

Hi Dilip, all:

Answers to your questions below, as well as two cool new case studies:

Some questions:

1. The workshop referred. Is this the one that was held for children in October?

The workshop referred to by the kids was a village-level workshop held Jan 27-28, 2009.

As per our proposal, each partner is holding 5 two-day village-level workshops with 30 kids each. (This followed the state-level kickoff workshop with the children and then the facilitator training workshop we held with our partner organizations. They used the training they got from those two workshops to then teach the kids in the village-level workshops.)

2. How many RTI applications were filed in total after this workshop? In the village of Thati

A total of six RTI applications were filed during the Tathi village workshop. Three were filed by adults (with help from the children) and three by children. Since the project began, we have received information on a total 137 RTI applications filed by all our partners, but there are more that have been filed that we have not yet got information on and there are still more village-level workshops to be done, so the number should be going up.

3. There was a reference in the last report that students would write RTI applications after exams. How has this progressed?

4. There was a mention in same report on workshop in April. Was this conducted?

Exams have just finished and the workshops and RTI applications are now resuming. (Exams took longer this year because of the general elections which came in the middle.) We currently feel our partners are on target to conduct the workshops (5 per partner). So far 61 of the 90 village-level workshops have been done. We expect the number of RTI applications to continue to increase.

Also, I am including below a translation of the reports some of the kids in village of Khal (partner Mount Valley) in the District of Tehri. It shows how the impact of this project is not confined to just the children but also benefits the larger community. Equally important it is having a magical effect on the children - they are suddenly realizing how much they can do! All the information about the RTI activities can be found on our website:

http://www.mymountains.org/workshops/RTI_reports_ngo.html (scroll to the bottom and you will find a table with the names of our partners, each linking to a larger list of their village-level workshops and RTIs filed.)

Partner Mount Valley

Bal Panchayat Khal, District Tehri

Pranaam to our PABAM companions:

Mount Valley Development Association held a workshop on the Right To Information (RTI) in our village with the support of the Mountain Children's Foundation. As part of this workshop, some members of our bal panchayat filed RTI inquiries with the relevant government organizations to address problems in our village. We also helped adults in the village, who could not read or write, file applications of their own. Here are two cases in which the RTI helped us find the truth and help members of our community.

Case Study I:

In our village, Ms. Sulochana Devi, wife of the late Buddhi Lal, is a widow living in poverty. We wanted to find out if she was entitled to a widow's pension. Some people of the village had taken money from her and promised that they would file the papers for her widow's pension, but none of these people actually sent her papers to the Social Welfare Department. We got to know this when we filed an RTI request asking "Why is Sulochana Devi not getting her widow's pension?"

In just a few days, we received a written response saying that her papers had not reached the Social Welfare department. They also said that if we sent the papers to the office, they would release her pension as soon as possible. In addition, they gave us a list of the people in our village who are currently receiving a pension from the department.

We immediately sent her papers to the department and they have accepted her application.

Thanks to the Right to Information Act, we were able to learn the truth and found a solution to our problem.

Case Study II:

Mr. Sohan Lal also lives in our village. After his wife's death, all the responsibility of caring for their two children has fallen on him. He has no cultivatable land and has been working as a day laborer to make ends meet. In December of 2008, he received an electricity bill of Rs. 5000/-. He has a BPL (Below Poverty Line) meter and appealed to the electricity board that he had not used so much electricity. But the workers at the electricity board refused to listen to him and threatened to cut off his electricity and take other punitive actions against him. Because of his current financial situation, Rs. 5000/- is an unmanageable amount of money and as a result he was extremely worried.

The members of our bal panchayat inspired Mr. Sohan Lal to file an RTI request. We helped him write the application as we had learned in our RTI workshop. In his application, Mr. Sohan Lal asked the electricity department why his bill was so outrageously high. Within a month, a Junior Engineer came from the electricity department and, along with some other people of the village, went to Mr. Sohan Lal's house to check his meter. The meter was found to be faulty and the Rs. 5000/- charge was subsequently waived. Mr. Sohan Lal thanked our entire bal panchayat for helping him.

In this way, by getting training on the RTI Act, we were able to solve several problems in our village. We all thank the Mountain Children's Foundation for their support.

With thanks,

The Members of Bal Panchayat Khal

Tehri, Garhwal