

One day workshop at Katni, 15th May, 2002

Venue: Community Hall

Chief areas of discussion:

1. Importance and value of the Right to Information:

The first part of the workshop was devoted to discussion on how Right to Information was important with respect to the survival of the needy in society in our country. By adding and strengthening transparency, accountability and participation in decision-making, the right to information works as a strong tool towards preventing corruption in society and towards deepening democracy as such. This attribute of the right to information is very relevant at the grassroots in the country as the omnipresent corruption, from Municipal Council to Gram Panchayat, denies people their rightful livelihood (for example, a Municipal sweeper pays a small part of his pay to a destitute in society for doing the actual work and keeps all the rest to himself) and prevents the proper implementation of developmental projects/schemes of the government for the benefit of the people. Denial of information amounts to the denial of fundamental rights of the people and a mockery of democracy. It is therefore, imperative that a proper system be established written in law to setup an effective and strong right to information for the people. A presentation was made on the contents of such a law that will enable the people to get information from the government effectively. A law will provide the strongest protection and implementation mechanism for the fundamental right to information.

2. Madhya Pradesh and RTI:

Madhya Pradesh has an administrative setup through executive orders in various departments catering to access to information, but the problem is the lack of a strong foundation for this system, in the absence of a law on the subject. There are some basic problems with this system right now, which make the system a non-starter. No one knows about the orders giving effect to access to information from the departments, even government officials like the District Commissioner does not know about them. There is no knowledge about the contents of these orders. This lack of knowledge and awareness about the orders have hampered any progress with respect to access to information by the people, activists, journalists, etc. Certain executive orders in certain departments were presented to the audience. Departments like, Local governance-Panchayati Raj, Food Distribution, Mining, Women and Child welfare, etc., were covered in the workshop. The participants found this most useful and they expressed the need for a copy of all these orders in their work.

3. Taking RTI forward in Katni:

Aware of the importance of the issue to their region and work, the way forward with respect to campaign on the issue was discussed in length in the last session of the workshop. It was suggested that the journalists of Katni form a group to take the issue forward. The group could start by publishing and disseminating the executive orders across the region. They will have further meetings and workshops on the RTI to discuss how best to take the issue forward. CHRI would form the

resource and knowledge base for this group by providing its expertise in terms of information about RTI that will be required by the group from time to time. A decision to form such a group was taken by the journalists, whose main focus will be to promote the issue of RTI in the region. How they will device the effort will be worked out through meetings of the group members.