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## CITIZEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

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### ABSTRACT

*The Right to Information refers to the right of every citizen of the state to access information under the control of public authorities consistent with public interest. The main objective of providing information is not only to promote openness, transparency and accountability in administration but also to ensure participation of people in all the matters related to Governance. Right to Information is a very effective tool in the hands of citizens to make the objectives of Good Governance (SMART) realizable. A Right to Information will ensure that people can hold public bodies accountable on a regular basis, without having to lay the entire burden on their elected representatives who are themselves often unable to get the information sought in spite of all the resources at their command.*

*Key Words: Rating, Information Officer, Suggestions.*

### INTRODUCTION

The RTI Act confers on all citizens the right to seek information and makes it the duty of the public authorities to disseminate the same for better governance and accountability. It covers the Central and State Governments, Panchayat Raj Institutions, local bodies and recipients of government grants but does not apply to the intelligence and security organizations except if the information relates to the allegations of corruption. The Prime Minister said that it would usher in a new era of performance and transparency to benefit the common man in the complex modern world and empower the people to judge if the government was functioning in public interest. It gives public-spirited people an instrument to prevent misuse of public power and funds. The Prime Minister said that the intention was to enlarge the interface between people and government and not to paralyze the administration.

## **PREAMBLE TO THE ACT**

The Preamble to the Act says that it has been enacted for establishing "the practical regime of Right to Information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of public authorities, in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority, the constitution of a Central Information Commission and State Information Commissions and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto".

It further points out that democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency in information to contain corruption and to hold governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed. The Preamble also says that in some cases, revelation of information in actual practice is likely to conflict with other public interests including efficient operations of the Governments, optimum use of limited physical resources and the preservation of confidentiality of sensitive information. The Act proposes to harmonize these conflicting interests while preserving the paramountcy of the democratic idea by providing the needed exemptions.

Certain categories of information have been exempted from disclosure. The categories, by way of illustration, include, information likely to affect security of the State, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the State, detection and investigation of offences, public order, conduct of international " relations and Cabinet papers. Trade or commercial secrets, information the disclosure of which would cause breach of privilege of Parliament of State Legislature and personnel information which has no relationship with public activity and could cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of any person are also exempted from disclosure. However, exemptions provided are not absolute and withholding of information must be balanced against disclosure in the public interest. Information is to be released even if harm is shown to the public authority if the public benefit in knowing the information outweighs the harm that maybe caused by disclosure.

## **Attitude of PIOs/APIOs**

The proper implementation of Right to Information Act depends on the positive attitude of officials towards information seekers. As such during field survey the opinions of sample information seekers on the attitude of officials is recorded and presented in figure1.

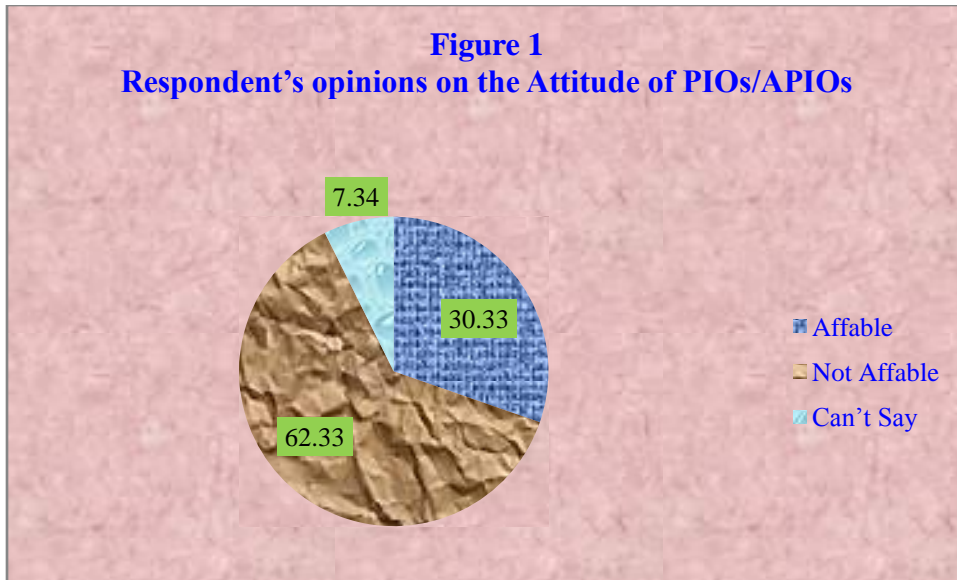
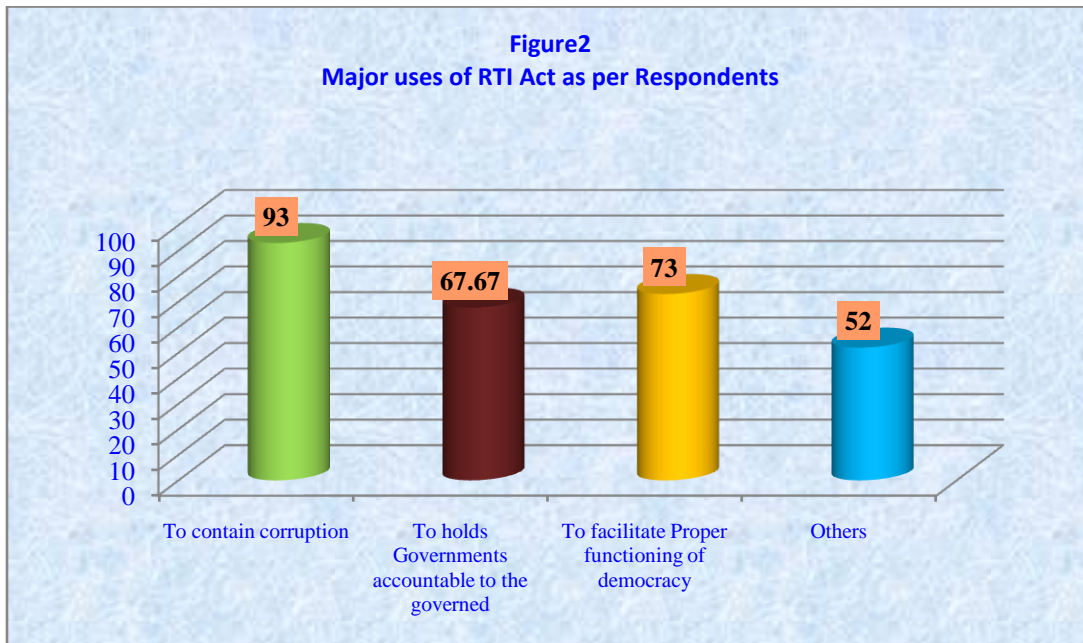


Figure 1 reveals that the attitude of officials towards information seekers is not affable as reported by 62.33 per cent of the sample. About 30.33 per cent of the sample respondents reported that the officials i.e. PIO/APIO are affable towards information seekers. Nearly 7.34 per cent of sample respondents framed any idea on the attitude of public officials.

**IMPORTANT USES O RTI ACT**

The major uses of Right to Information Act as per the sample information seekers is given in figure 2.



It is clear from figure 2 that as many as 93 per cent of sample respondents opined that the Right to Information Act is useful to contain corruption. The RTI Act is essential to facilitate proper functioning of democracy as reported by 73 per cent of sample respondent information seekers. Nearly 67.67 per cent mentioned that the RTI Act is useful to hold government accountable to the governed. The other uses like to correct erring official, avoid nepotism, red-tapism, negligency of official etc are mentioned by 52 per cent of sample information seekers.

**RATING OF RTI ACT**

The sample respondents were asked to give their overall ratings to Right to Information Act and the same is presented in figure 3.

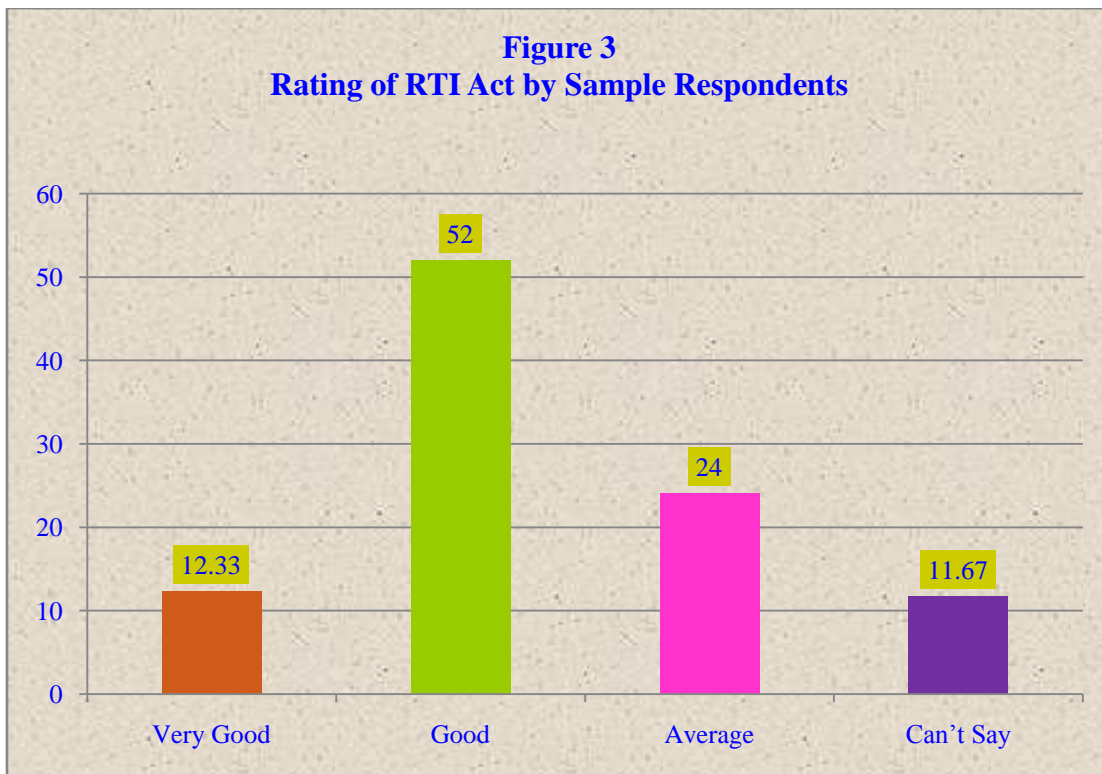


Figure 3 reveals that a preponderant majority i.e. 52 per cent of sample respondents rated the Right to Information Act as good. While 12.33 per cent rated the Act as very good. Average scorings were given by 24 per cent of sample respondent information seekers. On the other hand 11.67 per cent of sample respondents are unable to give any ratings to RTI Act.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR PROPER IMPLEMENTATION**

Several scholars identified several deficiencies in the Right to Information Act of 2005. For the law to be truly effective, the incorporation of the suggestions of the community at large is needed. Therefore, the sample information seekers were asked to give their suggestions for proper implementation of RTI Act and the same is presented in tabular form in figure 4.

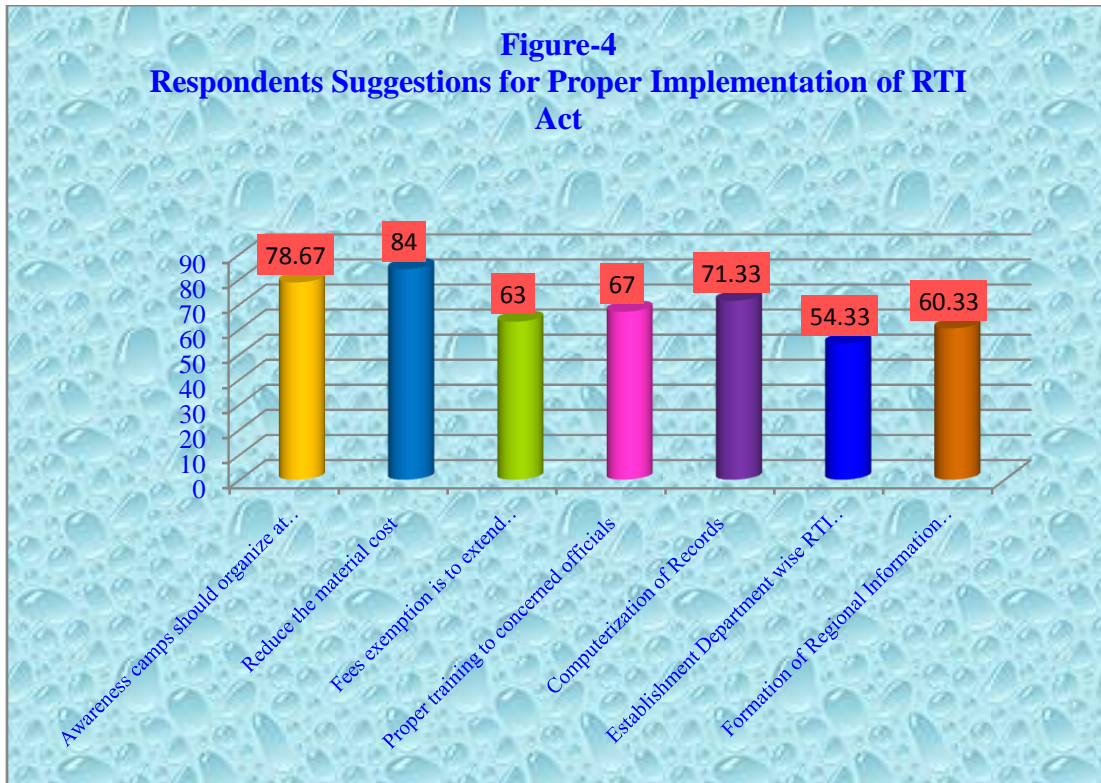


Figure 4 shows that nearly 84 per cent of sample information seekers suggested to reduce the material cost supplied by the officials. They argue that the cost of Photostat copy in private Photostat centres is Rs. 0.75, but the PIO/APIO collecting Rs.2 per each copy. The cost of CDs and DVDs is also higher than the open market. To educate the rural people awareness camps is to be organised in each and every village as reported by 78.67 per cent of the sample. About 71.33 per cent sample respondents suggested for the computerization of records. Proper training to PIO/APIOs is suggested by 67 per cent of total sample. Nearly 63 per cent of sample information seekers suggested for the exemption of fees to students, scholars and un-employees. Formation of regional Information Commission for 4 to 5 districts is to be established as suggested by 60.33 per cent of respondents. About 54.33 per cent of sample suggested for the establishment of department wise RTI monitoring committees.

## CONCLUSION

The enactment of the RTI Act, 2005 is one of the most progressive legislations enacted in our country. As such during data collection, the researcher formally interacted with PIO/APIO and other staff members of respective departments and sought their views on the implementation of the Act. The officials reported that it become herculean process for PIO/APIO to provide information to information seekers, besides attending to regular duties. The second anomaly they pointed out is periodicity of information. It is very difficult to provide more than 5 years of information, as their predecessor have not maintained proper records. The third anomaly pointed out is that, some of the information seekers by manipulating the information blackmailing the concerned official. It I also difficult to supply the information within a time limit with poor infrastructural facilities in the office. There is no particular training to the PIO/APIOs in all the departments.

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