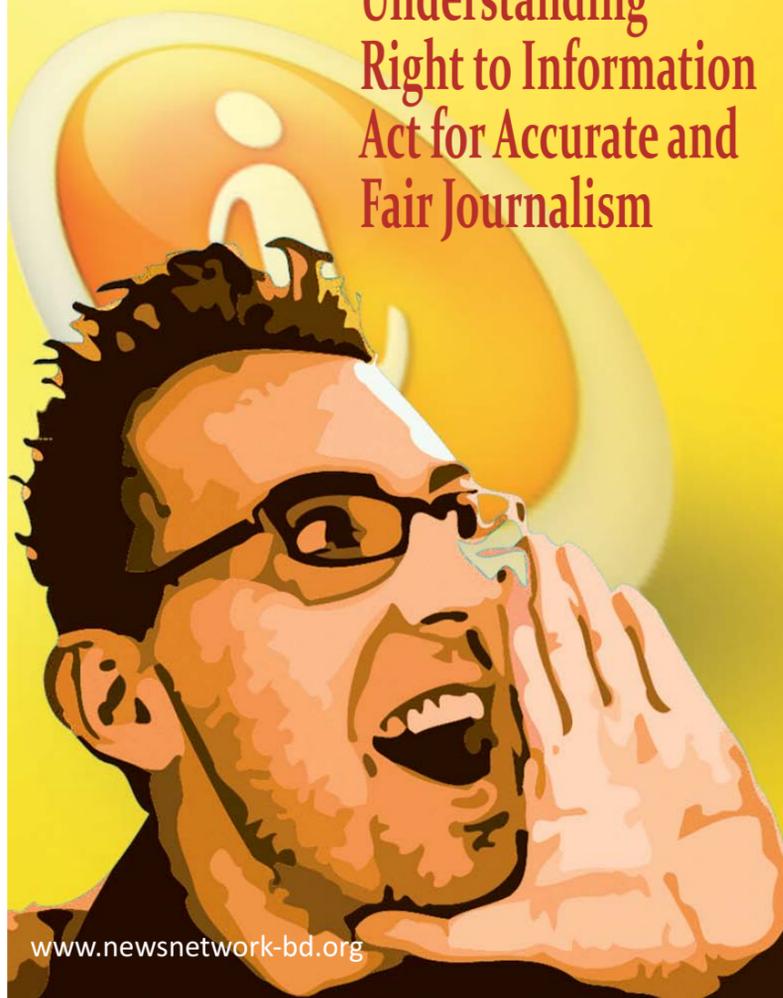


Understanding Right to Information Act for Accurate and Fair Journalism



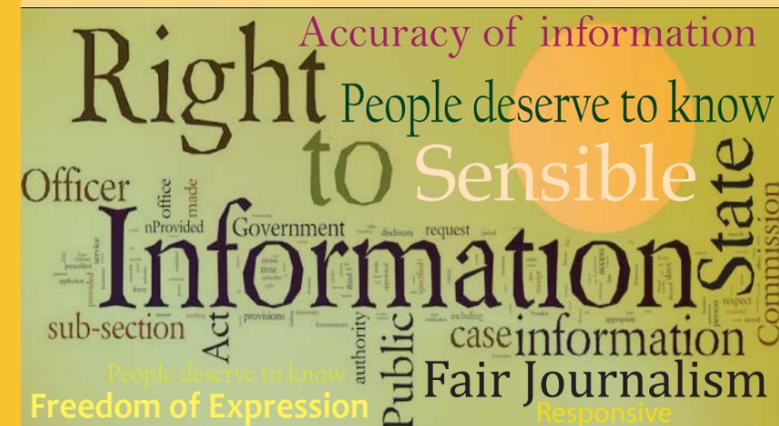
www.newsnetwork-bd.org



A News Network Programme, supported by UNESCO Bangladesh has a right to information (RTI) law, enacted unanimously by parliament in 2009. It has ensured a citizen's right to get information from government as well as non-government organisations. The main purpose of the RTI, the (Bangladesh Right to Information Act 2009), is to make both the government and the NGOs more transparent, accountable and responsible to the citizens. The citizens of the country now have a legal tool to try to know how the taxpayers' money and donors' funds are spent by the government and the NGOs. The use of the RTI is thus expected to reduce corruption and establish good governance, which is essential for making democracy meaningful. Journalists' understanding of the RTI is poor, though they have welcomed it. The RTI is considered a useful tool for journalists to gather accurate information so they can pursue fair journalism.

Nearly four years into its enactment, journalists' understanding of the RTI is not adequate. They are yet to realise the full potential of the Act. The RTI can be best used for investigative journalism. But many journalists still wrongly think that the RTI is only for gathering information for daily spot reporting.

News Network believes that the programme on the RTI is relevant to Bangladesh context. Convinced that it will help Bangladesh journalists understand the law better, News Network has decided to implement this programme with assistance from UNESCO.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

- The programme seeks to make journalists understand the real potential and strength of the RTI
- To promote accuracy of information and fair journalism



People deserve to know

- Emphasis will be given on the use of the RTI in investigative journalism, follow-up and in-depth reporting. The greater use of the RTI to obtain documents or to have access to documents and papers will enrich a report and make it more objective. So, the objective is to help journalists gain more skills on how to use the RTI in journalism.

How RTI is related to investigative, follow-up and in-depth reports

- A key objective of investigative journalism is to expose the wrongdoings by a syndicate of people involved in corruption. Such syndicate acts against the public interests and the welfare of people.
- In order to expose such misdeeds, journalists must gather dependable information which are usually kept secret and those involved in such acts try their best as long as they can to provide the information.

But the RTI has changed the situation. Journalists doing investigative or in-depth reporting now can use it to seek the relevant documents in all formats, including films and CDs. They can then ask for photocopies or duplicate CDs/films. This is a big leap towards establishing media people's right to information and documents relevant to their works.

- The RTI can have a positive role in reducing corruption. It can be applied in bigger projects which deal with poverty alleviation, improving good governance, transparency, accountability, human rights etc.

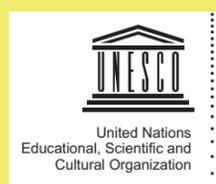
Access to credible and quality information is still far from ideal for many across the globe, though we all need reliable, authentic information to assess our situation. What about you? Can you make the right decisions?



Thus journalists by using the RTI can play a greater role in empowering the citizens by raising the level of their knowledge and information.

The Programme

Currently supported by



News Network envisions a stable nation, where citizens are aware of their rights, enjoy freedom of expression, live with dignity and enjoy gender equality and where the media are free.

It promotes freedom of press and expression, human rights along with the rights of the minorities and ethnic groups and access to information. It promotes good governance, accountability and transparency at all levels. It also seeks to develop the capacity of media and bring in more women in journalism.

OUR AGENDA

- To promote freedom of expression, freedom of media, human rights and gender equality
- Work for developing the professional capacity of journalists and promotion of investigative journalism
- Encourage young women to take up journalism as a profession
- Promote investigative journalism and right to information
- Sensitise media people on crucial social issues, including Right to the Information Act, democracy, good governance, transparency and promotion of access to justice
- Motivate children and youths to build themselves as good citizens
- Promote secularism, tolerance and peace in society, and also the rights of ethnic and indigenous people
- Organise dialogues, seminars, workshops and discussion meetings on issues of national importance.