressed their views and experiences.



The Afternoon Session started with a Puppet show on RTI, which enthralled the children.



They specifically like ‘Risky Uncle’, the puppet who has been associated with the MCF from the beginning. He shared with the children how happy he was that the children were standing up not only for their own rights but for their community as well and for those members of society that did not know about the act or how to access it for important issues like old age pension and widow pension. The puppet show also stressed that the children should not stop what they are doing because of the negative pressure from their community. After the

puppet show, Mr. Ramlalji asked the children for feedback. Many children spoke of what they felt was the message of the show.

A group of children from Jeolikote who work with the MCF partner Chesta staged a street play of their own experiences. The main storyline in this drama was how people filed RTI application to repair their village path and its impact on the Pradhan (head man) of the village. The message of this play was that people can resolve their problems (personal or social) by using RTI.

Ramlalji played some games related to acting with the participants. He told children that while performing, it is necessary to express emotions and he helped them understand voice modulation as well. The children enjoyed the way he taught and were energized by the games.

After the games, children sang an RTI song, led by Mr. Mahesh, who is an RTI activist with Asha for Education from Kanpur. The song is vibrant and describes the rights of people to get information about different works by govt. department. *“Mere sapno ko janne ka haq re; Kyon sadiyon se toot rahe ha; Inhe sajne ka naam nahi hai”* --- *“My dreams have right to know why they have been allowed to break for hundreds of years and not allowed to come true”*



The day ended with a cultural program organized

by the children where children from different districts sang, danced and told jokes in Hindi and their own languages – Garhwali and Kumaoni . They helped each other understand their language and culture.

12 October – 2nd Day

Dr R.S. Tolia, Chief Information Commissioner for Uttarakhand, was the chief guest of the second day of the workshop. The 12th of October also marked the 4th anniversary of the RTI Act.

Poonam Kandari from Gairsain came forward to share her success story of how she filed an RTI application and got the birth registration certificate for a girl in her village who couldn't get admission into school because she did not have a birth certificate.

This impressed the CIC and he stressed that the success stories of the children must be shared with the entire country. He was also presented with the August addition of PABAM magazines in which all the success stories have been printed.



In his remarks, Dr Tolia noted that **“I was the first person who asked, how will children understand and use RTI, but now looking at the success stories of children, I am very impressed.”** He thanked the MCF and its partner organizations for their outstanding work in taking the awareness of RTI forward in the rural areas of the state. He also expressed pleased amazement at the data

gathered through the baseline and endline surveys, saying that he needed a copy, since, to-date no survey has been carried out by any agency or the govt to measure the impact of the RTI. He also told the children that in an interview Dr. Amartya Sen had said that of India's three achievements after independence were Democracy, Secularism and a sense of shame. Mr. Narayanmurti in the same interview had agreed with Dr. Amartya Sen's first 2 points but said that India's third achievement was the Youth of India and Dr. Tolia concurred with Mr. Narayanmurti.

Dr Tolia then thanked Ms. Aditi, MCF and all the 19 Partner Organizations for supporting the children and encouraging them to come forward to use the RTI Act for social benefits.

He also announced that the RTI commission of Uttarakhand was starting three new services from the 13th of October 2009.

- 1 Online Information through website and SMS
- 2 Online Complaint through website and SMS

3 Online Appeal through website and SMS

Toliaji awarded nine children from different districts of Uttarakhand for their extraordinary achievements through the use of the RTI Act:

- Vimla Basera from Arpan Pithoragarh,
- Devvrat Verma from Horrawalla Bal Panchayat Dehradun,
- Manish Arya from Chesta, Nainital,
- Meena Arya from Saral, Nainital,
- Poonam Kandari from S.B.M.A. Gairsain,
- Jaideep Negi from S.B.M.A. Uttarkashi,
- Beena Bisht from Jan Chetna Kendra Pauri,
- Kamal Bhandari from Kagas Champawat, and
- Anil Kumar from Vimarsh Nainital.



Their applications focused on issues such as electricity, pipelines, education, school road, water, computers, birth registration, A.N.M., sand quarrying etc.



Facilitators from the MCF's 18 Partner Organizations were also awarded for their hard work and for supporting the children, and all 18 Partners were also felicitated. Each child and facilitator was then given a certificate signed by Dr. Tolia for their role in taking the RTI forward in Uttarakhand. The awards and the certificates were supported by the Information Commission of Uttarakhand and by Asha for Education (SV).

After the award ceremony, 18 children (1 child from each partner organization) was invited to be a part of the MCF group that had been invited by Dr. Tolia to attend the closing ceremony of RTI Week, which had been organized by the Information Commission. Mr. Indu Kumar Pandey, the Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand was the chief guest for the program and Mr. Shekhar Pathak presided over the ceremony. The MCF also distributed PABAM magazines with the RTI success during the meeting.

Mr. Indu Kumar Pandey said that RTI had proved its importance for good governance and that the Act, was resulting in transparency in the government's work. Dr R.S. Tolia said that the MCF and Mahila Samakhya have proved to be important networks to take RTI to the villages through children and women.



Devrat Verma from Dehradun and Sneha Basera from Pithoragarh of the MCF presented the details of the one year RTI campaign supported by Asha for Education (SV) and the Uttarakhand Information Commission.

Devrat Verma said “ When I was sitting at the table making my presentation, I did not feel like a child but felt as empowered as the adults” He said that it was the first time he was responsible for taking the work of 3,682 children of the Mountain Children’s Forum and presenting it at such an august gathering, and said “when the adults were impressed with our work I felt honoured.”

Kamal Singh from Champawat requested permission to ask a question. His question was: “Why do people threaten me when I use the RTI to help my community? I asked about the boundary wall for the primary school in my village and the next day the village pradhan came to threaten me. I only used a right I have been given.”

This got an immediate response from the Chief Secretary, who said that no one should threaten the children or any member of the community asking for information under RTI and if such a situation arises he should be informed and action would be taken against the officer. Dr. Tolia said that a complaint could also be made to the Information Commission.

Mr. Mahesh Pandey, (RTI activist, Kanpur) gave the children representatives a short session on the different sections under the RTI Act and their importance. He asked the children about the problems they faced during filing application and told them how a complaint could be filed.

The workshop came to a close with the children singing songs in Garhwali and Kumaoni.



Success Stories of Children and Organisations

Bal Panchayat Horrawalla (Dehradun)- Devrat has been one of the most visible successes of this project. He submitted an RTI request about large pipes that had been lying in the roadway causing a severe hazard for months, which resulted in the prompt removal of the pipes.

ARPAN (Pithoragarh)-Vimala Basera filed an application asking about the low electricity voltage that prevented them from studying just before their exams. She did not get a response but the voltage got better. Illegal liquor in their village has lessened since they filed an RTI asking about how many raids (and where) were conducted to crack down on illegal alcohol and how much illegal alcohol has been confiscated.

Adopt (Dehradun) All the roads in their area were in very bad shape, streetlights had not been functioning for three years, and the toilet in the Degree College was never cleaned. After they submitted some RTIs for information on these issues, 6 roads (all the major ones) have been repaired, streetlights have been fixed, and the College toilet is now kept clean. They had also inquired about public garbage receptacles. They have not yet received a response to that query, but the garbage that had been lying around was removed

Vimarsh (Nainital)

After learning about the RTI Act, the children in Mangoli requested information on birth registration. They not only got an answer to their application but several births were registered by the Panchayat Secretary and 16 birth certificates were distributed in the district office.. The block administration was impressed by the children's drive, and invited them to the monthly block meeting to inform the block on children's issues.

Himani, Ganesh, and Deepa from Phaguniakhet - Khurpatal applied for information under the RTI act on lack of electricity in their village, which had been out for more than a month. They did not get an answer but the electricity department changed the transformer within a week and electricity was restored.

Sudha (Almora) Jyoti, a young woman who works for Sudha but comes from and lives in one of the villages, submitted an RTI asking about the Swajal project for water and sanitation as well as about the obligations for the water department to maintain and repair lines. At first, the water department tried to intimidate her by threatening to declare her line illegal and getting it removed, but when she showed them her water bill and asked them to give it to her in writing that they were removing her tap because it was illegal, they backed off and provided the information. They also fixed her water line and the linesman now stops by regularly to ensure that everything is functioning well.

Saral (Nainital) When Meena Arya filed an RTI asking about computer education in their school, teachers scolded and threatened the kids and intimidated Saral workers. (The school had been collecting computer fees of Rs. 120 per child annually, but there are no

computers in the school, even though these had been sent in 2002.) Computers have been returned to the schools and the children are now attending computer classes.

In another school, the teachers used to keep the school toilets locked so the children could not use them. Complaints of the children and their parents went unheard until Sapna Arya filed an RTI, after which the locks on the toilet were permanently removed.

Jan Chetna Kendra – (Pauri) Beena Bisht wrote an application requesting information on uncontrolled sand quarrying. Some members of her community threatened her but her family supported her, and now the Panchayat has passed a rule saying that only the villagers will mine for sand and permission will be taken from the village before quarrying the sand.

SBMA – (Gairsain) In Gairsain Ponam Kandari filed an RTI application for the birth registration of a young girl whose father was unknown. Her grandmother and SBMA had been trying to get this child's certificate for several years because the school was refusing to admit her without a birth registration certificate. Following an RTI request, the child's registration came through all of a sudden.

SBMA – (Uttarkashi) Jaideep Negi asked how often the ANM was supposed to visit the village because she was staying at the ANM center and telling the villages to come to her. The CMO ordered the ANM to visit the village and she is doing so regularly.

In another case, the project facilitator, Bhupender Singh Rawat, received a phone call from an education official saying "We know you are teaching the children about RTI and we have sent a principal to the school!" Bhupender was not actually involved with the RTI request that resulted in this declaration, but he later learned that this was a school with 76 students that had no principal. There were two teachers at the school, who used to take turns attending school for one week at a time. This example perfectly illustrates how the impact of this campaign has spread far beyond the applications that were filed.

SEAD (Kalsi - Dehradun) – Bhagat Singh inquired about when the school might receive a math teacher, which resulted in a teacher being immediately appointed to the school. Subash Chandra Bhosa enquired about classrooms for class 9 and 10 in the newly upgraded Pipaya School. Soon after he filed his application, work started on the construction of the new classrooms. Ritesh Tomar wrote an application about a single teacher in the Pipaya primary school that had 35 children and a second teacher was appointed. Divya Tomar wrote an application for information on the ANM for their villages. The ANM has been sent to visit those villages regularly

Annex 2

The Process in Brief
Children in RTI
A project by MCF and Asha SV

Selection of 18 Partners in 12 Districts of Uttarakhand.

Material created – Brochures and posters made to generate awareness
FAQs printed in PABAM magazine for children to understand

Material Given by the Information Commission for all partners including copies of the RTI Act 2005.

12 and 13 October 2008 - First Children's Workshop- CIC Dr R.S Tolia says, in answer to a question posed by a child, that children indeed can apply for information under the RTI Act .

24- 25 October 2008 – First Facilitators Workshop. Santosh and Ram Asrey of Parivartan, Delhi attend and train facilitators. Share their stores of success.

October – December 2008 – Base line Survey

November 2008 – August 2009- 104 workshops at the village level with more than 30 children each. 3,682 children attended.479 applications filed

March 2009 – September 2009- Follow up visits to MCF Partner Organizations and meeting children at the village level and addressing problems. Printing of success stories in PABAM magazine.

22nd -23rd July 2009 - 2nd Facilitators' workshop supported by the Information Commission, Uttarakhand. Dr B.P. Maithani provided a vital refresher course and support to the facilitators on the RTI filing process He also stressed on the process for first and second appeals.

August 2009- September 2009 – End Line Survey

11and 12 October – Second Children's Workshop. Children and Facilitator's felicitated. Children attend special meeting held by Information Commission.

MCF/ Asha SV - RTI Base Line Survey - December 2008

SL No	Name of Organization	T	F	M	Heard about RTI	know about RTI	used RTI
1	Adopt, Dehradun	224	120	104	47	46	0
2	Jan Chetna Kendra, Pauri	842	397	445	28	0	0
3	Arpan Pithoragarh	112	50	62	10	10	0
4	Grass Rudraprayag	120	65	55	0	0	0
5	SBMA Gairsain	204	102	102	139	10	4
6	Sudha Almorah	174	101	73	68	51	2
7	Saral Nainital	83	33	50	11	5	1
8	Kagas Champavat	223	119	104	21	6	1
9	Kagas U.S.Nagar	220	111	109	55	11	3
10	GMVS Purola, Uki	272	136	136	127	92	5
11	Vimarsh Nainital	87	44	43	18	0	0
12	RADS Ranichauri	369	218	151	103	15	0
13	SEAD Kalsi, Dehradun	99	46	53	21	9	0
14	Cheshta Nainital	74	37	37	0	0	0
15	Simar Deval Chamoli	868	450	418	572	132	0
16	Mt.Valley Tehri Garhwal	663	304	359	328	178	5
17	Simar Sanstha Bageshwar	1217	626	591	204	45	1
18	SBMA Uttarkashi	964	500	464	46	10	2
	Total	6815	3459	3356	1798	620	24
	Total %				26.38%	9.09%	0.35%

MCF/ Asha SV - RTI End Line Survey - October 2009

SL No	Name of Organization	T	M	F	Heard about RTI	know about RTI	used RTI
1	Adopt, Dehradun	259	132	127	223	63	40
2	Jan Chetna Kendra, Pauri	1743	925	818	1743	800	25
3	Arpan Pithoragarh	256	146	110	183	152	24
4	Grass Rudraprayag	349	175	174	135	134	25
5	SBMA Gairsain	269	130	139	266	159	63
6	Sudha Almorah	0	0	0	0	0	
7	Saral Nainital	541	241	300	536	518	6
8	Kagas Champavat	429	234	195	389	195	26
9	Kagas U.S.Nagar	990	611	379	925	792	14
10	GMVS Purola, Uki	0	0	0	0	0	
11	Vimarsh Nainital	0	0	0	0	0	
12	RADS Ranichauri	539	309	230	458	306	17
13	SEAD Kalsi, Dehradun	172	74	98	138	112	25
14	Cheshta Nainital	732	379	353	720	720	33
15	Simar Deval Chamoli	472	218	254	367	221	29
16	Mt.Valley Tehri Garhwal	80	25	55	45	27	27
17	Simar Sanstha Bageshwar	966	565	401	822	362	25
18	SBMA Uttarkashi	0	0	0	0	0	
19	B.P Horrawalla DD	337	159	178	146	84	6
	Total	8134	4323	3811	7096	4645	385
	Total %				87.24%	57.11%	4.73%

**Right To Information and Children of Uttarakhand
Organisations and Issues filed in the One year campaign
October 2008 to October 2009**

Organisation Name	Horrawalla Bal Panchayat	Adopt Dehradun	Kagas US Nagar	Jan Chetna Pauri	SBMA Gairsain	Sudha Almora SIMAR Bageshwar	SIMAR Chamoli	Mount Valley Tehri	SBMA Uttarkashi SEAD Kalsi Dehradun	Grass Rudraprayag	Vimarsh Nainital	GMVS Purola	RADS	Kagas Champawat	Chestha Nainital	SaraI Nainital	Arpan Pithoragarh	TOTAL		
Issues																				
Education	1	3	0	1	14	2	5	5	9	5	7	7	3	4	4	1	4	3	6	84
Playgrounds	0	3	0	3	2		0	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
Electricity	1	8	0	3	8	1	1	0	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	2	34
Water	1	3	0	4	7	2	6	6	4	1	3	1	4	0	3	3	7	1	2	58
Road	0	7	0	2	2	1	3	4	3	0	3	6	3	1	2	3	12	0	1	53
Health	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	6	0	5	1	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	1	25
UBR	0	1	1	0	6	0	1	0	0	4	1	1	6	0	0	0	0	1	1	23
Ration Card	0	1	4	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	3	3	0	1	3	1	1	1	23
Sanitation	0	6	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	0	1	17
Panchayat ***	0	1	7	0	3	4	2	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	6	0	0	3	33
BPL Cards	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	12
Pension *	0	0	1	0	3	0	1	4	3	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	16
Forest	0	2	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	12
Gender	0	1	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	8
Irrigation	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0		7
Anganwadi	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	11
Child rights	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Others **	2	1	0	8	2	1	3	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	3	0	2	30
TOTAL	6	40	14	25	63	21	25	29	27	18	25	25	30	11	17	26	33	6	24	465

* Pension - Handicapped, Widow and Old age

** Barat house, Gas Agency, Financial Assistance, Chardham Yatra, Training center, Cooking gas, Tourist center, Animal husbandry, Agriculture and PWD

*** Programs at the Panchayat and Block level for the Village.