

**RTI Awareness Raising Campaign and Proactive Disclosure through wall paintings in Gujarat's Gram Panchayats - Watch on Janane ka Haq on DD News Channel Saturday 10.30am
December 03, 2010**

Dear all,

Please watch the next episode of Janane Ka Haq to be telecast on India's national DD News Channel on Saturday, 04 December, 2010 at 10.30am and repeated on Sunday 05 December, 2010 at 3.30pm. This programme will focus on the Right to Information Campaign organised recently in Dahod district of Gujarat by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and Nagrik Adhikar Kendra Kalol, in collaboration with the CSO partners such as Anandi, Utthan, Prakruthi Foundation, Devgadhi Mahila Sangathan and Pressman VLVS. The Gujarat State Information Commission and the Dahod district administration supported this campaign wholeheartedly.

About Dahod RTI Abhiyan:

In Gujarat, one of our hub states where we work intensively, within a very short period in 2009-10, CHRI has developed a model proactive disclosure template for Gram Panchayats in collaboration with Nagrik Adhikar Kendra (NAK), Kalol, Panchmahals district. Basic information related to development schemes, functions and budget of Gram Panchayat has been painted on the outer and inner walls of Malav Gram Panchayat in Panchmahals district. The Sarpanch and Secretary of Malav Gram Panchayat worked with CHRI and NAK to develop and paint up this model proactive disclosure template for people to read any time of the day. Lists of BPL families and holders of various types of ration cards have also been displayed on notice boards in the Panchayat office. These can be inspected by any person free of cost. This exercise is an impact and outcome of the RTI compliance survey that we conducted in Panchmahals in 2009 and the subsequent RTI Abhiyan launched in collaboration with the Gujarat State Information Commission and the district administration.

(to access these report and the methodology of the survey click on: http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/rti/compliance_with_rti_act_survey.pdf) At a ceremony held in June 2010, the State Chief Information Commissioner Shri R N Das declared Malav to be the first fully compliant Gram Panchayat in Gujarat vis-à-vis its proactive disclosure obligations under the RTI Act. NAK has held several meetings with the local residents to educate them about the wall paintings. The local media gave wide coverage to this initiative. The district administration has invited CHRI and NAK to scale up this exercise and cover 25% of the gram panchayats in the district.

Encouraged by the success of the Panchmahals RTI campaign and the completion of the Malav wall paintings, CHRI approached the State Information Commission, the district administration and civil society organisations in Dahod with a proposal to launch a similar RTI Abhiyan with a sharp focus on improving proactive disclosure at the block and Gram Panchayat level. Dahod is a comparatively less developed district with a large segment of the population belonging to ethnic communities. The month long preparations involved holding sensitisation workshops, with senior officers of the district and block level administration in all the development blocks. The importance of proactive disclosure was discussed with officers of the Zilla Parishad (popularly elected self-governing body at the district level), District Rural Development Agency, the Food and Civil Supplies Dept.'s local office, the Police Department, the Forest Department and the office responsible for implementing the Tribal Sub-Plan. While these offices began serious work on improving their proactive disclosure manuals, the NAK team held intensive coaching workshops for Sarpanches and Talathis (revenue officials) for implementing the Malav model in 15 Gram Panchayats of Dahod. Individuals and officials in charge of the Gram Panchayat, Anganwadi Kendras (catering to women and children), the fair price shop (selling subsidised food grains and fuel oil to the impoverished segments of society), the primary health centre and the local government school attended this workshop. Thanks to the support of the district administration during the Dahod RTI Abhiyan, the target of making 15 gram panchayats compliant with their proactive disclosure obligation was not only achieved but was exceeded exponentially. The district administration ordered the replication of the Malav experiment in 200 villages spread over the district. CHRI and NAK are collecting information the amount of work done in these villages.

Another leg of the Dahod RTI Abhiyan was the organisation of Information Fairs- locally known as Mahiti Melas organised at district and sub-divisional headquarters, especially during weekly bazaars which attract villagers and townfolk from far and wide. At every mahiti mela stalls were set up and educational material distributed on the following themes: RTI Act, citizens' rights vis-à-vis the police, especially in the context of access to information, the public distribution system and the implementation guidelines of various centrally sponsored development schemes including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme. Members of CHRI, NAK and local CSO partners provided advice to people who visited the stalls with their grievances related to governance. Citizens were given assistance for filing petitions and RTI applications to draw the attention of public authorities to their grievances. NAK and its local partners will provide follow-up support to such petitioners and applicants.

Soon we will upload on the WWWeb photo-essays on the Panchmahals and Dahod RTI Campaigns. Please wait for our next email alert on this subject.

In order to access the our previous email alerts on RTI and related issues please click on:
http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=84

You will find the links at the top of this web page. If you do not wish to receive these email alerts please send an email to this address indicating your refusal.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

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