

Drive against Bribe using RTI Act

The **Drive against Bribe** using the **Right to Information Act**, organized by **Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahel** at the Satyagrah Kochrab Ashram as part of a nation-wide campaign, comes to an end tomorrow, on July 15, 2006. This statement gives a synopsis of what has transpired so far and what is planned for the future.

The Campaign

That the campaign has been an **unqualified success** is shown by the following **quantitative indicators**

1. Number of visitors at the campaign site, Kochrab Ashram **over 1400**
2. Number of phone calls received **1275 calls**
3. Number of applications under RTI filed **1366**

The quantitative indicators tell only a limited story. The **real impact** has been through **creation of awareness about the RTI Act amongst people at large; empowerment and creation of confidence in common citizens** that they can ask for information, and ask questions, from government functionaries; transformation of some of the citizens into active propagators of the RTI Act and its uses; and creation of a **core of volunteers knowledgeable about the provisions, uses, intricacies of the RTI Act.**

As many as 300 volunteers have actively worked at the RTI camp at Kochrab Ashram during this fortnight. These volunteers have actually understood the RTI Act quite comprehensively and have also gained valuable experience in drafting applications under the RTI Act for a variety of problems and issues. Since the volunteers came from different parts of the state, their fanning out across the state and continuing to work for effective implementation of the RTI Act is likely to go a long way in a common people of the state using the RTI Act to solve their day to day problems instead of having to pay bribes.

People from **all walks of life** came to the camp to get their problems solved using the RTI Act, from very poor, daily wage earners, to some quite well-off business people. A significant proportion of those who came were **employees of government departments and agencies**, thus proving the fact that **this Act empowers all citizens** without any discrimination and that **every one is a citizen first and only then a businessperson, a professional, or even a government employee.**

The **real objectives** of the campaign were:

- (a) Dissemination of the existence of the RTI Act and its provisions amongst the people at large.

- (b) Creating examples of using the RTI Act effectively and successfully to solve day to day problems instead of paying bribes.
- (c) Empowering common citizens and giving them confidence that even they can ask the same questions from a government functionaries as an MP or an MLA can ask.
- (d) Empowering and enabling common citizens to use the RTI Act by themselves without any external assistance either of volunteers, civil society activists, or lawyers.
- (e) The theme of drive against bribery was chosen because it is very easy for common citizens to associate bribery with dealing when government agencies. The use of the RTI Act instead of paying bribes has made citizens familiar with the existence, provisions and possible uses of the RTI Act.
- (f) Once an individual understands and gets used to using the RTI Act in one sphere, it is very easy for the person to use the RTI Act in another's sphere.
- (g) Using the RTI Act not only to get personal work done but also correcting systematic weaknesses and get some larger issues affecting society resolved satisfactorily.

The campaign succeeded in all of the above objectives as would be evident from the attached case studies which described very briefly some of the examples illustrating each of the objectives.

The Future

The 15 day campaign has finished on July 15, 2006, but **the RTI Act and attempts at getting it effectively implemented will continue.** Groups from several parts of the states have requested Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahel, during the preceding 15 days, that similar camps be organized in various locations across the state so that people in those areas also become familiar with RTI Act and some volunteers can also gain experience in the usage of the Act. Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahel is very happy to receive and accept such requests. **A plan for conducting such camps across the state will be drawn up in the next few days and activity will continue to be spread across the state.**

In addition, the **telephone helpline of Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahel (Mobile Number: 99240 85000) will continue to be functional** for providing assistance regarding the use of the RTI Act anyone who calls up this phone number.

Active **volunteers of Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahel**, who are **knowledgeable about** the provisions and use of the **RTI Act**, will be **available for personal discussions from 4 to 6 pm every Saturday at the office of the Janpath, B-3, Sahajanand Tower, Jivaraj Park, Ahmedabad.**

Summary

The 15 day campaign has generated tremendous amount of enthusiasm and excitement in fairly large numbers of people. The organizers are enthused to continue this work in future. The support of various agencies has been very heart-warming who particularly that of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth for making the premises of the historic Kochrab Ashram available, where Mahatma Gandhi first stayed; and all forms of media including print, radio, and television. The **holding of this camp at the Kochrab Ashram has itself been a source of inspiration** for the participants to carry on this effort to give more and more power to the common citizens.

It is hoped that **appropriate implementation of the Right to Information Act will make the governance not only more transparent but also more relevant and useful for “We the People”**.
