A Qualitative Assessment of BRAC’s Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment (CARE) Project

Final Report

December 2012

Community Empowerment Programme
BRAC
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Final Report

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Photo: Professor Sadeka Halim (Commissioner, Information Commission Bangladesh), RTI specialist Shameem Reza (University of Dhaka), Alauddin Ali, (UNO, Kapasia) and Anna Minj (Director, CEP and IDP, BRAC) seen talking with Polli Shomaj members in a meeting held at Doshhu Narayanpur, Kapasia in June 2012. The Information Commissioner paid a visit to some areas of the World Bank supported BRAC project called “Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment (CARE)”.
# List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEP</td>
<td>Community Empowerment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Information, Education and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Polli Shomaj</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTI</td>
<td>Right to Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTIA</td>
<td>Right to Information Act, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNO</td>
<td>Upazila Nirbahi Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>UP</td>
<td>Union Parishad</td>
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<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>The World Bank</td>
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</table>
Key Terms

**Infomediaries**: A cadre of community based volunteers who serve as a link between the Upazila (sub-district) level government agencies (duty bearers) and the grassroots community (rights holders). They were trained to assist community members in applying for information using the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Infomediaries primarily assist community members in filling out RTI applications and sometimes accompany them during application submission. This change agent was created especially to facilitate the process of community empowerment through RTIA.

**Polli Shomaj**: A ward level forum of the poor, especially women, facilitated by BRAC Community Empowerment Programme (CEP). Each Polli Shomaj has 60-65 members on average. It was initially prompted by BRAC with the aim to be eventually run independently by the group members.

**RTI Clinics**: It takes place at the spot of the drama immediately after staging of a popular theatre show. In each RTI Clinic the performers provide information on different aspects of RTIA. They also respond to queries from the audiences and provide necessary guidance.

**Union Shomaj**: is a federation of Polli Shomaj groups at the union level which serves as platform for grassroots advocacy and networking among Polli Shomaj leaders. Majority of Union Shomaj meetings are held at Union Parishad premises.

**Community Dialogue**: On the following day after staging a drama by the popular theater team, a community dialogue session is organized at the same spot with the participation of audiences/community people. Participants discuss what they had seen and learnt from the stories. Community meetings are used to validate the information received by community members.


Introduction

The Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment (CARE) Project was implemented by BRAC’s Community Empowerment Programme on a pilot basis with particular focus on addressing some of the demand side challenges that affect poor peoples’ access to information. It aimed to promote and popularize the RTI Act among rural citizens of Bangladesh as well as to develop a cost efficient, community based mechanism for accessing information. The project activities were designed to develop a ground up approach towards ensuring that the rural poor can effectively benefit from using the Right to Information Act (RTIA). The project was funded by the World Bank.

After the completion of piloting, an assessment of CRAE project was planned to understand the level of awareness and popularity of the RTIA created among the rural citizens as a result of the project activities implemented during June 2011 – June 2012. The planned assessment conducted in July 2012 looks into the challenges as well as highlights the best practices and achievements of the project.
1. Background of the Project
BRAC Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) implemented a pilot project in Gazipur and Mymensingh districts during June 2011-June 2012 with support from The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank), named “Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment (CARE) Project”. The project aimed at empowering the rural poor through effective understanding and use of the Bangladesh RTI Act 2009 as well as improving local governance. During the project period, the project attempted to promote and popularize the RTI Act among rural citizens so that they can benefit from it.

Goal:
The goal of CARE project was to empower the rural poor through effective understanding and use of the RTI law, and improve local governance

Objectives:
The project targeted to achieve the following objectives:
   a) Promote and popularize the RTI Law among rural citizens so that they can benefit from it;
   b) Build capacity of rural citizens to effectively demand for and access information; and
   c) Carry out advocacy at local and national level for strengthening implementation of the RTI Law based on grassroots demand

1.2 Key Strategic Approaches:
In order to achieve outcomes, the following strategies were adopted for the pilot project:

   a) Focusing on both demand and supply side of realizing the RTI law. However the major focus was on strengthening the demand side with the assumption that strengthened community demand will lead to gradual increase in responsiveness and strengthening of the supply side (by the government and NGOs).

      The project attempted to increase awareness and knowledge of citizens (rights holders) on the right to information as well as the RTIA. Simultaneously, the project targeted authorities mainly at the local (duty bearers) through advocacy in order to increase their responsive to the citizen’s needs.

   b) Developing a cadre of community based infomediaries to bridge the gap created by the immobility and inaccessibility of the poor, particularly women, to get information from public offices at Upazila level. The objective of developing Infomediaries was to develop a sustainable mechanism of need based information sharing between the authorities and the community members.

      The infomediaries were given a 3-day training on right to information and RTIA focusing on the mechanism of demanding/accessing information from the authorities which involves collecting information requests from rural people, articulating it in the prescribed form and submitting to respective government
offices; and after due time retrieving and disseminating the information to the applicants or community.

c) Building on existing BRAC structures and forums to ensure sustainable project outcomes and continuation of best practices even after project completion.

1.3 Key Project Activities:
Project implementation was based on three sets of coordinated activities –

i) Grassroots Information and Awareness Campaign
BRAC’s existing structures and forums were used to raise awareness among the rural poor, particularly women, on the RTIA. Awareness campaign focused on the importance of information, how information can bring about positive change in people’s lives, where and how to access information, citizen’s right to information and RTIA. Specific activities included - Promoting RTIA through Popular Theatre, RTI Clinic after Theatre Show, Follow up Dialogue Session, Information and Awareness through Community Based Organizations (i.e. Polli Shomaj), Using Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Materials (Posters, RTI Handbooks, etc.)

ii) Capacity Development of Community Infomediaries
A cadre of community based infomediaries was created through capacity building training in order to develop a sustainable mechanism for information sharing between the authorities and the community members. Infomediaries were selected from Popular Theatre performers and Polli Shomaj members.

iii) Advocacy at Local and National Level
Advocacy workshops were held at the Upazilas with the participation of Upazila level government officials as well as representatives from the civil society and local media. The aim of the workshops was to make the government officials/authorities at the Upazila level more responsive to the information needs of the poor. Union Shomaj, a union level federation of all Polli Shomaj groups within the union, engaged in dialogue and lobbying with Union Parishad (UP) members on issues of RTI through bi-monthly Union Shomaj meetings. In addition, at the project end a national level seminar was arranged to disseminate the learning and recommendations on best practices as evidenced by the project outcome. Representatives of government agencies, NGOs and networks, civil society, national media and donor communities participated in the seminar.

1.4 Project Coverage
The pilot project covered 5 Upazilas in the district of Gazipur and Mymensingh. In Gazipur the areas are Kaliganj, Kapasia and Sreepur; and in Mymensingh the areas are Trishal and Muktagacha.

1.5 Piloting Period
The project was implemented for a duration of 1 (one) year - from June 2011 to June 2012.
2. Assessment of CARE Project
After completion in June 2012, an assessment of the CRAE project was planned to understand the level of awareness and popularity of the RTIA created among the rural citizens as a result of the project activities implemented during June 2011 – June 2012. The assessment conducted in July 2012 looks into the challenges as well as highlights the best practices and achievements of the project.

2.1 Objectives of Assessment
Overall objective of the assessment of the “Creating Awareness on RTI Law for Community Empowerment Project” was set to find out the best practices, achievements and challenges to the project, which in particular looks into -

1. Level of awareness of the RTIA created among rural citizens as a result of the project, and the benefits they are gaining from it;
2. Capacity of rural citizens to effectively demand for and access information; and
3. Advocacy initiatives taken for strengthening implementation of the Act

2.2 Methodology
To conduct the assessment and collect information from primary sources, the following qualitative research methods were used in two representative Upazilas from project areas, namely Kapasia in Gazipur, and Trishal in Mymensingh (for additional information see Annex i: Primary Sources of Information):

i) 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with RTI Infomediaries\(^1\) (1 in each Upazila); and In-depth Interviews with selected RTI Infomediaries\(^2\)
ii) Meeting with selected beneficiaries who are getting information through Infomediaries
iii) Meeting with project staff
iv) 3 FGDs with Polli Shomaj members (2 in Kapasia and 1 in Trishal Upazila)\(^3\)
v) 4 Key Informant Interviews (KII) with Union Parishad (local government) members (2 in each Upazila)
vi) Key Informant Interviews with 2 Upazila Nirbahi Officers (1 in each Upazila)

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\(^1\) While selecting the Infomediaries, it was essential to ensure representations of both Polli Shomaj members and Theatre Artists. Thus, first the categories were purposively selected, and then the participants for FGDs were taken randomly. Please note that the number of Infomediaries from Polli Shomaj is more than those representing Popular Theatre Artists.

\(^2\) Among the FGD participants (Infomediaries) who seemed to have better understanding of their assignments, ideas about central aim of the RTIA project and information of its activities as well as willing to take a leadership role as an Infomediary were selected for interviews.

\(^3\) The study areas were selected in consultation with CEP. However the rationales for this selection were: i) since the study intended to highlight the best practices of the piloting there was a scope for us to be judgemental about taking 2 (two) best practice areas based on the performances as it appeared in the monitoring reports; and ii) As both the areas represent a combination of semi-rural and semi-urban set ups, the researcher and CEP personnel mutually agreed to take Trishal and Kapasia as study areas.
vii) Observation of Popular Theatre drama shows and discussions with BRAC Popular Theatre Artists.

Following table provides an overview of the stakeholders at different levels, and in various capacities of the project implementation process, who were consulted for the assessment:

Table 1: FGDs, Meetings, Interviews & KIIs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FGD with Infomediaries</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGD 1</td>
<td>Kapasia BRAC Office, Zamirer Char, Kapasia, Gazipur</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGD 2</td>
<td>Trishal BRAC Office, Mymensingh</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews with Infomediaries</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with selected Infomediaries 1</td>
<td>Kapasia Office, Zamirer Char, Kapasia, Gazipur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with selected Infomediaries 2</td>
<td>Kapasia Office, Zamirer Char, Kapasia, Gazipur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with selected Infomediaries 3</td>
<td>Trishal BRAC Office</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FGDs with Polli Shomaj</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGDs with Polli Shomaj 1</td>
<td>Chinatuli, Kapasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGDs with Polli Shomaj 2</td>
<td>Anjabor, Kapasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGDs with Polli Shomaj 3</td>
<td>Solimpur, Trishal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KII with UP Chairmen, Members &amp; Secretaries</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kapasia Sadar Union Parishad</td>
<td>Kapasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torgaon Union Parishad, Latapata Bazar</td>
<td>Kapasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trishal Sadar (Pourosava) Union Parishad</td>
<td>Trishal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rampur Union Parishad</td>
<td>Trishal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting/KII with UNO</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNO, Kapasia Upazila</td>
<td>UNO Office, Kapasia</td>
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</tbody>
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4 See Annex for Infomediary FGD checklist; Polli Shomaj FGD checklist; BRAC project staff meeting checklist; Selected Infomediaries interview checklist; Beneficiary interview checklist; and KII interview checklist.
### Consultation with BRAC RTI Project staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNO, Trishal Upazila</th>
<th>UNO Office, Trishal</th>
<th>Mr. Mizanur Rahman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNO Office, Trishal</strong></td>
<td><strong>BRAC Office, Trishal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ilias Sarkar (RTI District Manager, Gazipur), Obaidur Rahman (RTI PO, Kapasia), Swapon Kumar Bhoumik (RTI FO, Trishal), Md. Nazimuddin (RTI PO, Sripur), Mrs Nazma Begum (RTI PO, Kaliganj), Alamgir Hossain (RTI FO, Muktagacha), Md. Lokman Hekim (District Manager Popular Theatre, Regional Office, Mymensingh)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| RTI staff form project areas of Gazipur and Mymensingh | **BRAC Office, Trishal** | Ilias Sarkar (RTI District Manager, Gazipur), Obaidur Rahman (RTI PO, Kapasia), Swapon Kumar Bhoumik (RTI FO, Trishal), Md. Nazimuddin (RTI PO, Sripur), Mrs Nazma Begum (RTI PO, Kaliganj), Alamgir Hossain (RTI FO, Muktagacha), Md. Lokman Hekim (District Manager Popular Theatre, Regional Office, Mymensingh) |

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**Photo**: As part of assessing CARE project results an FGD with *Polli Shomaj* members is taking place at Solimpur in Trishal, Mymensingh

As secondary source of information documentation of the types of information sought and information received, and RTI agendas for discussion in *Polli Shomaj* meeting were taken into consideration. Relevant project documents of CARE project too were relevant in the assessment. In addition, with a view to assessing the impact of CARE activities and to understand the level of advocacy, newspaper clippings of BRAC RTI activities in Gazipur and Mymensing were used. Moreover, few case studies based on beneficiary/Infomediary experience were useful in understanding the project outcome; or in other words, the achievement of the project in empowering rural people through the utilization of RTIA.

The pilot project matrix does not have specific verifiable indicators for the assessment although it sets out the outputs which were accomplished by the end of the project.
period. In this backdrop, based on the expected outcomes, we determined the following indicators for assessing CARE piloting:

**Table 2: Assessment Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Objectives</th>
<th>Assessment Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness as a result of the project</td>
<td>i) Knowledge and understanding of RTIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promotion and popularity of RTIA</td>
<td>ii) Level of promotion and popularity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Benefits rural people are gaining from using RTIA</td>
<td>iii) Ability to derive benefits,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv) Demands for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Capacity of rural people to demand for information</td>
<td>i) State of rural peoples’ capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) Increase in demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii) Capacity of Infomediaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv) Voluntarism &amp; sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v) Building a ‘replicable model’</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advocacy for strengthening implementation on RTIA</td>
<td>i) (Degree of) Responsiveness of key actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) (Level of) Sensitization of government authorities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Assessment of Communication Approaches & IEC Materials**

| Evaluation of communication approaches | i) Effectiveness of the approach |
|                                       | ii) Mechanism for dissemination |
|                                       | iii) Relevance |
| IEC Materials                         | i) Information & communication value |
|                                       | ii) Relevance |
|                                       | iii) Mechanism for dissemination |
3. Qualitative Assessment of CARE Project

3.1 Outcome of Awareness Campaign on RTIA

Awareness – knowledge and understanding on RTIA

Target people of the project area have realized that there is a law for accessing information which has bearing on their livelihood. As a result of the project many of them have learnt about the provisions of receiving information. For example, the beneficiaries have learnt the time period for receiving the information sought. They have also got the knowledge that there is a provision of appeal in case of refusal.

*Polli Shomaj* members said in the past government offices were reluctant to provide information; neither had they got any idea that an application could be submitted for information. Now they have the knowledge of the law and the benefits the may gain from it. However, it seems that not all of them are aware of the complaint mechanism and the provision of appeal.

*Polli Shomaj* members have observed that the attitudes of the government officials have changed as a result of the project; and they are getting used to dealing with RTIA applications\(^5\).

On the point of target publics' knowledge and understanding, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Kapasia Upazila in Gazipur thinks that the awareness level is still in the primary level. He however recognizes the fact that people are gradually getting aware of the benefit of the law. Union Parishad (UP) Chairman thinks people become interested in using the law when they need certain types of information relating to their livelihood\(^6\).

Level of Promotion and Popularity

In the assessment it appears that *Polli Shomaj* members and their families are better aware of the law than other inhabitants of the areas. Some of the people (not belonging to *Polli Shomaj*) have heard that government has passed such an information law, but do not know the details\(^7\). They have however expressed their interests to learn about their information right as well as function of the law.

Top government officials in the project Upazilas have mixed perceptions about the reach of the CARE campaign among government departments. Kapasia UNO said:

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\(^5\) For further details, see section 3.3: Advocacy for Strengthening Implementation of RTIA.

\(^6\) See sub-section ‘Ability to derive benefits from using the law’ for examples of the types of information that people have applied for.

\(^7\) These people were audiences of BRAC popular theatre dramas on RTIA.
“I am well aware of the RTIA Awareness project. I was present in the Motobinimoy shova (view exchange meeting with key stakeholders), and also visited some project areas”.

As opposed to the above view, a top administrator at Trishal (Mymensingh) Upazila said:

“I do not know much about the RTIA project. However, as the BRAC staff did not come to me with any complaints it indicates that it (the project) is working well”

Kapasia Union Parishad (UP) Chairman and female ward members said that they have been aware of the RTI project and its activities since its inception. Sometimes ‘BRAC project people’ (their perception of the applicants/Infomediaries) come to UP office for information. They also came to know about the project through meeting with BRAC (Motobinimoy Shova). With regard to the state of RTI application at UP, the Chairman said he is not fully aware of it, but Secretary knows about it who maintains the record/register. The Kapasia Sadar UP secretary said, “Most applicants are women”.

Although the outcome of activities for advocacy (also see the section 3.3 on Outcome of Advocacy for relevant discussions) varied in project areas most project staff think –

Before the project was carried out, Infomediaries or the local people did not have any idea about RTIA, neither had they ever applied for information. Most of them had hardly ever been to the government offices at Upazila Sadar. They had a kind of apprehension about government offices.

They also feel that although the training that the Infomediaries, Polli Shomaj members or selected popular theatre members have received is not enough, they have been able to popularize the law by making people aware of the benefits of using it. People now know where the offices are; and can demand and access public information. Most importantly, Infomediaries are working as the facilitators in enabling community people to apply for information according to their needs.

One Infomediary shared her experience -

“At the beginning of the project as we approached rural women for using the law, males were critical of our work as well as the usefulness of the law. As some women began to get useful information, they (males) started changing their attitudes”.

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8 It is generally assumed that government officials are aware of RTIA. But this does not necessarily guarantee that they are aware of the RTIA projects and pertinent activities run by NGOs or civil societies in the locality. CARE activities aimed at promoting and popularizing RTIA for activating demand side as well as sensitizing the supply side. If a top administrator in Trishal is unaware of CARE, this indicates that there is a lack of communication with the vital demand side, which may affect the advocacy process with the Upazila administration.
It appears that family members of the Infomediaries have become sensitized about their work. When they (Informediaries) go to Sadar, their husbands inquire about the purpose of applications that they are going to assist in submitting. Interestingly, they (males of their families) further discuss the matter with their neighbours.

**Ability to derive benefits from using the law**

It may be said that those who have got knowledge and understanding of the law have been able to benefit from it. One BRAC project staff said:

“Some people have accessed information on computer training. They are now making a good earning with related businesses. Some female applicants took sewing training. They are now applying their skills for their earnings.

According to the Infomediaries, the information people have applied for so far are related to improving their livelihood\(^9\). As the information has been beneficial to the users, day by day other people are showing their interest about the law and the application procedures.

**Case Study:** RTIA benefited a government job seeker in Kapasia

“In Kapasia Upazila, a candidate stood first in selection examination for the post of a school teacher. The result was announced in the notice board, but he did not get any appointment letter, rather another candidate ranking behind him got the appointment. The first position holder applied through RTIA demanding an explanation of such decision. As the matter was brought to the knowledge of UNO, I took measures to investigate the matter. Finally, he was appointed for the post and the other person’s appointment was cancelled”.

- Mr. Alauddin Ali, Kapasia UNO; Interviewed on 4 July 2012

Examples of the types of information that people have applied for\(^10\):

- *Boyoshko vata* (Old Age Allowance) *Britti* (Scholarship)
- *Bidhoba vata* (Widow Allowance) *Krishi* (Agriculture)
- *Jubo Unnayon* (Youth Development) *Selai Proshikkhon* (Sewing Training)
- *Matrikalin vata* (Maternity Allowance) Computer training
- *Polli Biddutayon* (Rural Electrification) *Goru Palon*
- *Sashtho* (Health) *Motsho Bishoyok* (Fisheries)
- *Dustho kendro* Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) card

\(^9\) Also see Box 1 (Relevance of RTIA) below for examples

\(^10\) Also see Annex XIV: Outcome of RTI Applications (June 2011 – June 2012)
Box 1: Relevance of RTIA

“After I have received information on *Poshu Palon* (animal husbandry) I came to learn that the fee for the training was only Tk 50, but in the past I was informed that it was Tk 450”.

“I needed to learn the fees for *Kabin* (marriage registration) and divorce registration. I was informed by the *Kazi* (Marriage Register) that it would be Tk 8000 for a 50,000 *Kabin*. After receiving information (in response to an application I made to the Kazi) I learnt that it was only Tk 500 – Shahida (RTIA beneficiary from Chikna, Trishal)

“I came to know about *Matrikal Vati* (maternity allowance) from BRAC popular theatre drama on RTIA. Then I took help of an Infomediary and applied for more information”. -- Sheuli (Beneficiary from Panchtara Boro Masjid, Trishal)

“Using RTIA, I applied for information on free fertilizer distribution for poor farmers. I was informed that the Chairman got 200 cards for fertilizers from the government. I then applied to the Chairman and received one card”. -- Mohammad Jahangir Alam (Beneficiary from Mothbari, Trishal)

“When I first inquired about *Bhumi Kharij* (land mutation) fee, I was told by the land office that it would cost me Tk. 5000. As I applied through RTIA, I came to learn that it was only Tk. 200. I got the matter solved with the exact amount of fee”. (A beneficiary from Kapasia)

“I was refused of any information on *Motsho Chas* (Fisheries) that I applied through RTIA. I then complained the matter in a Motobinimoy Shova where government officers were present. As a result, they accepted my application and provided information. Eventually I took the training”. (A beneficiary from Kapasia)
Community people do not have clear idea about the definition of information (as described in the law). However, realizing the relevance they are demanding information according to their needs. In some places community people have advanced knowledge of the law. In Kapasia for example, some Polli Shomaj members know the categories of restricted information (mentioned in the law). But in Trishal members do not seem to be aware of this.

In general, the growing demands for information with beneficiaries have been in the following sector or issues:\textsuperscript{11} -

- Hospital (doctors’ duty hours, free medicines etc.)
- Family Planning
- Police Stations (services available, fees for services like General Diary)
- Prokolpo Bastobayon Office (Project Implementation Office/PIO)
- Shomaj Sheba (Social Welfare) for disables
- Jubo Unnoyon (Youth Development) for Poshu Palon
- Mohila Bishoyok (women welfare related) for Maternity Allowance, Old Age Allowance etc.
- Poshu Palon (Livestock)
- Bishesh Onudan (Special Government Allowance)
- Vumi Kharij (Land Mutation)
- Marriage Register, Kabin and Divorce Register
- Fisheries
- Ration Card
- Bangladesh Rural Development Broad (BRDB)
- VGD & VGF
- Kabikha – Kajer Binimoye Khaddo Kormoshuchi (Food for Work)

Polli Shomaj members said that in the past Poshu (Veterinary) and Krishi (Agriculture) departments were reluctant to provide them information on medicine and pesticide. After the growing demands for information (as they applied through using RTIA) these offices now provide them with information, sometimes even in writing (advices related to the medicines/pesticides).

3.2 Capacity of rural citizens in demanding & accessing information

Enhancing rural peoples’ capacity

Capacity of the members of Polli Shomaj and Union Shomaj, Infomediaries, and members of BRAC popular theatre teams has increased to demand for and access information sources. Although the pilot project has achieved a success with these community groups and forum members, targeting rest of the rural community people and building their capacity on RTI still remains a challenge.

\textsuperscript{11} This list has similarities with the examples of the types of information that people have applied for mentioned in the previous section. These common issues came out in our consultations with Polli Shomaj members, Infomediaries, UP representatives etc. This is also evident in the CARE project record of applications.
Increasing Demands

Despite the challenge of reaching out to the wider rural population, one can observe some trends indicating the increasing demands for information. Government offices never informed the rural people of the benefits of using RTIA. Beneficiaries have learnt about the act mainly from *Polli Shomaj* meeting, popular theatre dramas and Infomediaries (who are also part of these groups).

According to the project staff evaluation, people now feel that going to government offices for information is not a hard thing to do. This has, in turn, sensitized the government officers. They too are aware of the Infomediaries and *Polli Shomaj*, for example. They are now more cordial in processing RTI applications. This claim was validated in this assessment as we talked with beneficiaries and Infomediaries, change agents of this process. They are confident and willing to apply for information.

Confidence of the facilitators and beneficiaries was the first step in the subsequent increase in the demands for public information. Primarily the applications were personal need based. Some people are now getting skilled enough in applying for information on social needs, such as UP budget, road repair, safe drinking water issues, and power supply. In the assessment it seems to us that the beneficiaries are about to enter into the later phase of awareness in which application for information has become more on social needs.

Capacity development of Infomediaries

A cadre of community infomediaries received training for developing their capacities to effectively use RTIA. The 3-day training primarily helped them to have an understanding of RTIA, important provisions of the law and benefits of using them. The training taught them how to use the RTI form and to apply for public information.

Some Infomediaries do not seem to have a clear knowledge of the definition of Information. With regard to systems of information preservation/record keeping in public offices, they only know that information is stored in files and computers.

Infomediaries find it quite easy to write an application or fill up an RTI form. They help those who cannot write or unable to fill up forms by themselves. They also provide RTI application form, assist people in submitting application, and accompany them to government offices. As RTI application form is not available at government offices in the project areas, prospective applicants collect it from Infomediaries or leaders of *Polli Shomaj*. Both Infomediaries and leaders of *Polli Shomaj* help people applying for information. One of the beneficiaries who were interviewed said:

“In most cases, Infomediaries accompany applicants to the government offices; help them to fill up the RTI forms according to their information demands. They also introduce them (applicants) to government officers or officers in charge for providing information”.
Capacity, Voluntarism and Sustainability of Infomediaries

*Polli Shomaj* members were satisfied with the services that they received from Infomediaries particularly in the process of RTI application according to their needs. As mentioned in the previous section currently the Infomediaries are campaigning on the benefits of RTIA, providing application forms, assisting in application process and accompanying the beneficiaries to government offices.

Formal education wise the Infomediaries are not highly qualified\(^{12}\). Some of them have completed their SSC level. Not all of them understand the provisions of the law fully. Despite this limitation, the RTI project staffs feel they (Infomediaries) have done quite well in persuading people to use the law\(^{13}\).

There is a need for further training on the law. A beneficiary is willing to know how RTIA can be used in inquiring information on family planning and to deal with issues of violence on women\(^{14}\).

Need for further training:

Further training on the law will be most useful to Infomediary capacity building. For example, they will require advanced orientation on the appeal process, and submission of complaint letter. The training should also include sessions on the RTIA Handbook. At the same time, some elements of the training should vary from area to area based on the local needs.

Sustainability:

In the future, when the project has expanded and number of beneficiaries has increased there may be a need to train new batches of Infomediaries. If Training of the Trainers (ToT) can be arranged for the current Infomediaries, they may train others. This is will be cost effective from the project perspective as well as be useful in promoting voluntarism. Some Infomediaries said that they would be willing to train new batches of Infomediaries provided there is an easy version of BRAC RTI Handbook. Beneficiaries think if the Infomediaries are absent, capable *Polli Shomaj* members can help them in RTI application.

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\(^{12}\) This may be noted that educational qualification of Infomediaries was not an indicator, neither was an outstanding issue in assessing their performance in helping to popularize the law. Their educational level was mentioned in relation to further capacity building. However, it is our view that current level of educational qualification may be a challenge in providing them with an advanced training on RTIA. At the same time, we also realize that in the local context, if the project involves more educated Infomediaries, there is a possibility of dropping out as they may soon look for better employment opportunities.

\(^{13}\) Staff comments on the performances of Infomediaries are similar to the views expressed by participants in the FGDs, KIIs and interviews on the contributions of this Information Change Agent. Above staff comments can be validated and substantiated by comments from other stakeholders which are mentioned in relevant sections of this assessment report.

\(^{14}\) We think the process for obtaining information on these issues will be the same as for any other issue or topic. Information regarding government family planning services can be obtained through RTIA. One of the *Polli Shomaj* FGD participants (in Kapasia) wanted to deal with issues of ‘violence on women’ through using RTIA.
Developing a Replicable RTI Model

It may be early to comment whether a replicable model has been developed to bridge the information gap between the government departments and the grassroots level. But some positive outcomes of the piloting phase are suggestive of the possibility to creating a replicable RTI model in the future, for which continuation of the project for a considerable period will be required.

In the beginning of the campaign, Infomediaries faced obstacles in the government offices as they approached them (government officers) with application. Infomediaries were not well treated by the government officials. For example, they did not receive cooperation from the land office and government hospitals. In some cases, according to their own language “Amader tara amole antona” (We were not regarded well by the office staff). Today the situation has changed. They (Infomediaries) are well accepted and their credibility to the government offices has increased.

Some Infomediaries said, even today sometimes applicants have to wait for long hours if the Information officer in charge is absent. If the applicants have to wait for long hours there should be some facilities available particularly for the women, for example sitting arrangements and wash rooms.

Despite the challenges (although some are related to the supply side), we have heard that government officers, particularly in Kapasia (Gazipur) are making phone calls to the applicants for collecting information they have applied for. Some beneficiaries have also received information by post. If continued, the communication approaches, social interventions through Infomediaries, Polli Shomaj and popular theatre leaders using the existing BRAC forums as well as any new innovative approaches will be central to creating an effective and replicable RTI awareness and implementation model.

3.3 Advocacy for strengthening implementation of RTIA

Outcome of CARE Advocacy Initiatives

Local level advocacy for strengthening implementation of the Act has created an environment of communication between the grassroots and the Upazila government offices as well as UPs. Chairman of Kapasia Sadar UP and its staffs have heard of the activities by Infomediaries. They have also observed some RTI related activities run by local BRAC office. With regard to the activities of Infomediaries, as far as their knowledge goes, they (Infomediaries) help people in applying for information. A top government official at Trishal on the other hand, said:

“I joined here in November (2011). I do not know whether someone has applied for information using RTIA form (as a result of BRAC RTIA project). We received the gazette from the government. There is also Upazila web portal. People may access information even without application”.
The above government officer however thought that other departments at Trishal Upazila might have been aware of the project. The advocacy initiatives seem to have achieved better outcome in Kapasia Upazila. The Kapasia UNO said:

“From the government we received copy of the gazette and later the amendments. We do not have application forms here, but I think UP offices has got it. When we need it, we make photocopies from the BRAC RTI Handbook”.

Both in Kapasia and Trishal, government offices had received copies of gazette after the information law was passed. They also received ‘amendment’ gazette, but never had printed application form. Government did not arrange any training on RTIA for the UP officials. To make the Upazila officials and UP personnel more responsive to peoples’ information needs and sensitizing them to improve supply side, some Polli Shomaj members feel that Ward level campaign may be initiated through monthly or bi-monthly meetings in presence of Chairman and Members¹⁵. Trishal UNO thinks “RTIA Campaign should include UP Ward members and block supervisors, among others”¹⁶.

Responsiveness of local key actors to information needs

By and large responsiveness of Upazila offices to the information needs of poor citizens is appreciable although some specific intervention will be useful to make government officers responsive enough in project areas, like Trishal. Compared with Upazilas offices, the office bearers of UPS will require to becoming more responsive to the information needs of the rural communities.

Since the Upazila does not have specific Information officers, according to an Infomediary experience -

“If you apply to one office for information, sometimes he/she refer you to another officer or office. If we could have one officer (as one stop service) he/she could do the needful to provide any type of information that an applicant has applied for”.

Sometimes the process is hampered if the delegated or in charge officer is absent. In such case, there should be someone to attend the applicants. These limitations in supply side affected the institutional responsiveness of UP and Upazila offices.

¹⁵ Infomediaries had their bi-monthly meetings at BRAC office. Along with the views of Polli Shomaj members we also think it can be more effective if the meeting is held at Union or Ward level. As part of the campaign this may include the Chairman and Member, opinion makers, like Imams and teachers,

¹⁶ Block supervisors are from the Agricultural Department of the government. They are stationed at Union level and each of them looks after several blocks. If the supervisors are present in the Polli Shomaj meetings or the bi-monthly meetings of Infomediaries at Ward level, they can answer to agriculture related queries. At the same time, their inclusion will help to bring success of RTIA campaign.
Infomediaries provided RTI forms to applicants as none of the government offices keeps printed forms. On these pertinent issues UNO of Kapasia Upazila said:

“There is no planned government campaign on RTIA at Upazila level. BRAC campaign has contributed to the process of sensitization of government officers. But it is not possible to see a big change within a brief period of time. To popularize Oral Saline, it took more a decade. For a change with regard to the use RTIA will take longer time”.

According to beneficiary feedback, as a result of peoples’ interest in information, some government offices have now started to hang (either in notice board or a fixed place in front of the offices) important information (on most demanding issues), so that people will not require to apply for them. In case of application by demand, except the photocopy fees, they do not charged any extra amount for providing information. These are good instances of responsiveness of key policy implementers at UP and Upaliza levels.

Sensitization of Local and National Level Government Authorities

In the ‘District Information Fair’ (Zila Tottho Mela), CARE project staff along with Infomediaries and Polli Shomaj beneficiaries brought out rally and staged a popular theatre drama. This created enthusiasm among audiences. Such activities not only helped popularizing RTI among the potential users, but also attracted attention of government authorities.

As part of local level advocacy 5 (five) ‘Motobinimoy Shova’ were organized in five Upazilas. In addition, UP Chairmen, Members and staffs feel that if few more consultations with opinion leaders were organized at Union level, it could have helped in achieving better advocacy results. The project staffs however think ‘Motobonimoy Shova’ was quite effective in local advocacy. Government offices now recognize the BRAC RTIA project’s contribution in popularizing RTIA among people.

Photo: A ‘Motobinimoy Shova’ (View Exchange Meeting) was held in Mymensingh
Although sensitization of government authorities in developing countries like Bangladesh is a continuing process, as a result of the piloting of the RTI project we have observed the willingness of the authorities to improve government mechanism for strengthening the implementation of the Law. Once good results are achieved, a replicable model is developed and project learning is shared at wider forum, we believe the government policy making authorities will be sensitized in taking appropriate measures for improving the supply side facilities. This will of course require a set of planned activities of lobbying and policy advocacy supported by campaigns.

3.4 Evaluation of Communication Approaches

Popular Theatre Dramas on RTI

We have mentioned in previous sections that the popular theatre drama has been very effective in informing people of all ages about the use and benefits of RTI. It was found in the assessment that pertinent activities, such as spot selection mechanism and dissemination of RTIA information through popular theatre were most effective:

Spot selection process, post show activities etc. have contributed to the increase in the level of mental (knowledge) engagement, participation and decision making process of prospective RTI applicants. Generally, the show took place in a spot that was located in a comparatively densely populated area, and where Polli Shomaj activities are stronger. This helped to disseminate the messages on RTI among wider publics.

The assessment study found that the pre show campaign usually did not use traditional technology, like miking. Instead, it formed a Youth Voluntary Team that not only publicized the ensuing event, but also assessed the situation in case there was a possibility of social resistance from any quarter. The team talked to local opinion makers including religious personalities. Places nearer to Mosque or religious establishments were avoided. This is an approach that helped to avoid any social noncooperation in organizing the theatre show.

For disseminating pre-information on a drama show, volunteers used a banner, informed the adjacent shopkeepers and also students and teachers of local schools (in many places the performers are recognized by school children). The project staff thought it was a cost effective and participatory process that encouraged voluntarism and has been effective for promoting the messages on RTIA.

One UP Member of Torgaon Union, Kapasia said, “I have seen the theatre shows on RTI; and I do not think there will be any problem (social resistance) in staging theatres in the future”. UNO of Trishal thinks, “BRAC theatre on RTI can be disseminated though video. Local cable providers can telecast the video. This will make communication on RTI through popular theatre more effective”.

17 See Conclusion and Recommendations for researcher’s suggestions on this matter.
3.5 IEC Materials on RTI

Evaluating RTI Handbook

Government offices said that the BRAC RTI Handbook has been useful to them. CEP has so far circulated around 1000 copies of the Handbook. However, from general users’ point of view, there can be an abridged and easier version of the handbook. Illustrations will also be effective with some users.

The booklet is available with the Infomediaries and leader of Polli Shomaj. However, they too feel an easy and smaller version of the booklet with illustration will be very useful.

Evaluating RTI Poster

Photo: Poster on RTI used in awareness campaigns to promote and popularize RTIA in Gazipur and Mymensingh districts.
On average, people evaluate RTI posters as a good information/education material, but for some people, the illustration without text may not be communicating well. They think some people perceived the picture as something relating to education and family planning. There can be some texts with the four sets of picture in the poster.

A good number of Infomediaries and beneficiaries suggested that picture of the poster should be bigger so that people can see from distance. Currently illustrations in the poster are small. This should be enlarged. According to the key informants, as it is important to make a visual impact of posters pictures are important and we will require to take into account the views of RTI users.

Infomediaries feel some of the posters may be laminated or framed to save them from rain. Posters should be stick on strategic locations. Few beneficiaries think Imams (Islamic religious men responsible for conducting prayers at mosques), older people and Madrasa (Islamic educational institution) students do not like theatre. For them posters may be an effective (Instead of theatre) medium.

CEP provided a comprehensive guideline for distributing posters in Trishal and Muktagacha in Mymensingh; and Kaligonj, Sreepur and Kapasia of Gazipur. Generally, posters have been displayed in some government offices, UP and BRAC office premises and glued to the walls of small shops. UNO of Kapasia recognizes RTI posters in some Upazila offices. Although during the assessment we did not find any photo of people seeing posters in any place of the project areas, we were informed by CARE project staffs that following the guideline posters were placed in different locations.

Infomediaries and beneficiaries think posters should be hanged in tea stalls, hospital premises, Hat-Bazars and government offices. CARE staffs admitted that communication materials, particularly posters should be used more strategically.\footnote{The RTIA poster was part of the overall communication campaign to promote the law. It was also aimed to aide other IEC activities during the piloting. We should be aware of the fact that one poster alone could not serve all information/communication needs of a diverse audience group.}

Framed posters were given to government offices. However, in some offices, due to the availability of lots of other posters, sometimes RTI posters are not displayed in most visible locations. In outdoor, sometimes people rip them off, while some are damaged by rain water.\footnote{In Bangladesh, retaining outdoor posters is a challenge for both commercial and non-profit campaigns. However, if hanged or posted strategically, outdoor posters may remain available for longer period. It should be hanged in a place that is out of peoples’ reach, but at the same time clearly visible for reading. Places that are protected from rain waters may be an option although such place may limit posters’ visibility. In fact, some outdoor posters will be damaged by rain water or heat. This should be accepted as a system loss of using this medium.}
3.6 Overall Good Practices & Achievements

RTI project offices maintain register of applications made. In some cases, they have also kept record of the information received from offices. Maintaining an RTI application register is a good practice to replicate in the similar projects that provide and an overview of what type of information was applied for, on which date and whether the information was accessed.

Photo: Copy of an RTI application asking for information on government allowances for disables and widows. The copy also contains a reply (information) from the government office concerned.

Using existing BRAC structures and forum (Polli Shomaj and Popular Theatre) for the RTI awareness campaign as well as to popularize the use of RTIA has been an effective concept; which in other words, has been cost-minimising.

Creating a cadre of Infomediaries as RTI change agent has been useful in achieving the objectives of the pilot projects as well as creating a good grounding for future project activities. A sense of voluntarism has been created among the Infomediaries. This will help in making this community based use of RTIA sustainable. Some Infomediaries are truly devoted for continuing with their
services even if there is no financial assistance (e.g. for conveyance and honorarium from the project side).

“As a result of the project activities, so far, we are receiving good response from the government. There is hardly any scope for appeal”, says Bilkis, an Infomediary as well as beneficiary from Kapasia. Some of beneficiaries’ relatives who are living outside the project areas, have collected RTI forms from BRAC Infomedaries and applied for information. The project campaign has been contributing to the effectiveness of a community based RTI awareness approach. Beneficiaries said those who became successful in accessing information, are assisting others in applying for information. One of them said, “People now know what is Right to Information Act and have also come across the fact that information can be found in government offices”
4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The pilot project has helped to break the sense of apprehension that generally persisted among rural communities in relation to their ability to seek information. As people are gradually getting keen on using RTIA government departments and UPs too started realizing the need to improve information supply system. However, after the assessment, it appears to us that the piloting of the project alone was not enough to address the wider rural population on RTI although the project has achieved successes with Polli Shomaj members and BRAC beneficiaries.

Effective BRAC inter-programmes sharing of information on RTIA would have been advantageous for reaching more rural people. At the same time, although more popular theatre shows on RTI issues would have been useful in raising the beneficiary awareness, number of dramas could not be increased within the available budget and man power. Overall, the RTI project has been most effective in -

- ‘Confidence’ building of rural beneficiaries in demanding and accessing public information; and
- Sensitizing UP and Upazila government personnel in realizing rural peoples’ information needs.

As far as the learning and achievement of the project are concerned, the following conclusions may be made:

- Creating and using a cadre of Infomediaries, and using existing structures of Polli Shomaj and popular theatre have been cost efficient for developing a community based mechanism to access information. Although as a result of the project it may be early to try establishing a ‘Ground up Model’ for the rural poor to benefit from RTI legislation, overall social communication approaches used in the project will be useful in developing and executing a bottom up model for increasing demand for and access to information.

- The assessment looked into the qualitative achievement of the project. Therefore, although from the project implementation point of view, the number of successful RTI applications is important, it is equally vital to take into account the level of information awareness and willingness of the people to use the RTI law for improving their conditions. The individual and collective actions towards RTIA in the project areas, we believe have had significant bearings on the responsiveness of the supply side.

- In order for BRAC to develop a sustainable mechanism for need based information sharing between the authorities and the community members, it will require continuation of the project for a considerable period of time. Both area specific and need based training/capacity building will be needed for ensuring effective functioning of the RTI Infomediaries. Nevertheless, by and large, building on existing BRAC structures and forums to ensure sustainable project outcomes have been useful.
• *Polli Shomaj* has been useful as a strong platform to inform and build awareness on RTIA amongst the rural poor. However, in some project areas this existing organization could be used in much better ways.

• Popular theatre dramas were most frequently referred to as a prime source of information on RTI. In the assessment, this communication approach appears to be very effective in promoting and popularizing messages related to rural peoples’ right to public information. However, in the future **specific verifiable indicators** will be needed to evaluate the results of RTI Clinic and Dialogue.

• RTIA Handbook has been very handy to UP members and Upazila government officers. Infomediaries too found the handbook useful. However, they suggested for an **easy and abridged version** of it. Some even suggested for illustrations with an easy version.

• Infomediary work should get more visibility in the overall awareness campaign. In order for the **branding of ‘Infomediary’** as RTI change agent, future project design should keep more scope for them to play role both in public awareness initiatives and sensitizing local policy implementers.

• With regards to the supply side, there is a challenge of appointing specific Information Officers at the Upazila. Currently, one does not get a **one stop service** while submitting an RTI application. They also have problems when a delegated officer or an officer in charge is absent.

Suggestions for Further Capacity Building:

• RTIA project staffs require further training on the **technical aspects** of the law. Currently they do not seem to have advanced orientation on RTIA, amendments and Rules of Business.

• There is a need for the Infomediaries to receive further training on RTIA with local/area specific issues as well as on the technical aspects of the law.

Suggestions for Further Campaign:

• In rural areas announcement through microphone can be useful

• There is a need for area-specific campaign. (In Kapasia, for example, people are aware that application can be made even on white paper, while in Trishal people do not seem to be aware of this.)

• Posters should be displayed in places where big gatherings take place (*Hat, Bazar*)

• RTI messages in Bangla font can be disseminated through mobile phone. Voice call**20** (instead of SMS as many of them do not know how to read) and special ring tone on RTI themes can be useful too

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20 Suggestions for using voice call or SMS is for greater campaign on RTIA. Information Commission has already been using SMS as public service alert on the information legislation. This may be done in collaboration with the mobile operators that they provide this service in the RTIA project areas as part of CSR
• Collaboration with the government, mobile film unit of the Department of Mass Communication may be used for the campaign of RTIA.
• Awareness programme on TV channel (in evening programme; after *Esha* prayer). This was suggested by the beneficiaries who have access to TV
• There may orientation classes in schools and colleges on RTIA
• Union Information Centres can be included in the RTI campaign
• There may be a chapter or information in the government/BRAC school text book about RTIA and the role of Infomediaries. As part of national level advocacy this may be suggested to the government authorities.
• When opinion leaders and UP members hold meeting with the community RTI videos can be shown through multimedia projector

Suggestions for Improving Communication Materials:

• An abridged version of RTIA Handbook with illustrations will be useful
• There may cartoon strips or films like the *Meena* cartoon.
• Billboard may be used locally
• Popular theatre dramas on RTI can be disseminated though video. Local cable providers can telecast the video\(^{21}\).
• Recorded popular theatres dramas can also be disseminated through multi-media projectors in *Hat-Bazars*\(^ {22}\)

Suggestions for Local Advocacy:

• Motobinimoy shova should be continued and the Information officer of the Upazila should be present in the meeting
• Frequent dialogues need to be arranged with UP Chairman, Member and eminent citizens
• There can be Ward level meeting on RTIA in presence of journalist, teachers, Imams (person who conducts public prayers in mosque) and *Huzurs* (religious teachers) among others. (Also please see section 3.3 for *Palli Shomaj* members’ and an UNO’s suggestions on this point)
• Government officers should be trained on RTI

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\(^{21}\) This suggestion is for making few videos of the dramas (recording of the live theatre shows; and with some editing). Using television for telecasting such videos may not be effective due to quality of the videos (made in cost minimising ways) and costs involving in buying air time. However, cable casting through the infrastructures of the local cable operators will not be expensive.

\(^{22}\) We are aware that recorded popular theatre dramas may not be as effective as the live ones due to localized nature of stories and absence of interactions. However, in addition to live shows, as a media mix and to give repeat exposure of the dramas, dissemination of RTIA messages through recorded dramas may be a useful option.
5. Postscript: Way Forward

Assessment results were presented at an experience sharing national seminar on Right to Information. Participants of the seminar, representing both supply and demand side stakeholders showed their interest in learning about the best practices of the community level implementation of RTIA. The seminar brought together participants from NGOs, INGOs, donors, government, civil society organizations, Infomediaries, elected representatives of UPs from the project areas and field level staff among others. They emphasised on the need to improve supply side as well as strengthening implementation of the law for peoples' empowerment and improving local governance. Distinguished speakers were impressed by the level of the participants' active participation, particularly rural women's feedback on the findings of the assessment of the pilot project. Speakers of the dissemination seminar expressed their commitment in supporting advocacy initiatives in strengthening implementation of the information legislation.

Discussants' feedback:

As the designated speakers spoke about the Keynote paper on the findings of the assessment of CARE pilot project, one of them emphasised on the importance of Social Auditing and developing Tracking System. Referring to the experience of public hearing in other countries, he said that social auditing at local level will add new dimension to the community-based approaches to the implementation of RTIA. Without a tracking system we cannot measure the agency performances. Besides developing tracking system, we will require to improve documentation. Speakers appreciated the proactive behaviour of government offices (in providing information) in the project areas. He felt contribution of the Infomediaries should be highlighted duly along with the persons and offices that are champion in providing information.

One guest speaker thought using the existing social forum and structure is important for any community-based approach to strengthening implementation of the information legislation. For the rights holder, ‘confidence’ is important; and at the same time, supply side should be equipped with information database. For an awareness and empowering project like CARE, he said the process should first start with informing people. Next is the stage of consultation. After this, once target publics are mobilized, they are ready for going into action.

A speaker talked about the importance of deciding appropriate medium for communicating with people. It is also important to determine who will carry forward the

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23 This section is included here as postscript to the main assessment report.

24 Keynote paper was presented by S M Shameem Reza (consultant, right to information & communication specialist) in the national seminar on Right to Information, organized by the Community Empowerment Programme of BRAC, held on Monday 22nd October 2012 at BRAC Centre Inn Auditorium, Dhaka.

25 Special guest speakers of the seminar were Vikram K Chand, Senior Public Sector Management Specialist, The World Bank; Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director, D.Net; Barrister Manzoor Hassan, Advisor, Institute of Governance Studies, BRAC University; Professor Sadeka Halim, Information Commissioner, Information Commission of Bangladesh; and Dr. Kamal Hossain, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The discussion sessions including the open discussion by other participants were moderated by Prof. Ainun Nishat, Vice-Chancellor, BRAC University.
message. Some concepts in RTIA may look complex, but the facilitators like the Infomediaries will need to explain the terms in easy language. He felt that for a success in community-based RTI campaign, more involvement of women will be essential. Overall, there will be a task for us to demystify the whole process. Scaling up of good practices will also be central for the sustainability of this kind of project.

In the open discussion, a few participants commented that the overall picture of information disclosure in the government offices is not a rosy one; rather many of them still are not willing to give information although the situation may be a little different in the CARE project areas.