

Orissa Right to Information: RTI Fellowship

Kalyan Anand- Orissa Soochana Adhikar Mancha

Site: Bhubaneswar

Funding so far: \$13,600

Years supported: 4

Scope: Empower citizens, prevent corruption with RTI

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The 2005 Right to information Act has turned out to be a powerful tool against corruption. Despite massive attacks by vested interests - including intimidation with murder of the RTI activists - the Act continues to inspire and empower. Having seen corruption as the major obstacle to the various anti-poverty programs, IFA is supporting several Fellowships to promote awareness and effective utilization of RTI. Kalyan Singh is part of a highly dedicated team of volunteers and activists working on this issue in Orissa. They are guided by Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan, Delhi, who originally recommended this Fellowship.

The OSAM mission is two fold:

1. Demand transparency in the administration
2. Empower the common man in the villages to standup against corruption and demand their rights

They have evolved an innovative approach by creating **RTI clinics**. The team is now operating one such clinic each in five districts. The clinic relies heavily on local volunteers to extend continuous hands-on support to the villagers in filing RTI applications and conducting rural awareness campaigns. The clinics are modeled on the basis of local ownership and OSAM only provides technical or logistical support.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM RTI APPLICATIONS IN 6 DISTRICTS

Khurda (Srikanta)

- Illegal appointment to Anganwadi work was stopped and the deserving candidate got the job. The person who was using the forged mark sheet with political influence to secure the position had to withdraw.
- An unfinished road got completed and the assistant engineer was fined Rs. 25000 for delay in providing the sample of the road as per the RTI application.

Sambalpur (Anand)

- 7 families got their pending Indira Awas Yojna funds.

Kendrapada (Banamber)

- The water supply was restored and the pump repaired.

Dhenkanal (Kalyan)

- Ensured that the Market yard is opening regularly so the farmers can sell their paddy to the government. They had to do a road blockade to force the administration to fulfill this simple and legitimate demand.
- Ensured that the IAY money of 32 households was released. The OSAM volunteers also supervised the process to ensure that the houses got completed.



Women marching for RTI and NREGA

- Kalyan led a demonstration of Juang tribes to regularize their land pattas and the district administration has promised to complete this in 60 days time.
- Two villages got their tube wells using RTI after a request that had been ignored for 30 years!

Puri (Santosh)

- Kalyan helped Santosh file RTI application relating to a half built Primary health center in Kanas block. It prompted the authorities to rectify their mistake and tell the contractor to complete the building for which he had received the full payment although the work was incomplete.

Kandhamal (Kalyan)

- The dealer supplying cooking gas in the Sadar block was hoarding the gas and selling it in black market at a premium of 300 rupees. Kalyan organized 17 local youths with a training program on RTI and mobilized them to seek information from the dealer regarding stock position, delivery timing, grievance redress mechanism, etc. Immediately the supply became streamlined. Inspired by the success, the youths have formed a Soochana Adhikar Mancha for taking the action further.

AWARENESS BUILDING AND TRAINING FOR USING RTI

Apart from the success stories generated by RTI clinics, awareness-cum-assistance camps have been organized in eight blocks with around 100 panchayats. Close interaction with the Panchayats and the various officials (Sarpanch, Public Information Officer, etc.) has been an important part of this process. The focus has been on the following issues:

- Streamlining PDS (Public Distribution System)
- NREGA
- Janani Surakshya Yojna (Reduction of child mortality and safe motherhood)
- Sarvasikhya Yojna (Primary Education)
- Community Ownership of Forests
- Block level RTI Manch (Front) Formation

Bhubaneswar

A rally and youth camp were organized and 2 slums were selected for RTI activities. A Public hearing on RTI was organized in which the Chief Information Commissioner, State Information Commissioner and National activists such as Arvind Kejriwal participated.



Nishikant of OSAM and Arvind Kejriwal of Parivartan, Delhi at the Bhubaneswar convention

Dhenkanal

Kalyan Anand organized a capacity building program with the assistance of India Habitat Center who supplied the resources. Around 24 organizations participated.

SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

Rairakhol intervention

Orissa farmers have had a very bad time. A persistent drought has compounded the issues of debt-trap and irresponsibly promoted high input, non-sustainable agriculture that are decimating the small farmers all over India. A rally was organized in Rairakhol under the convenorship of Anand Samal of Santhabhimabhoi Krushak Sangathan. The rally was attended by several leaders of the various farmers' organizations along with 300 farmers. The following demands were presented to the Chief Minister via the sub-collector:

- Declare the revenue village as the unit of cost calculation for compensation rather than the block
- Declare the whole of Rairakhol are as the drought affected
- Provide immediate facilities of lift irrigation at Bhartapur, Chudapurug, Musakata and Nuapada villages
- Build check dam at Naktideula
- Loan waving off all the farmers affected by the drought

COMBATING NAXALISM: SUPPORT FOR THE TRIBALS

Koraput intervention

Koraput area is rife with Maoist insurgency. The fraudulent taking away of the tribal land by the non-tribals is a major cause. The Government has notified that they must get their land back but there is no effective mechanism of ensuring land entitlement to the original owners. Kalyan has been working with Lok Sakti Avijan, led by Prafulla Samantara, Orissa Nagarik Sangathan led by Rabi Das and some NGOs to pressurize the government to ensure speedy restoration of lands to the tribals.

Peace building efforts

Kalyan and a team of OSAM organized goodwill camp in the insurgency-affected area of Narayanpatna. 45 young men and 15 women joined in to travel to 11 different villages to bring the message of reasoned dialogue for redressing genuine tribal grievances. Kalyan worked closely with the tribal organization, Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangathan. Given the volatile situation he had to work incognito.

NATIONAL ISSUES: INDIAN COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS NETWORK (ICAN)

Sustainable development is a key ICAN goal and Kalyan organized a district level consultation on Forest, Water and Mining issues at Dhenkanal in which a unanimous decision was taken to protect natural resources. A one-day consultation was also organized in Bhubaneswar on the issue of land acquisition by state on behalf of private interests and at the cost of the indigenous people. Chunnibhai Vaidya from Gujarat Lok Samiti, Arvind Kejriwal and Swati Maliwal from Parivartan were some of the senior activists who participated.

Surekha, Prithvi and Ashim visited Orissa last winter and spent time with Nishikant, Kalyan and several other activists in the area. They were impressed by the large number of dedicated volunteers that have joined this effort. If IFA can provide additional support these numbers can be multiplied several fold. This would give a tremendous push to pro-poor development in this area.