

**India's News Media and the Right to Information Act:  
An Assessment of the Media's Role in Promoting the RTI Regime**

**Statement of Methodology for Media Survey Consultants**

**A brief background** – The RTI Act became operational on October 13, 2005. Yet, nearly three years since, there has been no systematic, nationwide assessment of its implementation. But for mostly anecdotal evidence, it remains unclear how the Act is functioning, how it is being received and utilized by Indian citizens, the government and other information-holding agencies, or how the Information Commissions are adjudicating the Act. Nor is it fully known how various constituents of society, such as the media, lawmakers, corporate groups, or citizen sector organizations, are being affected by the Act or are affecting it.

The Right to Information Assessment and Accountability Group (RAAG) is undertaking a national assessment to gain insight into just such questions. Additionally, the assessment will shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the Act; the major constraints to its effective implementation; the ways in which access to information affects people's life; and the changes and adjustments necessary - if any - to improving the RTI regime in India.

**Broad research questions** – In this context, RAAG considers it particularly important to analyse the role of the media as a disseminator of the Act, a user of the Act, and in reporting on its implementation and use by others. Most important, the media can also galvanise public awareness and support for key RTI-related issues.

For this reason, RAAG's analysis of the role of media in promoting the RTI will examine:

- How much coverage have different publications given to RTI-related issues and cases?
- What role have different publications played in raising public awareness about the RTI Act and its use?
- What tone and approach have different publications assumed vis a vis the RTI Act?
- Have newspaper, magazines and other publications used the RTI as a tool for investigative journalism, and have they found it useful?
- What does the Indian media establishment (i.e. owners, editors and journalists) think of the RTI Act?
- Has the Indian media establishment begun to internalise the RTI in letter and/or spirit by enhancing the transparency of their own functioning?

*State sample* – This RTI media survey will be conducted in two phases. Phase 1 (August-September 2008) will survey RTI coverage in the 16 states which represent the major Indian language groups.<sup>1</sup> These states, and the major languages they represent, are:

1. Andhra Pradesh (Telugu)
2. Assam (Assamese)
3. Bihar (Hindi)
4. Goa (English, Konkani)
5. Gujarat (Gujarati)
6. Karnataka (Kannada)
7. Kerala (Malayalam)
8. Madhya Pradesh (Hindi)
9. Maharashtra (Marathi)
10. Orissa (Oriya)
11. Punjab (Punjabi)
12. Rajasthan (Hindi)
13. Uttaranchal (Hindi)
14. Uttar Pradesh (Hindi, Urdu)
15. Tamil Nadu (Tamil)
16. West Bengal (Bengali)
17. Delhi (English, Hindi, Urdu)

*Publications sample* – In each of these 16 states, a partner organisation or individual is being commissioned to survey a sample of leading local vernacular and English newspapers and magazines/periodicals, in an effort to answer the broad research questions outlined in the preceding section. On average, the total sample per State will be in the region of 10 – 15 publications. At the national level (Delhi) the sample would be larger, covering 25-30 newspapers and periodicals.

## **DETAILED METHODOLOGY**

### **Step 1: Parameters for selecting the media sample for review**

In each state, we are aiming to survey 10-15 of the leading and most influential publications. Three criteria should be used in selecting this sample:

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<sup>1</sup> Phase II will cover the remaining 12 states, and will commence as soon as additional resources become available.

- i) *Extensive readership* – The sample should comprise of all the State's most widely circulated newspapers, news magazines and periodicals. However, if you wish to include one or two less widely-circulated, special interest publications (e.g ready by civil servants, politicians, judges and lawyers, etc.), please feel free to do so.
- ii) *Daily newspapers are prime focus* – At least two-thirds (that is, 6-10 of the sample publications) should be daily newspapers. The remainder can be periodicals and magazines.
- iii) *Language* – Two-thirds (that is, 6-10 of the sample publications) should be in the State language. The remaining one-third (that is 3-5 publications) should be in English.

Once you have selected your State media sample, please email this list, together with the rationale for selecting each publication, to your contact person, i.e. Premila Nazareth Satyanand at [premilanazareth@gmail.com](mailto:premilanazareth@gmail.com).

At the same time, please include this list, as also the reasons for selection, at the beginning of your analysis report, so that it might be incorporated into the final statement of methodology for the media survey component of the People's RTI Assessment 2008.

### **Step 2: Parameters for selecting RTI clippings for review**

The media survey will analyse RTI-related coverage in the 16 states between 1 May 2005 and 31 July 2008. For this reason, please identify all relevant clippings including i) news items, ii) articles, iii) editorials, iv) letters to the Editor, and v) special features that appear in the publications that you have selected during this period.

### **Step 3: Preparing and labelling clippings**

Once you have identified a clipping, please cut or photocopy it and stick it onto an A4 sheet of white paper. Each clipping must be clearly labelled with the following information, which must be in English and appear above its title:

1. the name and language of the publication,
2. the translation of the title of the clipping, where it is not in English.(If it is a letter from a reader, please title it 'Letter to the Editor').
3. the date (Day, Month, Year – e.g. 21 July 2008, 6 December 2007, etc.), and
4. the page on which the clipping appeared. (In this context, it is important to indicate whether it was on the front, edit or back page; was it the lead story, and whether it was a special feature, etc.)

**Subject keywords** – Additionally, please label each article with a combination of one or more keywords and letters from three groups of keywords. Please record this information immediately below that described above and, if possible, in a single line.

These three groups of keywords and letters will capture the following issues:

- i) *Administrative level* – The first group of keywords will record the level of Government that the particular clipping deals with. Please mark clippings dealing with a Central Government ministry or agency as 'C', a State Government department or agency as 'S', a District Government department or agency as 'D', and a sub-District level agency as 'X'. Should a clipping relate to one or more levels of Government, please mark it with the relevant combination of keyletters as illustrated below.

E.g. CS CD CSD SX CX

- ii) *Department and subject* – The second group of keywords will capture the department and subject that each clipping refers to. Thus, a story in which the RTI was used to uncover corruption in farmer loan disbursements would be labelled 'agriculture', one in which it was used to obtain teacher attendance records as 'education', and one in which it was used to determine water pollution levels as 'environment'. Here, too, please use the necessary combination of key words if a clipping deals with more than one subject or government ministry/ department/ agency.

E.g. agriculture, finance agriculture, environment, water education, employment

To help you in choosing the correct keyword for this department/subject related labelling, we have attached a list of the most commonly-approached Ministries and Departments at the four levels of Government. (Please see Table 1 in Annexure 1 for this list of keywords). If you come across a clipping for which there is no keyword in Table 1, please label it as 'Others' and include whichever word you consider apt.

E.g. 'Others – seismology' or 'Others – pilgrimage administration'.

- iii) *RTI action* – The third keyword group captures the specific RTI processes, activities or actors that each clipping may describe. This list of keywords is found in Table 2 of Annexure 1 and is marked in blue.

Accordingly, please label clippings that discuss problems in locating a PIO or in filing an RTI application as 'Application'; those dealing with the drafting, tabling or passing of the RTI Act as 'RTI Bill'; and those dealing with appeals as 'First Appeal' or 'Second Appeal'. Please label any items dealing with Information Commission decisions, appointments, and budgets etc. as 'Information Commission' and, if possible, please name the Information Commission involved. For example, the Maharashtra Information Commission would be labelled Maharashtra IC, the Karnataka Information

Commission as Karnataka IC, the Andhra Pradesh Information Commission as Andhra Pradesh IC, etc. Please label clippings relating to the Central Information Commission as CIC.

When clippings name specific RTI actors, such as Information Commissioners, Public Information Commissioners, First Appellate Authorities, and RTI Activists by name, these names should also be incorporated into each label. Thus, please mark an item that mentions Wajahat Habibullah as 'Information Commissioner – Wajahat Habibullah', or one that mentions Aruna Roy as 'RTI Activist – Aruna Roy'. Should a clipping mention more than one Information Commissioner or RTI Activist, their names should be listed after the relevant key word. For example, 'Information Commissioner – Wajahat Habibullah, Padma Subramaniam,' or 'RTI Activist – Aruna Roy, Shailesh Gandhi, Shekhar Singh.'

By labelling each clip with the relevant combination of keywords and letters from across these three keyword groups, it will be possible for a reader to immediately tell what each clip is about. Additionally, this labelling will greatly facilitate analysis and enable the cross-state compilations of clippings to be electronically searchable the minute they are uploaded into the People's RTI Assessment 2008 portal.

For your convenience, we had included some illustrative clippings in Annexure 2.

#### **Step 4: Creating a clippings 'master list'**

Please create a 'master list' that records *all* the clippings that you have collected from each sample publication, using the template that is attached in Annexures 4 and 5. We would like to suggest that you might find it most efficient to record each clipping in this template as soon as it is cut or photocopied and labelled, rather than to wait until you have all the clippings in your hand.

While Annexure 4 is an illustrative master list of all the sample clippings in Annexure 2, Annexure 5 contains the blank template in which you can immediately begin to create your master list by entering each clip as you collect it.

Please organise the information in your 'master list' as follows:

- a) *Segregate by language* – First, organise all publications by language. In other words, please list all the English language clippings together, all the state language clippings together, and – where relevant – all the Hindi language clippings together, etc. Please mark each category with the applicable language code. These codes might be found in Annexure 3.
- b) *Sequence historically* – Within each language category, please organise all clippings by date, starting from earliest and going to latest. Thus, the 1 May 2005 clippings would appear first in each language grouping.

- c) *Number each clipping* – All clippings must be numbered in sequence, starting with 1 for the first entry. Please ensure that you also record the same number onto the clipping itself. Please do not interrupt the numbering sequence as you transition into another language category, but please ensure that you have not omitted the new language code at the point where this happens.
- d) *Enter all labelled information* – Please enter all the information contained in the label of each clipping in the relevant columns in the template – i.e. i) date, ii) name of publication, iii) title of article, and iv) all keywords.
- e) *Brief abstract* – Additionally, please summarise in 1 sentence the story or idea contained in each clipping.

### **Step 5: Scanning all collected clippings**

Please scan all clippings into JPEG format (150 dpi) and provide RAAG with a CD of these scans, together with a comprehensive 'master list' of all your clippings. Each scan should be marked with the same number as its underlying hard-copy clipping. In other words, each clipping, its entry into the 'master list', and its scan should *all* be marked with the same number.

### **Step 6: Analysing clippings**

Once all clips have been collected, analysis should be guided by the following set of broad questions to facilitate cross-state agglomeration and comparison.

- **RTI Coverage**

- 1) How many RTI-related pieces have each of the selected State publications published since 1 May 2008?
- 2) How many of these pieces have been i) news items b) editorials c) letters to the editor and d) special features?
- 3) How many have appeared on i) the front page, ii) in a special feature section?
- 4) In this coverage, what are the 3 most frequently-appearing i) subjects or departments, ii) RTI processes, and iii) RTI actors, respectively?
- 5) Do these keywords differ radically across the major categories of clippings? (That is, i) language and ii) type of clipping – news item, editorial, letter to the editor, and special features). If yes, please discuss, using statistics if possible.

- **Generating public awareness about the RTI**

- 1) Which publications have been more active than others in educating readers about the RTI and how specifically they might use it?
- 2) What are the particular kinds of stories, features, or campaigns that individual publications have employed? Are there significant commonalities and differences?
- 3) Are there any other noteworthy innovations you would like to mention?

- **Tone and approach towards the RTI**

- 1) What is the total number of 'RTI success' stories versus 'RTI failure' stories in the selected sample?
- 2) Which 2 publications have published the most RTI success stories, and which 2 the most RTI failure stories?
- 3) Which publications published the most news items, ii) editorials, iii) letters to the editor and iv) special features about the Act, before it became effective (12/13 October 2005)?
- 4) What were the dominant themes of this early coverage?
- 5) Have these themes changed significantly since the Act was passed? In what way?
- 6) Have there been radically different perspectives between publications on the RTI Bill and the RTI Act?
- 7) Are there significant differences in perspective between the English and the vernacular press?
- 8) Any other comments and observations that you may wish to record?

- **RTI for investigative journalism**

- 1) How many publications have used the RTI to research or break a story?
- 2) Which 3 publications have most used the RTI for this purpose?
- 3) How many such investigative articles have they each published respectively?
- 4) If possible, please comment on how many of these stories led to a positive change in the problem they sought to address?

### **Step 7: Interviews with representative members of the media establishment**

After analysing the clips, you will need to interview editors and owners of the selected publications, as also a representative mix of 5 senior and 5 junior journalists, to ascertain their perspectives on the following:

- What they, as the Indian media establishment, think about the RTI Act?
- Whether their publications have begun to internalise the RTI in letter and/or spirit by enhancing the transparency of their own functioning?

The questionnaire for these interviews is currently being developed, and will soon be sent to you. However, we would like to kindly request you not to embark on these interviews until after you complete your analysis, since you will then be in a better position to ask more telling questions of each editor, owner, and journalist.

### **FINAL OUTPUTS**

Thus, to summarise, the final outputs of your media survey will be:

1. A 10-15 page report (single-spaced, excluding Annexes) that analyses the following:
  - how much coverage different state publications have given to RTI-related issues and cases;
  - what role different publications have played in raising public awareness about the RTI Act and its use;
  - the tone and approach that different publications have assumed vis a vis the RTI Act; and
  - the extent to which newspaper, magazines and other publications have used the RTI as a tool for investigative journalism, and whether they have found it useful?
2. A labelled and numbered hard copy of all the clippings (including news items, news articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and special features) appearing in each of the selected State publications between 1 May 2005 and 31 July 2008.
3. A completed 'master list' of all these clippings.
4. A CD containing the scanned and numbered copies of all these clippings.
5. A 5-10 page report (single-spaced, excluding Annexes) that analyses the following:
  - what leading editors, media house owners, and senior and junior journalists in the State think about the RTI Act, and
  - whether and how leading state publications have begun to internalise the RTI by enhancing the transparency of their own functioning.

**ANNEXURE 1 – Keywords Table 1: DEPARTMENTS AND SUBJECTS**

<b>CENTRE (C)</b>	<b>STATE (S)</b>	<b>DISTRICT (D)</b>	<b>SUBDIVISION AND BELOW(X)</b>
Cabinet Secretariat	Chief Secretary's office	Collector/DM/DC office	SDO/BDO/Tehsildar/CO office, and panchayat/village
Planning Commission	Planning	Planning	
Ministry of Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture
Department of Atomic Energy			
Ministry of Chemical & Fertilizers			
Ministry of Civil Aviation	Civil Aviation		
Ministry of Coal & Mines			
Ministry of Commerce and Industry	Commerce and Industry	Commerce and Industry	Industry
Ministry of Communications			
Ministry of Corporate Affairs			
Ministry of Consumer Affairs & Public Distribution	Consumer Affairs & Public Distribution	Consumer Affairs & Public Distribution	Consumer Affairs & Public Distribution
Ministry of Culture	Culture	Culture	
Ministry of Defence			
Ministry of Disinvestment			
Ministry of Environment and Forests	Environment; State Pollution Control Board; Forests	Environment; Forests	Environment; Forests
Ministry of External Affairs			
Ministry of Finance	Finance	Treasury	Sub-treasury
Ministry of Food Processing Industries			

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	Health and Family Welfare	Health and Family Welfare	Health and Family Welfare
Ministry of Heavy Industry & Public Enterprises	Public Enterprises		
Ministry of Home Affairs	Home Affairs; Police	Police	Police
Ministry of Human Resource Development	Education	Education	Education
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	Information	Information	Information
Ministry of Information Technology	Information Technology	Information Technology	
Ministry of Labour & Employment	Labour & Employment	Labour & Employment	Labour & Employment
Ministry of Law and Justice	Law and Justice		
Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises	Small scale industries; cottage industries; Handlooms; Handicrafts; Artisans	Small scale industries; cottage industries; Handlooms; Handicrafts; Artisans	Small scale industries; cottage industries; Handlooms; Handicrafts; Artisans
Ministry of Minority Affairs	Minority Affairs	Minority Affairs	
Ministry of New & Renewable Energy	New & Renewable Energy	New & Renewable Energy	New & Renewable Energy
Department of Development of North-Eastern Region			
Department of Earth Sciences			
Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs			
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs			
Ministry of Panchayati Raj	Panchayati Raj	Zilla Parishad; DDO	Panchayat Samiti, Gram Panchayat

Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension	Administrative Reforms; General Administrative Department		
Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas			
Ministry of Power	Power; Energy; Electricity	Power; Energy; Electricity	Electricity
Ministry of Railways			
Ministry of Road Transport & Highways	Roads, Transport	Roads, Transport	Roads, Transport
Ministry of Rural Development	Rural Development, NREGA	Rural Development, NREGA	Rural Development, NREGA
Ministry of Science and Technology	Science and Technology	Science and Technology	
Department of Space			
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment	Social Welfare, Women's Welfare; Child Welfare	Social Welfare, Women's Welfare; Child Welfare	Social Welfare, Women's Welfare; Child Welfare
Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation	Statistics	Statistics	
Ministry of Steel			
Ministry of Shipping	Shipping; Inland Waterways, Harbour Masters	Shipping; Inland Waterways, Harbour Masters	
Ministry of Textiles	Textiles	Textiles	
Ministry of Tourism	Tourism	Tourism	
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	Tribal Affairs	Tribal Affairs	
Ministry of Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation	Urban Development, Municipalities; PWD	Municipalities; PWD	Municipalities; PWD
Ministry of Water Resources	Water Resources, Irrigation, Dams	Water Resources, Irrigation, Dams	Water Resources, Irrigation, Rural Sanitation and Water Supply

Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports  
Prime Minister's Office  
Parliament  
Supreme Court  
Others (Please specify)

Youth Affairs & Sports  
Chief Minister's Office  
Legislative Assembly/Council  
High Court

Youth Affairs & Sports  
District and Sessions Judge

Lower Judiciary

**ANNEXURE 1 – Keywords Table 2: RTI PROCESSES, ACTORS and ISSUES**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RTI Bill</b></p> <p>Drafting of the RTI Act            Tabling of the RTI Bill            Enacting of the RTI Act</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RTI Act</b></p> <p>Powers of the RTI Act            Amending of the RTI Act            Analysis of the RTI Act            Comparison of the RTI Act with other laws</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Information Commission</b></p> <p>Setting up of Information Commissions            Financing and budget of Information Commissions            Functioning of information commissions            Performance of Information Commissions            Transparency of Information Commissions</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Filing Application</b></p> <p>Identifying the public authority            Identifying the public information officer            Submitting an application            Good/bad consequences of submitting an application            Delay in getting information            Complete/ incomplete information received            Good/bad consequence of having received information            Impact of using information received            Refusal/ deemed refusal</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>First appeal</b></p> <p>Finding first appellate authority            Filing first appeal            Good/bad consequence of filing first appeal            Hearings for first appeal            First appeal - receipt or refusal of information            First appeal - complete/ incomplete information received            First appeal - impact of using information received</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Second appeal</b></p> <p>Understanding second appeal process            Filing second appeal            Good/bad consequence of filing second appeal            Hearing for second appeal            Delay in hearing            Outcome of second appeal            Second appeal - receipt/denial of information,            Second appeal - impact of using information received</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RTI rules</b></p> <p>Application format            Application fees</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RTI actors</b></p> <p>Public Information Officer            First Appellate Authority</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RTI events and issues</b></p> <p>RTI workshop            RTI protest</p>

<p>First appeal fees                  Second appeal fees                  Required form of payment for application fee                  Required location of payment                  Receipt/no receipt for payment</p>	<p>Information Commissioner                  RTI activist (please name )                  Collective application                  NGO support in filing RTI application</p>	<p>Public mobilisation around RTI                  RTI education                  RTI awareness                  RTI research</p>
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**Others** (Please specify)

**ANNEXURE 2: SAMPLE CLIPPINGS** – to illustrate labelling and numbering (*Clippings are being emailed individually to facilitate transmission*).

**ANNEXURE 3: LANGUAGE CODES**

Assamese - **Ass**  
Bengali -- **Ben**  
Gujarati - **Guj**  
Hindi - **Hin**  
Kannada - **Kan**  
Konkani - **Kon**  
Malayalam - **Mal**  
Marathi - **Mar**  
Oriya - **Ori**  
Punjabi - **Pun**  
Tamil - **Tam**  
Telugu - **Tel**  
Urdu - **Urd**

**ANNEXURE 4: TEMPLATE FOR MASTER LIST OF CLIPPINGS (ILLUSTRATIVE)**

STATE – DELHI						
No.	Date	Name of publication	Title of article	Lan.	Abstract	Keywords
1	25/8/07	Indian Express	Letter to the Editor: 'Letter of the Week'	Eng	Cost of filing an RTI application varies considerably across state	CS, RTI rules, application
2	27/9/07	The Hindu	Information Act will not apply to judicial proceedings: Commission	Eng	CIC rejects application for information on judicial proceedings	C, law and justice, courts, CIC, Information Commissioner – Wajahat Habibullah, Padma Subramaniam, AN Tiwari
3	19/10/07	Times of India	RTI Confusion: Ministry gives different answers to same question	Eng	Ministry of Environment obfuscates about proposed new coastal regulation rules.	C, environment, application, other (coastal regulation)
4	9/1/06	Bhaskar	Rs 1 lakh for information	Hin	Chattisgarh Government spends Rs 1 lakh to provide applicant with information on past five years of paddy purchase by State, while latter has still not paid application fee.	S, agriculture, application, RTI rules
5	5/4/06	Dainik Jagran	Officers feel harassed by RTI questions	Hin	Delhi's transportation department is finding it difficult to respond to a	S, transportation, application, RTI actor –

					host of RTI applications asking for outdated and extensive information	Public Information Officer
6	29/12/06	Navbharat Times	Officials make a mockery of the Right to Information	Hin	RTI applicant is deliberately provided with wrong information by the Land & Construction and Public Works departments, which refused to answer for six months, when he lodged a first appeal	C, land development, public works, application, appeal.

**ANNEXURE 5: TEMPLATE FOR MASTER LIST OF CLIPPINGS (for completion by each state media survey consultant)**

STATE – DELHI						
No.	Date	Name of publication	Title of article	Lan.	Abstract	Keywords