

CONNECTING GOVERNMENT WITH CITIZENS:

DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

ON

IMPLEMENTING RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT IN BANGLADESH

An agenda for
2014-2018

Abbreviations

IC	Information Commission
CIC	Chief Information Commissioner
BPATC	Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
ANSA	Affiliated Network for Social Accountability
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoPA	Ministry of Public Administration
NGO	Non-Government Organization

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1. Background

1. The Right to Information Act 2009 was enacted by the Government of Bangladesh in the first session of the 9th Parliament. This was in response to both domestic and international demand for greater transparency within the various sectors, particularly the public institutions. Over the last two decades, particularly since 2001 the issue of governance has become central to Bangladeshi politics. The major political parties have given much emphasis to policy reform in their manifestoes prior to general elections, and the 2008 General Elections were no exception. Among many initiatives, ensuring that citizens' have greater access to information found a prominent place in the manifesto of both the two major political parties at that time.

2. It is incontrovertible that the most difficult aspect of any new legislation or policy is its implementation. The implementation stage is much more of a challenge than that of drafting or the passage through the legislature. Some of the implementation challenges in relation to a right to information act are: (i) the existing mindset of the bureaucracy, particularly those officials who are tasked to give information; (ii) the lack of capacity in the areas of record-keeping and record making; (iii) insufficient resources and infrastructure; (iv) inadequate staff and (v) lack of capacity building.¹ All of these factors are applicable in the Bangladesh context, and any institutional framework for the implementation of RTI Act will have to take them into account.

3. After the enactment of the RTI Act the government promptly established the Information Commission (IC) and appointed the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and two additional Commissioners. The IC has undertaken a number of very important activities since its inception. The Ministry of Information has formulated the rules and the Information Commission the regulations, under the Act, and Designated Officers (more than 12,500 so far) have been appointed by various organizations. The IC has successfully involved the media, particularly the electronic, to encourage citizens to take advantage of the newly established right to access information.

4. The IC has been given a clear mandate to implement the RTI Act 2009. The Act is unequivocal. Section 11 states:

- (i) *After the commencement of this Act, a commission to be known as the Information Commission shall be established for carrying out the purpose of this Act and in accordance with its provisions.*
- (ii) *The Information Commission shall be an independent body corporate having perpetual succession and a common seal....*

Section 13 (5) clearly delineates the functions of the IC and the implementation of the right to information is at the heart of it. The IC has been given the following obligatory powers:

- (i) to issue directives for the preservation, management, publication, publicity of and access to information;
- (ii) to lay down procedures for application for information;
- (iii) to preserve and implement the right to information;
- (iv) to identify and remove impediments for effective implementation;
- (v) to undertake research and solicit recommendation for effective implementation;
- (vi) to follow international best practices;
- (vii) to undertake awareness activities;
- (viii) to formulate rules and regulations;
- (ix) to assist other organizations or institutions to implement the right to information;

¹ p.4 Laura Neuman/Ricahard Calland

- (x) to provide technical assistance to authority; and
- (xi) to oversee the actions of others under other laws for preservation and implementation of right to information.

5. The rules and regulations under the 2009 Act provide further guidance regarding the functioning of the IC. It is also to be noted that sections 17, 20, 22, 23, 33 and 34 of the Act have given the Government (without specifying any particular Division or Ministry of the Government) some role to play vis-à-vis the IC. Nevertheless, according to section 21 of the Act the IC has full financial independence, subject to audit oversight by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. But under section 23 the Government has retained significant administrative control and influence over the IC. Section 23(3) states “[T]he salary, allowance and other terms and conditions of service of the Secretary and other officers and employees shall be determined by the Government.” The Government may also appoint officers and employees on deputation to the IC (Section 2(4)). The Secretariat of the IC is made up of civil servants, and several some positions within the IC are occupied by the Admin cadre of the civil service on deputation.

6. The Act provides a very transparent selection process for the appointment of the Chief Information Commissioner and Commissioners (Section 14), and the Act specifies in sections 15 & 16 the process of appointment, tenure, resignation and removal of the Chief Information Commissioner and other Commissioners. At least on paper the CIC and IC have been given much authority and independence to operate but in reality the IC has not fully exercised its powers to implement RTI. Mainly due to this reason the performance of IC has been rather mixed.

2. Rationale

7. In 2013, the Nielson Group conducted a survey which found low levels of awareness of the RTI Act among members of the public, leading in turn to few RTI requests being submitted.² The Information Commission annual reports note that many of the requests submitted under the RTI Act actually related to general information requests. On the supply side, the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) has introduced RTI training in its regular programme for training officials. Despite this, the Nielson survey found that many Designated Officers were not aware they had been appointed as such; and only one quarter said they had received any RTI training. The Information Commission made considerable progress in its first year: e.g. getting itself established, framing rules for the RTI Act, carrying out public consultations in a number of districts to raise awareness among citizens. However, a subsequent gap in its leadership (owing to retirement of the first Chief Information Commissioner) and administrative hurdles regarding the financing of the Commission slowed down its activities.

It is in this context that one has to envision the future operation of the IC. The question is ‘how can the implementation of the Act be made more effective?’

8. The Cabinet Division has agreed to provide overall leadership to the implementation of the RTI Act 2009, and they have exercised their convening authority to bring together the relevant stakeholders, such as, various line ministries, Information Commission, district and upazila administrative units. Traditionally, the Cabinet Division is considered as the apex body within the hierarchy of civil administration structure, and acts as the ‘secretariat’ to the Cabinet, which is headed by the Honourable Prime Minister. Given the dominance (rather than being ‘the first among equals’) of the Prime Minister and the special relationship between the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet Division, the latter having the responsibility of inter-ministerial coordination. The day-to-day implementing activities will be left to the various line ministries. The Cabinet Division will undertake an oversight role but the IC, as the independent statutory institution, with the mandate as stated above, will play the lead role.

9. The key to success of any implementation plan is the ownership of the process and the results. The institutional arrangement has to factor-in a number of issues: the marrying of ‘demand’ for information with ‘supply’; strong commitment from the upper echelons of the administration together with a strong sense of ‘inclusiveness’ at the level of different ministries; and keeping the implementation structure simple with the various entities enjoying as much autonomy as possible.

10. The IC is placed well to contribute to both the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ side of information. It can generate ‘demand’ through its policy and research advocacy activities. Since its inception the IC has signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding with various telecom companies to raise awareness of the general public in terms of the kind of information that they are entitled to according to the 2009 Act. Despite its impressive activities there is much to be done on the demand side, and this has been revealed by research undertaken by various non-profit organizations.

11. As an integral part of the ‘supply’ side of information the IC has the function to increase the capacity of Designated Officers (DOs). As an independent body, the IC will decide on the synergy that it wants to develop with other bodies, such as, the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) or other civil service training academies, the Ministry of Information, Cabinet Division and civil society organizations.

² *RTI Baseline Survey for Bangladesh*, (Nielson Company, March 2013).

12. In terms of independent monitoring of the implementation of the Act, the IC can play a role either independently or in collaboration with other organizations. Third party monitoring can also be undertaken by non-profit organizations (there are several qualified organizations operating in Bangladesh) can also contribute with their technical expertise involving ICT tools for on-line access to information through the internet and mobile phones. Such independent third-party monitoring could inject additional elements of accountability in Bangladesh and support the reduction and incidence of malfeasance and corruption, which to some extent prompted the call for the legislation in the first place.

13. While it is clear that the IC can play a useful role in monitoring the progress of the RTI plan independently, it is not clear that it alone can serve as the coordinating agency that drives an implementation program as a whole across the target line ministries. All countries have found it useful to create a structure within government to drive the implementation of RTI because government officials are usually less willing to take direction from an outside agency than from a lead ministry. In India, the government chose the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) to lead the implementation of RTI within government. Because DoPT is the main cadre controlling authorities for the key All-India civil service, its directives are thus more likely to be followed than those of an IC. In Bangladesh, the government could consider designating the Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA), Cabinet Division or the Ministry of Information as a coordinating agency for RTI across government. The MoPA is likely to have more traction than the Ministry of Information by virtue of its own role as a cadre controlling authority in Bangladesh.

3. Vision

14. The RTI Vision of Bangladesh is 'An open Government connecting citizens'. Or 'An information-powered nation'

4. Strategic Objectives

4.1 Programmatic Results, Indicators and Activities

Demand-side

Result 1: Citizens are progressively aware of RTI Act, process of using it, and are willing to file for information

Indicator: Percentage increase of RTI awareness of citizens. Baseline: xxx. Target: xxx

15. Problem analysis: Despite the effort of the IC in raising the level of knowledge among citizens the current awareness of RTI remains very low. In the rural area the awareness level is particularly low given the fact that service delivery agencies are not accountable to citizens and poorly resourced. Even in the urban areas the application of RTI is noticeably insignificant, and disappointingly uninterested among groups such as journalists, professional groups and civil society organizations, who are traditionally the major exponents of RTI Act.

16. Activities

- a) Form a group of advisors in every district from among the Government officials, lawyers, journalists or civil society members for providing necessary guidance and advices to citizens for filing request, appeal and complaint
- b) Form RTI strategic partnerships among institutions (NGOs, private organizations, professionals, civil society groups) with communication skills and sustainable outreach programmes to citizens to initiate, augment and scale-up awareness campaign on RTI
- c) Undertake audience (e.g., farmers, students, women, people with disabilities) assessment and analysis in order to identify target-group specific communication strategy for RTI partners (NGOs, private organizations, professionals, civil society)
- d) Develop diverse but relevant communication materials (poster, leaflets, TV adverts, etc.) and approaches for various partners to reach identified target-groups at different times to make them aware of the RTI provisions, its applications and benefits.
- e) Assist RTI partners to operate centers (intermediaries, clinics, circles, booths, internet cafes, business outlets) to reach citizens with the materials on how to access government services and administrative recourse in the event of failure to provide information.

Result 2: Media, National and Regional NGOs with outreach network, civil society actors and political organizations practice and promote RTI (existence, benefits, use)

Indicator: Increased frequency of RTI promotional activity (NGOs) or coverage (media). Baseline: xxx
Target: xxx

17. Problem analysis: RTI related activities have remained confined to a very small segment of Bangladeshi society, with very little involvement and interaction at the grassroots level. The evolution of RTI 'movement' in Bangladesh has been 'supply driven', that is, promoted by donors and donor-funded CSOs and lacked 'traction' with the general public. Lack of 'buy-in' meant that RTI Act was perceived negatively by both the major constituencies of RTI, journalists and NGOs. Even though the political parties committed to the promotion of RTI in their manifestoes, they failed to draw up a realistic strategy enabling the mainstreaming of access to information policy. So far the public has not benefited from the RTI Act and doesn't have much faith in future success.

18. Activities

- a) Involve Government agencies where possible to promote RTI. The Ministry of Information has its nationwide publicity network; The Deputy Commissioners/UNOs can also promote RTI in their jurisdiction
- b) Involve national and regional NGOs in rolling out extensive advocacy programme on the RTI Act, mainly focusing on the service delivery agencies at the lower administrative tiers, in order to create sufficient 'demand' for information from the general public.
- c) Undertake door-to-door campaigns on certain issues, for example, safety-net programmes involving low-income households, which will create a need for information on the basic services which are being provided by the various agencies of the government.
- d) Educate citizens, particularly poor communities with limited literacy on RTI in NGO-driven existing grassroots consultation framework (weekly/monthly meetings) using communication materials as part of development activities.
- e) Encourage newspaper and television owners and senior management to become 'supporters' of RTI Act by encouraging their journalists to apply the Act through activities, such as, in-depth investigative journalism.
- f) Encourage popular television and radio programmes such as talk show, success stories and documentaries highlighting the use of RTI Act using communication materials.
- g) Encourage media and civil society organizations to monitor and report widely on the RTI pledges by political parties in their manifestoes and their fulfillment through policy formulation and implementation.

Supply-side

Result 3: Designated Officers have immediate access to RTI service delivery skills (materials, CD, online training)

Indicator: Percentage of Designated Officers trained on RTI at any time is continuously increasing.
Baseline: xxx. **Target:** Rising trend.

19. Problem analysis: Despite the growing number of Designated Officers (presently above 14,000??) who are being appointed by the Government under the RTI Act the challenge is to empower them to effectively discharge their statutory role due to factors such as frequent transfers, competing work demands, non-existent support system and lack of knowledge of RTI Act, among others.

20. Activities

- a) Develop an appropriate database containing up-to-date information on the Designated Officers, including a short profile highlighting previous employment record, training received and existing job description, among other items. Also develop a standard information package containing items, such as, the RTI Act, rules, regulations, a handbook on the RTI commission and its functions and guidelines for each Designated Officer. Furthermore, ensure that the Designated Officers have access to such information package either by way of a hand-over to the new officer in the case of a transfer or by way of direct transmission from the IC within one month of the date of assuming responsibility of Designated Officer. Conduct regular training for Designated Officers at different levels, such as, national, district and upazila. IC needs to develop a standard training module for the Designated Officers which the Government and non-government training institutions can follow in RTI training. The training courses could use different medium, such as, traditional classroom context, distance learning using audio and print materials, CD-based computer lessons and internet/on-line.

- b) Develop and distribute print and DVD materials on the roles and duties, application process, appeal process, information delivery process, as stated in the RTI Act and examples of key decisions of the IC. Such materials should be given to the Designated Officers within one month of them assuming their responsibility.
- c) Establish a well-resourced help desk at the IC and other key administrative centers, which will respond to queries from Designated Officers by way of letters, telephone calls, email messages, Skype calls, and live on-line chat.
- d) Establish an interactive website for exchange of experience between Designated Officers and practitioners. Such a website could also contain latest IT technology to enable dissemination of information on RTI.

Result 4: More citizens-friendly and efficient technology (cell phone, internet, etc.) for filing RTI request is accessible

Indicator: Number of citizens filing for information is increasing. Baseline: xxx. Target: Rising trend

21. Problem analysis: Given the prevalent ‘culture’ of secrecy the assumption on the part of ordinary citizens is that they are not entitled to information from public bodies. The legal onus is presumed to be on the citizens to show that they require the information for legitimate reason. Furthermore, due to many ‘gatekeepers’, citizens face harassment when trying to obtain information from public offices. Due to the RTI Act the situation has changed and citizens have been legally empowered, and the onus has shifted to the ‘givers’ of information – the presumption is that information will have to be supplied on filing of requests under RTI Act. The challenge facing the implementation of such a request process is the high incidence of illiteracy. This is particularly acute among the poor and the marginalized communities in both rural and urban areas. It is important that new and suitable ‘tools’ are found for citizens to request information from different agencies. New and innovative technology (such as, mobile telephony, internet) is now available for citizens to file requests under the RTI Act.

22. Activities

Short-term

- a) Develop bilingual interactive websites with pro-active disclosures and filing options
- b) Establish citizen charters and updatable information board to know the names and mobile phone numbers of the service providers’ including the Designated Officers at service points as well as district and upazila web portals
- c) Introduce bilingual SMS system to respond to queries (call center based request system through a web portal)
- d) Introduce cost-free messaging system
- e) Introduce help desk at each service points equipped with visible information including at UP level

Long-term

- f) Examine the feasibility of establishing a comprehensive web portal for RTI in the country as a whole with provisions for information, filing, appeal, and response through call centers using internet/mobile phones.

Result 5: Back-end systems at the most frequently-visited departments are in use for efficient RTI service delivery.

Indicator: Number of back-end systems integrated with RTI portal increased. Baseline: Agree on a benchmark. Target: 5 (e.g., real estate records, car registration, education, pension, national ID) by 2018.

23. Problem analysis: Generally, Bangladesh's records management is either non-existent or very weak. The existing system of records management is very traditional and still predominantly undertaken manually despite the introduction of ICT. But over the last decade, particularly the last five years, ICT has started to make headway under the 'Digital Bangladesh' policy initiative of the present government. Nevertheless, due to lack of specific legal framework the process of information collection, storage and retrieval lacks overall coordination and policy direction. RTI Act 2009 provides sufficient legal basis for initial activities to commence in records management. The IC has also formulated an Information Preservation and Management Regulations in 2010. This needs to be updated by incorporating the modern management tools and procedures.. As manual data is time consuming web-based will be more appropriate. Departments that have large public interface (e.g., land records) deserve special attention for digitalization.

24. Activities

- a) Develop back-end systems for (for example) real estate (land, apartments), car, birth registration, education, pension, etc.
- b) Integrate selected back-end systems with the (to be developed) national web portal for informing, filing, appealing, and responding on RTI through call centers using internet/mobile phones.

Result 6: Selected Government Departments which regularly offer service delivery at different levels and points (e.g., health & education) increasingly practice proactive disclosures.

Indicator 1: Number of pro-active disclosures available at public offices (e.g., Health & Education) increased at all levels (national, district, upazila and union parishad). **Baseline:** Agree on a benchmark;

Target: As agreed through consultation with relevant ministries.

Indicator 2: Number of pro-active disclosures by public offices available as e-services increased at all levels (national, district, upazila and union parishad). **Baseline:** Agree on a benchmark; **Target:** As agreed through consultation with relevant ministries.

25. Problem analysis: Despite tremendous effort by successive governments to provide increased and better quality services to citizens many, particularly the poorer sections, are deprived of their entitlement. This is largely due to the fact that they are ignorant of their entitlements. It is to be noted that the level of awareness has gradually increased due to concerted effort of successive governments, NGOs and media but there is still much room for improvement. It is in this context that the enactment of the RTI Act has become particularly pertinent and its effective implementation can address the issue of 'ignorance' by way of proactive disclosure of available services. Proactive disclosure of information will address the issue of 'ignorance' if two issues are factored in: target groups and appropriate means.

26. Research findings indicate that there are some segments of the population which are lagging behind in receiving services such as health care and education. Such groups are: (i) ultra-poor and marginalized, single and divorced women, Dalits, members of various minority groups, among others. These groups are difficult to reach given their socio-economic status. Therefore, any proactive disclosure of information vis a vis these groups will have to address the dual challenges of 'how to reach these groups?' and 'how to encourage them to avail basic services?'

27. Activities

- a) Prepare a list of target groups who are entitled to such basic services. Then identify the various obstacles which deprive them from receiving those basic services.

- b) Identify the means (for example, community radio, traditional songs, theatre groups, outreach network) through which these target groups can be made aware of their entitlement bearing in mind the obstacles which have already been identified.
- c) Develop capacity at the facility levels (district, upazila and UP-level service points) to effectively track RTI requests and dissemination of information.
- d) Information Ministry to effectively tracks and monitor such RTI requests and share this information with the IC and others.
- e) IC to develop capacity to effectively track such RTI applications, particularly from the target groups, and subsequent appeals to the IC as the appellate body.
- f) IC to establish a national resource center (web-based, printed and CD/DVD materials) on RTI, particularly proactive disclosure, in order to respond from both the supply and demand side.
- g) The IC, Cabinet Division and A2I Programme have developed a guideline for proactive disclosure. This needs to be notified and institutionalized by ministries which enjoy a high level of government-citizens interface and encourage adoption of these guidelines by those ministries.
- h) IC to develop RTI professionals in Bangladesh (trainers, researchers, IT professionals)

Result 7: A policy reform proposal is in place to enable RTI to function without frictions with existing inhibiting rules, practices, and laws.

Indicator: Proposals for policy amendments are with the Government for consideration.

The plan will identify administrative rules and practices that impede the institutionalization of RTI Act in Bangladesh, such as the conduct rules of civil servants, the manual of office procedures, and other rules/laws that need reforming if RTI Act is to work well in the country.

- a) Undertake research (desk and empirical) to determine the various administrative rules and practices contradicting RTI practices.
- b) Prepare a policy proposal for amendment of rule, procedures and laws.
- c) Encourage and support the Law Commission and appropriate ‘think tanks’ and advocacy organizations to undertake research on specific issues and to put forward reform proposals.

Create forums and platforms to bring together different stakeholders (relevant ministries, Information and Law Commission, ‘think tanks’, advocacy and media organizations) to demand rationalization of laws and policies in relation to RTI Act.

4.2 Management Objective

Result 8: An effective and increasingly sustainable organizational framework at national level is in place for the roll-out of RTI systems and mechanisms across public offices, citizens and non-government entities.

Indicator: A RTI Cell attached to the Cabinet Division has assumed office to implement the project, and a suitable national agency is chosen as custodian of RTI in Bangladesh for mainstreaming RTI activities across government.

The Ministry of Information is responsible for providing support to the IC as the former is the only entity (other than the IC) which is closely involved with the implementation of the RTI Act. The IC sets in place various policies, rules and regulations for the implementation of the RTI Act, but given the fact that it is fundamentally an independent appellate body situated outside the Government it, therefore, cannot easily lead the process of implementation being ‘outside’ the sphere of the Executive. However, the strategic objectives elaborated above have touched different ministries and district and upazila-level administrators, and their activities can only be coordinated by an appropriate and competent agency. The Cabinet Division appears to be the most suitable entity to carry out this coordinating function, as it is responsible for the overall coordination of the different ministries, district and upazila administrators directly.

28. Activities

- a) Establish an RTI Cell/Unit with technical and administrative staff attached to the Cabinet Division headed by a Joint Secretary as the Project Director and reportable to a Steering Committee represented by Secretaries/Additional Secretaries of relevant ministries, civil society/NGOs and private sector.
- b) Form a Management Committee comprising the Project Director and one Member from each relevant Ministry (with service outlets at the grassroots level) and the Ministry of Information as ‘focal points’ with the status of a Deputy Secretary with ToR for the Chair and Members.
- c) Equip the Office of the Project Director with office equipments, furniture and car.
- d) Develop an annual plan based on the strategic plan involving the key implementing partners.
- e) Provide capacity building to the Members of the Management Committee.
- f) Develop and introduce an intranet-based monitoring system for RTI Unit/Cell.
- g) Develop an interactive website for the RTI cell.
- h) Propose a suitable national agency to mainstream the activities under the RTI Act and become the ultimate custodian of national RTI web portal after a public discourse.
- i) Seek resources from the Government of Bangladesh and Development Partners and TAPP for approval from ADP.

5. Implementation Plan

29. The Implementation Plan outlined in Annex 2 lists the milestones to be achieved for each Activity and broadly indicates the timeline and the responsibility. The Plan will also be the basis for activity monitoring and periodic reporting on the progress. Once the Implementation Plan is approved, the proposed RTI Cell may work out an Operational Plan before the implementation starts.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

30. The RTI strategic plan is subject to monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The basic monitoring framework (Annex 3), as below, is based on Results, Indicators, and Activities along with their milestones proposed in the plan. Internal or external monitoring will use this framework to gather information and assess the progress of the implementation and make necessary remedial measures. To that end, the framework helps to document progress against plan, deviations and the causes behind deviation for each Activity and Result. Upon adoption of the Strategic Plan, when the real scope and administrative anchorage are clear, the implementing agency may develop a research design to support this monitoring framework.

31. Given the Indicators for each Action and Results, the Director, assisted by his/her Deputy and MIS Officer, will monitor the activities of the organizations using an intranet system. Through this system, the Project Director can monitor 'real-time' what has been disclosed pro-actively and what was demanded (filed) by the citizens, the nature and quality of response, and whether any appeal was made. An auto-generated report based on 'indicators' will provide regular 'reports' on the progress of the implementation. The respective focal points in the different Ministries can also have access to this information.

32. Upon successful implementation of the monitoring framework the implementing agency will have sufficient information to prepare half-yearly and annual reports.

33. The project will support a yearly external review of the implementation. The findings of the review will become an essential part of the yearly report to the Steering Committee.

7. Challenges

Frequent transfers of Designated Officers and deficit of RTI skills

34. Having RTI-skilled Designated Officers in place remains a challenging task as transfers are routine activities of the Government. The possibility that the new Designated Officers will have low RTI skills as all civil servants generally have not been given such skills through training. As such, the issue of capacity building will be a continuous need and existing resources of the IC may not be enough to address this issue.

Political commitment

35. Even though the RTI Act is being implemented the provision of required resources will depend on the political will of the present and future governments to sustain the efforts initiated so far. Donor support will be required for the foreseeable future in order to effectively implement the RTI Act.

8. Conclusion

36. The Strategic Plan outlined above is a means to implement the RTI Act 2009. It is quite obvious that the success of the Plan will depend on various public institutions (relevant ministries, IC), private sector, civil society and NGOs in Bangladesh. The political party in power will have to present a 'vision' and bring to bear sufficient political 'will' and allocate adequate resources to achieve the objectives of this Plan. Above all, in order to ensure success of this Plan the Government will have to declare its intention to attach 'top' national priority to this Plan, among many other competing policy initiatives.

ANNEX 1

RTI (Information Publication and Publication) Regulations 2010

Bangladesh Gazette

Monday, July 4, 2011

DRAFT

Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh

Information Commission

Archaeology Building

F-4/A, Agargaon Administrative Area, Dhaka

SRO No. 412-Act/2010

1. Name of Regulations: This Regulations will be named as Right to Information (Information Publication and Publicization) Regulations, 2010.

2. Definitions: -----

3. Publication and Publication of Information:

- (1) Every authority shall publish and publicize information within the time limit mentioned in the column 2 of the Schedule 1 and Schedule 2.
- (2) Every authority shall publish a directory containing names, designations and addresses of its Designated Officers and Appellate Authorities in the beginning of every calendar year.
- (3) Every authority shall publish information related to the types of information requested to them by the citizens in every 3 (three) months.

Schedule-1

[See Regulations 3(1)]

Sl.	Description of Information	Highest time limit for disclosure	Medium of disclosure of Information
1.	Organogram, description of activities, rules of business and responsibilities of authorities	3 months	Notice board, printed copy in every office/information providing unit, website
2.	Powers and responsibilities of concerned authorities and their officials	3 months	Printed copy in every office/information providing unit, website
3.	Process of decision making and means of ensuring accountability and supervision	3 months	Printed copy in every office/information providing unit, website
4.	Directory of officers and employees	2 months	Printed copy in every office/information providing unit, website
5.	Act, rules-regulations, instructions, manuals, documents and records preserved and used by authorities for delivering business	3 months	Printed copy in every office/information providing unit, website

ANNEX 2

Implementation Plan

Demand-side

Result 1: Citizens are progressively aware of RTI Act, process of using it, and are willing to file for information

Indicator: Percentage increase of RTI awareness of citizens. Baseline: xxx. Target: xxx

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Facilitate RTI-specific strategic partnerships among institutions (NGOs, private organizations, professionals, civil society groups)	A RTI forum/network with a secretariat at of the institutional member formed (on rotational basis) and agrees on working together.						IC
2	Undertake audience (e.g., farmers, students, women people with disabilities) analysis to identify target-group specific communication strategy for RTI partners	An audience-specific communication strategy (for whom, which message, how to reach, feedback) is available for implementation.						IC
3	Develop differentiated but relevant communication materials (poster, leaflets, TV adverts, etc.) and approaches for various partners to reach identified target-groups	Audience specific communication materials are available to support the communication strategy.						IC
4	Assist RTI partners to operate centers (intermediaries, clinics, circles, booths, internet cafes, business outlets)	RTI partners organized by the Network/Forum are operating RTI centers.						IC

Result 2: Media, National and Regional NGOs with outreach network, civil society actors and political organizations practice and promote RTI (existence, benefits, use)

Indicator: Increased frequency of RTI promotional activity (NGOs) or coverage (media). Baseline: xxx Target: xxx

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Involve national and regional NGOs in rolling out extensive advocacy programme on the RTI Act, mainly focusing on the service delivery agencies at the lower administrative tiers, in order to create sufficient 'demand' for information from the general public.	The citizens in general confirm the existence of RTI Act and can mention the administrative agencies they can approach for information.						Cell
2	Undertake door-to-door campaigns on certain issues, for example, availability of safety-net programmes involving low-income households	The low income households entitled to safety net programs can mention where to go to claim.						Cell
3	Educate citizens, particularly poor communities with limited literacy, on RTI in NGO-driven existing grassroots (weekly/monthly meetings) using communication materials.	NGO workers discuss RTI issues using communication materials in their regular group meetings.						IC
4	Encourage newspaper and television owners and senior management to become 'supporters' of RTI Act through in-depth investigative journalism.	At least 10 investigative journalism driven reports are published/aired.						IC
5	Encourage popular television and radio programmes such as talk show, success stories and documentaries highlighting the use of RTI Act	The television and radios have screened/aired at least 10 good practices and problem cases and discussed critical issues in talk shows.						IC
6	Encourage media and civil society organizations to monitor and report widely on the RTI pledges by political parties in their manifestoes and their fulfillment	Media and civil society organizations prepares periodic 'RTI Watch' report highlighting what 'promised' by political parties and what 'prevailed'.						IC

Supply-side

Result 3: Designated Officers have immediate access to RTI service delivery skills (materials, CD, online training)

Indicator: Percentage of Designated Officers trained on RTI at any time is continuously increasing. Baseline: xxx. Target: Rising trend.

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Develop an appropriate database containing up-to-date information on the Designated Officers (short profile, employment record, training received)	A database (daily updated) is available online and can be accessed.						IC
2	Develop a standard information package (RTI Act, rules, regulations, a handbook on the RTI commission and its functions and guidelines for each Designated Officer).	A standard info package (soft and hard copy) for Designated Officers is available for delivery.						IC
3	Ensure that the Designated Officers have access to such information package (hand-over or mail)	The Designated Officers received the information package within one month of being assigned to the task.						IC
3	Conduct regular training for Designated Officers at different levels, such as, National, District and Upazila (traditional classroom context, distance learning using audio and print materials, CD-based computer lessons and internet/on-line).	The Designated Officers at different levels received IC-organized RTI trainings following a declared training programme (different levels, mode of delivery).						IC
4	Develop and distribute print and DVD materials on the roles and duties, application process, appeal process, information delivery process, as stated in the RTI Act and examples of key decisions of the IC.	The Designated Officers received print and DVD materials on how the citizens will apply and appeal with guidance to comply.						IC
5	Establish a well-resourced help desk at the IC and other key administrative centers, which will respond to queries from Designated Officers (letters, telephone calls, email messages, Skype calls, and live on-line chat).	The Designated Officers are receiving guidance from 'Help Desk' of respective ministries and IC on online or messaging or Skype or chatting basis or mobile phone.						Cell
6	Establish an interactive website for exchange of experience between Designated Officers and practitioners.	The IC and ministerial website has provision for communication between Designated Officer and Help Desk						Cell

Result 4: More citizens-friendly and efficient technology (cell phone, internet, etc.) for filing RTI request is accessible

Indicator: Number of citizens filing for information is increasing. Baseline: xxx. Target: Rising trend

Activities

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Develop bilingual interactive websites with pro-active disclosures and filing options	Citizens can access information (pro-disclosed pro-actively) and file for information from website.						Cell
2	Establish citizen charters and updatable information board to know the name and mobile phone numbers of the service providers' including the Designated Officers at service points	All public offices with service delivery points at local level have citizens charter and updated information board responding to FAQs (health, education, etc.)						Cell
3	Introduce bilingual cost-free SMS system to respond to queries (call center based request system through a web portal)	Citizens receive responses within three business days after cost-free submission.						Cell
4	Introduce help desk at each service points equipped with visible information including at UP level	Citizens are receiving information from each service delivery point at upazila and UP (Help Desk and 'Help Person' respectively) visible or on inquiry.						Cell
5	Examine the feasibility of establishing a comprehensive web portal for RTI in the country as a whole with provisions for information, filing, appeal, and response through call center and internet.	A feasibility report and a strategic plan is available for consideration.						Cell

Result 5: Back-end systems at the most frequently-visited departments are in use for efficient RTI service delivery.

Indicator: Number of back-end systems integrated with RTI portal increased. Baseline: Agree on a benchmark. Target: 5 (e.g., real estate records, car registration, education, pension, national ID) by 2018.

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Develop back-end systems for real estate (land, apartments, car, birth registration, education, pension, etc.)	Selected back-end systems exist and downloadable by competent authorities.						Cell
2	Integrate selected back-end systems with the (to be developed) national web portal for informing, filing, appealing, and responding on RTI through call center and internet.	Available back-end systems are compatible with a standard web portal for possible (allowable) downloading and filing.						Cell

Result 6: Selected Government Departments which regularly offer service delivery at different levels and points (e.g., health & education) increasingly practice proactive disclosures.

Indicator 1: Number of pro-active disclosures available at public offices (e.g., Health & Education) increased at all levels (national, district, upazila and union parishad). Baseline: Agree on a benchmark;

Target: As agreed through consultation with relevant ministries.

Indicator 2: Number of pro-active disclosures by public offices (e.g., Health & Education) available as E-services increased at all levels (national, district, upazila and union parishad). Baseline: Agree on a benchmark; Target: As agreed through consultation with relevant ministries.

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Prepare a list of target groups who are entitled to basic services such as healthcare and education and identify the various obstacles which deprive them from receiving those basic services.	A survey among target group produced a list of obstacles hindering access to basic services (health and education)						Cell
2	Identify the means (for example, community radio, traditional songs, theatre groups, outreach network) to make the people aware of their entitlement to overcome possible obstacles.	A matrix shows obstacles with communication tools to reach the target groups in response.						IC
3	Develop capacity at the facility levels (district, upazila and UP-level service points) to effectively track RTI requests and dissemination of information.	The respective supervisor and Designated Officers have got a list of applications, appeals.						Cell
4	Information Ministry to effectively tracks and monitor such RTI requests and share this information with the Information Commission and others.	The relevant staff members of the ministry received training and have communication systems (hardware, software and connectivity) to track applications and appeals.						MoI
5	Information Commission to develop capacity to effectively track such RTI applications, particularly from the target groups, and subsequent appeals to the IC as the appellate body.	The relevant staff members of the secretariat received training and have communication systems (hardware, software and connectivity) to track applications and appeals.						MoI
6	IC to establish a national resource center (web-based, printed and CD/DVD materials) on RTI, particularly proactive disclosure, in order to respond from both the supply and demand side.	Citizens can download information and ministries can upload information.						IC
7	IC to develop concepts and guidelines for pro-active disclosures for ministries which enjoy a high level of government-citizens interface and encourage adoption of these guidelines by those ministries.	Concepts and guidelines are available and shared with respective ministries.						IC
8	IC to develop RTI professionals in Bangladesh (trainers, researchers, IT professionals)	A website of RTI professionals trained by IC and others is ...						IC

Result 7: A policy reform proposal is in place to enable RTI to function without frictions with existing inhibiting rules, practices, and laws.

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Undertake research (desk and empirical) to determine the various administrative rules and practices contradicting RTI practices.	A research report with specific recommendations for policy changes is available.						Cell
2	Prepare a policy proposal for amendment of rule, procedures and laws.	List of amendments are submitted to the Government for consideration.						Cell
3	Encourage and support the Law Commission and appropriate 'think tanks' and advocacy organizations to undertake research on specific issues and to put forward reform proposals.	Law Commission, 'Think Tanks' and advocacy organizations regularly receive reports, case studies and policy proposals for deliberations and discourse.						Cell
3	Create forums and platforms to bring together different stakeholders (relevant ministries, Information and Law Commission, 'think tanks', advocacy and media organizations) to demand rationalization of laws and policies in relation to RTI Act.	At least two national level workshop/seminars held per years to discuss progress, critical issues and propose changes in the practice with RTI.						IC

Result 8: An effective and increasingly sustainable organizational framework at national level is in place for the roll-out of RTI systems and mechanisms across public offices, citizens and non-government entities.

	Activities	Milestone	Time Frame					Resp
			Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	
1	Establish an RTI Cell/Unit with technical and administrative staff attached to the Cabinet Division headed by a Joint Secretary as the Project Director and reportable to a Steering Committee represented by Secretaries/Additional Secretaries of relevant ministries, Civil society/NGOs, Private Sector.	A cell headed by a Joint Secretary as Project Director and technical staff (according to organogram) is in place. A Steering Committee exists.						Cabinet Division
2	Form a Management Committee comprising the Project Director and one Member from each relevant Ministry (with service outlets at the grassroots level) and the Ministry of Information as 'focal points' with the status of a Deputy Secretary with TOR for the Chair and Members	Committee is approved by the Cabinet Secretary and TOR approved						Project Director
3	Equip the Office of the Project Director with office equipments, furniture, and car.	The Office of the Project Director possesses the office equipment, furniture, transport and space according to predefined needs.						Project Director
4	Develop an annual plan based on the strategic plan involving the key implementing partners.	Annual plan approved by the Steering Committee is available for implementation.						Project Director
5	Provide capacity building to the Members of the Management Committee	The Members received training or exposure to RTI practices at home and overseas.						Cell
6	Develop and introduce an intranet-based monitoring system for RTI Unit/Cell.	Real-time monitoring is possible and auto-generated reports are available.						Cell
7	Develop an interactive website for the RTI cell.	Website is can be visited.						Cell
8	Propose a suitable national agency to mainstream the activities under the RTI Act and become the ultimate custodian of national RTI web portal after a public discourse.	A comparative analysis of relevant national agencies regarding their suitability for the custodian of RTI Act is available.						Cell
9	Seek resources from the Government of Bangladesh and Development Partners and TAPP for approval from ADP.	Both Government and development partners committed resources.						Cell

ANNEX 3

Basic Monitoring Framework

	Outcomes/Activities	Indicators/ Milestones	Achievement	Variation	Causality	Recommendations
A.	Programmatic					
1.	Supply-side					
1.1	Result 1					
1.1.1	Activity 1					
2.	Demand-side					
2.1	Result 1					
2.2	Activity 1					
B.	Management-oriented					
1	Result					
1.1	Activity 1					