

“LEGAL AWARENESS EVENT ON BASICS OF RIGHT TO INFORMATION”

*(Report on the event conducted in Kolkatta,
West Bengal on 2nd July, 2017)*

Abstract: This event was conducted to make small and medium shopkeepers and hawkers aware of the basic requirements of filing an application under the Right to Information Act, 2005. The importance of right to know and the objectives and goals of the act were also discussed.

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1. Concept Note:

The Legal Aid Centre at Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA has always strived to empower the masses to bring about an accountable and transparent government. In an endeavor to continue the same, an event to make the common people aware of their rights under Right to Information Act, 2005 was made so that they could become a part of good governance at the grass-root level. The main objectives of the Right to Information Act is to bring about transparent and accountable government by removing the veil of secrecy from the activities of the government. Small and medium shop keepers often face several problems in their day to day transaction that can be solved easily if they know how to file an RTI application. From checking the status of the Receipts to date of delivery of subsidized products, at all stages, these shopkeepers and hawkers need the RTI as a tool to stop corruption and other harmful practices. More often than not, the consumers blame these shopkeepers for not providing the necessary products or services. With the replies they receive through RTI applications, the shopkeepers may mitigate some of the resentment they receive from the consumers as well.

Keeping these in mind, the para-legal volunteer strove to impart a basic knowledge of Right to Information Act so that the commercial transactions of small and medium shopkeepers can be solved easily.

2. Objective:

The main objectives of the para-legal volunteer are as follows:

- To make the shopkeepers and hawkers aware of their rights under the Right to Information Act, 2005 so that the various problems faced by them maybe mitigated to a certain level.
- To make the target audience imbibe the practice of filing RTI applications in their daily lives as well
- To make the target audience responsible and aware of the duties and responsibilities of the government so as to achieve the objectives of the Right to Information Act, 2005 in the long run.

3. Preliminary Preparations:

Before conducting the event, a few preliminary preparations were made like:

- Taking print out of model RTI application forms
- Making charts to explain the procedure of filing of appeals
- Brushing up on the knowledge of Right to Information Act
- Informing the shopkeepers of the event beforehand

4. Conducting the program:

The event was organized in an office area at Gariahat, South Kolkata which is a hub of shopkeepers and hawkers. Initially, the shopkeepers in the area were informed of such an event two days before the day of the event. On the day of the event, the para legal volunteer initiated the event by giving a brief introduction to the Right to Information Act and portraying the importance of the Act. Then the model form of RTI application was distributed and the audience were informed of the important information that is needed to be provided when filing an application. Then the filing of appeals and the relevant time limits were explained. This was followed by an explanation of the duties of local government bodies and what to do when they are not being fulfilled. The event culminated in a question-answer session. On the request of the audience, the para-legal volunteer also showed them the online method of filing an RTI application.

5. Response of the target population

Even when the shopkeepers in the area were informed of the event beforehand, a few of them showed up for the actual event. However, those who attended the event were greatly interested in the event and took through notes. They asked innumerable questions and even wanted to see how online RTI applications are filed. They took many copies of the model RTI forms to be displayed in their shops. The discussion was not limited to the RTI Act only but surpassed business and questions were asked as to how to increase their awareness of their right and duties of the government. Once the subject was broached, the target audience became very inquisitive to know about how to increase their understanding of their rights.

6. Future plan of action

Follow up events should be organized to examine the impact of these events. One session is not enough to make the target population aware of topic chosen in entirety. We could only provide them with a basic structure. We think more programmes like these should be organized in future so that the people can have a clearer idea and have a greater understanding of the topics.

7. Suggestions/Feedback:

Various ways in which the program could be better conducted in future are as follows:-

- It would be of immense help if some agency could be collaborated with so as to make the event a major success.
- It is important to have a knowledge of how the local transactions take place to choose target audience and tailor the event according to their needs
- Primary research should be undertaken to understand what are the primary requirements of the target audience.

8. Conclusion/Remarks:

Overall this was a great experience and learning process. Not only did it help me reach out to the common people, but it also helped me understand where I lacked in my organizational skills. It felt very satisfying to see the target audience engage in a banter about how they have no knowledge of their basic rights because of which these rights are flouted each and every day. It is through acknowledgement of a problem that it can be solved. Moreover, due to the small size of the target population, the para legal volunteer was able to interact on a one-on-one basis which was of great help to the target audience.






