

"The Impact of the Right to Information Act on Transparency and Accountability in Indian Democratic Governance"

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Abstract

Good governance and e-governance have been the subject of considerable theoretical and practical debates over the past two decades. Recently, the non-specific terms RTI "governance" and good governance have been actively and gradually used in political science, administrative science and development studies and governance systems. RTI Act Good governance is increasingly recognized as a legitimate, responsible and effective way of obtaining and using public power and resources in achieving widely accepted social and political goals. Based on the existing literature, the study identifies good governance in relation to the political and institutional processes and outcomes considered necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. RTI Act The objective of this conceptual study is to explain in the simplest possible way what is meant by good governance and governance. By what criteria can it be measured. How governance is related to political participation and democracy. It then explores the relationship between good governance and sustainable development. This research paper briefly explains how the Right to Information Act has facilitated transparency and accountability in governance and how good governance collectively underpins the interests and well-being of democracy.

Keywords - Good governance and e-governance, Transparency and Accountability, Social and Political aspects, Sustainable Development and

Introduction

The RTI Act of 2005 has given the concept of information a broad definition. Information is defined as "any material in any form," which would include any content pertaining to government affairs, such as decisions, actions, plans, or schedules. Additionally, it has been

thoroughly defined, encompassing the several ways and formats of information that are accessible under the Right to Information Act. Stated differently, section 2(f) of the Act offers a broad definition of the "information" that can be requested under the RTI Act, albeit it may be expanded beyond the Act's intent, goal, and spirit. Making information about groups that receive benefits available to citizens is the primary goal of the beneficial legislation.

In addition to ensuring openness, transparency, and accountability, this guarantees that citizens can request and receive information on the use of public funds. However, under the RTI Act, private institutions or organizations that greatly benefit from direct or indirect government support are considered public authority.

The phrase "Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act" indicated that this section represents an exception to the Act's general principles, which state that the PIO is required to provide information to the public unless the Central or State Information Commission directs them otherwise.

Objectives of the study

1. Examine how the RTI Act has contributed to reducing information asymmetry in government functioning.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the Act in making public authorities more open and accountable.
3. Examine how the RTI Act complements other democratic tools, such as judicial activism and media reporting, in strengthening governance.
4. Suggest strategies for improving the accessibility, effectiveness, and enforcement of the RTI Act.
5. Study how the Act has contributed to identifying and addressing corruption at various levels of governance.

Research Methodology

This study is planned as a qualitative and analytical approach and is based on a review of the available published literature. Keeping in mind the study objective and the nature of the research question, efforts have been made to collect materials from diverse sources. Thus, information from purely secondary sources has been taken into consideration. Information has been collected and collated from documents such as international organizations, institutions, books, journals, and official information and communications. It can be said that attending international symposia, conferences, and workshops with other scholars can be very useful in developing clarity in thinking about various aspects of the subject.

Transparency and Accountability : Pillars of Good Governance

According to numerous empirical research, that the principles of accountability and transparency are related as public authorities can only demonstrate that the principles of accountability and responsibility are being upheld by being transparent. While accountability refers to the duty of public officials to report on the use of public resources and to answer for their failure to meet stated performance objectives, transparency refers to the public's unrestricted access to timely and accurate information on decisions and performance in the public sector (Armstrong, 2005, p. 4). Transparency becomes a practice as long as public officials are still required to report for their activities.

Good governance requires accountability and transparency. They promote trust in governmental institutions, empower citizens, and stop corruption. Even while systems like e-governance, social audits, and RTI have advanced significantly, problems still exist. A transparent and accountable government system must be achieved by utilizing technology, strengthening institutional structures, and increasing citizen participation. India can guarantee government that genuinely serves its inhabitants with persistent efforts, but the path towards a more open and responsible system is still underway.

Impact of the Right to Information Act on the Indian Governance

In India, the Right to Information Act, 2005 has given this opportunity to the citizens and empowered them to participate in the governance of the country facilitating people-centric governance. The sense of accountability and responsibility of the public authorities have increased considerably post the enactment of the Act. Undoubtedly, the Act has proved useful in restoring individual rights but it has achieved very little in changing the existing system of governance where the democratic institutions have significantly lost their credibility due to deep pervasive corruption in the prevailing circumstances.

Transparency and openness allowing free flow of information to the public can prevent corruption to a great extent. The RTI Act mandates disclosure of information which is subject to certain exemptions. The information defined in the Act also includes personal information of public officials if it outweighs public interest

The essential factors of good governance include:

1. Transparency – Transparency is built on the free flow of information. All citizens shall be entitled to the information on State policies that relate to their own interests, including legislative activities, policy-making, legal provisions, policy enforcement, administrative budget, public expenditure and other relevant political information. Transparency is also critical, both to ensure accountability, and also to enable genuine participation.
2. Accountability –It means that administrators and administrative bodies must fulfil the functions and obligations of the positions they hold. Decision-makers in the government, the private sector and civil society organisations shall be accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. The government at all levels must be accountable as accountability is closely related to the need of eliminating corruption, which is widely seen as a major deficiency in governance.
3. Rule of Law – Governance must be based on fair legal frameworks that are applied equally to all individuals. An overarching requirement of good governance is that the rule of law must be firmly established. Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially. If legal rights are clear and legal remedies for enforcing fundamental rights are swift, the interactions among

government and individuals as well as government and private entities can be efficiently performed

4. Participation – Citizens and stakeholders should have opportunities to engage in decision-making processes. A central feature of good governance is that the general public should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on constitutionally protected right to elect government at various levels, freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively. This is a basic requirement for the legitimacy of the government and its responsibility to the electorate.

5. Effectiveness and Efficiency: It means that processes and institutions shall produce results that meet intended goals while making the best use of resources. The government must be effective and efficient in delivering social and economic public services such as primary education, health, sanitation along with the development of basic infrastructures like roads, bridges, power, telecom, airport, irrigation and transport, which are its primary responsibilities. This requires monitoring and attention to the design of the programmes, especially at the local level

Findings and Recommendations

Findings

- The RTI Act has significantly reduced information asymmetry between the government and citizens by enabling access to public records. Many government departments now proactively disclose information on websites to comply with RTI provisions, improving openness in governance.
- The Act has empowered citizens, civil society groups, and journalists to actively participate in monitoring government policies and decisions. Increased use of RTI has led to greater public awareness about rights and government functioning, promoting participatory democracy.

- Public authorities are increasingly held accountable for delays, inefficiency, and non-compliance with legal mandates. Case studies reveal that RTI queries have exposed irregularities in public expenditure, allocation of resources, and project implementation.
- Bureaucratic resistance: Many officials view RTI as a burden, leading to delayed or incomplete responses.
- Lack of awareness: A significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas, remains unaware of the RTI Act or its benefits.
- The RTI Act has enhanced trust in democratic institutions by increasing transparency and reducing arbitrary decision-making. It has strengthened public accountability, aligning governance practices with democratic principles.

Recommendations

- Launch targeted awareness campaigns to educate citizens, especially in rural and underserved areas, about their rights under the RTI Act.
- Integrate RTI education into school and college curricula to foster early awareness and participation in governance.
- Simplify the RTI application process, including by expanding online filing systems and ensuring digital access for all citizens.
- Develop uniform guidelines for proactive disclosure by public authorities to ensure compliance with Section 4 of the Act.
- Establish independent audit mechanisms to periodically evaluate the compliance of public authorities with RTI provisions.
- Encourage public consultation processes and social audits to supplement the transparency achieved through RTI.

Conclusion

The most important components of transparency and accountability are citizen participation in the decision-making process and public information access. In this sense, the public administration principle of transparency encompasses a wide range of other ideas that

are impacting the shift towards transparent and effective governance. Information technology, public officials' dedication, people' awareness, effective public services, appropriate control, and other contributing elements are all necessary for the realization and application of this idea.

Over the past three decades, the importance of accountability and transparency in public administration has drawn significant attention, especially in relation to calls for greater accountability and transparency from public officials and the necessity of governmental reforms in relation to societal development. Therefore, in order to advance the rule of law, citizen involvement, accountability, and transparency, reformed governance should include criteria for collaboration between the government and the populace.

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