

Inclusive RTI – Launch of the OB Van
28th August 2010



The Information Commission of Uttarakhand
&
The Mountain Children's Foundation

The Mountain Children's Foundation
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Inclusive RTI – Launch of the OB Van



The rain Gods were merciful on the 28th of August 2010. Dehradun and the entire state of Uttarakhand had been inundated with rain the week before. The 28th was a cloudy day with imminent signs of rain and the village of Horrawalla was dressed in its monsoon best.

For the Bal Panchayat of Horrawalla, the Mountain Children's Foundation and the State of Uttarakhand it was a historic day. It was the inaugural run of the OB Van (Overhead Broadcasting Van) by the Information Commission to ensure the outreach of information on the Right to Information Act. Preparations for this day had begun a few days earlier by the Bal Panchayat. They contacted all the children who had been a part of the MCF-Asha (SV) RTI program of the year before, who then informed the community about the OB Van that was coming to their Village. They were supported by Mr. Om Prakash Singh, lecturer, in Geography at the Rajkiya Inter College Horrawalla. He has been a supporter and guide for the Horrawalla Bal Panchayat from its inception.

By 2:30pm 178 people had gathered at the Panchayat Bhavan Horrawalla. The MLA Mr. Kuldeep Kumar, Deputy Sec. RTI commission, Dr. Suchismita Sengupta Pandey and the Village Pradhan (Headman) Shri Mohan Lal, Mr Rajesh Naithani from the Commission, community members of Horrawalla and Rajoli, teachers of the Rajkiya Inter College Horrawalla, children from the nearby schools and children of Horrawalla Bal Panchayat.

The OB Van caused a lot of excitement when it came and once the link up was established the participants at Horrawalla could see the Information Commission's Office and were introduced to The Chief Information Commissioner Dr. R.S Tolia, Information Commissioner Mr. Vinod Nautiyal, MCF Patron Mr. Cyril R Raphael, Consultant for the Information Commission Dr. B.P Maithani and the Director Mahila Samakhya Ms. Geeta Gairola and other eminent citizens of Uttarakhand.

The program started with a welcome address by the Deputy Sec. of the RTI commission. She stressed on the point that the awareness levels in rural Uttarakhand were very low and the OB Van had been conceptualized keeping the mountain community in mind. The van would go to the citizens and offer information thus saving them time and money and also allow for the filing of a complaint or a second appeal on the spot. She also congratulated the Bal Panchayat of



Horrawalla for putting together such a wonderful welcome for the OB Van and encouraging people to come and participate in the two way dialogue.

Information Commissioner Mr. Vinod Nautiyal gave a detailed description of the Right To Information Act 2005. He focused on the process of filing an application, requesting information through the act and the facilities available to the citizens of India to access information from any government office. He said that children too could access information and should be the catalysts in generating awareness in their villages.

President, Mountain Children's Foundation, Ms Aditi P.Kaur, spoke about the Foundation and indicated that it was a platform "for" the children and had been created "by" the children. She informed those present that in the past year the MCF Asha (SV) program had been in partnership with over 18 organizations and had reached out to over 4000 children. She said in the one year program over 500 applications had been filed, of which most had been answered some with startling results.

She then introduced the Horrawalla Bal Panchayat Facilitator Deepika Panwar and their advisor Mr Om Parkash Singh, explaining how Horrawalla was the only Bal Banchayat that did not have a NGO supporting it. It was Mr Om Prakash Singh, who through his dedication as a teacher, helped and supported the Bal Panchayat.

The facilitator of the Horrwalla Bal Panchayat, Ms Deepika Panwar, gave a brief history of the creation of the Bal Panchayat. The Bal Panchayat initially had children from 3 villages but now the children were from as many as 14 surrounding villages. She then called forward children who wanted to ask questions from the Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioner on issues that they had encountered during the RTI program in the last year.



Neha Sharma – Requested information on who the PIO officer of the Village was?

Commission Answered – The Village Pradhan and the panchayat secretary were PIOs for the village. The Village Panchayat must have an Information Board that detailed who was the PIO officer in the village. The CIC added if their village did not have an information board, the children should file a complaint immediately. (There was no board but the children did not want to register a

complaint against their pradhan – the MCF team told the children to request the pradhan to place the board at the earliest.

Rohit asked – If it wasn't known who the departmental PIO officer was then where was the application to be sent?

Commission Answered – That the application should be addressed to "Public Information Officer" followed by the name of the departments from where the information is sought, along with the full address of the department and it would be

forwarded to the concerned PIO officer. Alternatively the application could be sent to the District Collector or the Chief Development Officer.

Swati Rawat asked – What steps need to be taken if the children were harassed and threatened after filing an application?

Commission Answered – The right to information is a constitutional right. No one should be harassed or threatened. But in case someone tried, a complaint should be filed with the Information Commission and the DIG of Police. Accordingly the closest police station would be informed.

Ittakhaab Alam asked – What the process was for filing of a second appeal. Had a new format been created?

Commission Answered– A second appeal could be filed within 90 days of the first appeal. It should be sent in the appropriate format. There should be 3 copies of the appeal and each should be self attested

Preeti Rawat asked – Whose responsibility it was to place the information board in different departments?

Commission Answered – It is the duty of each department to place the Information board where it could be seen, with details of who the PIO officer was. If a board was not placed then a complaint should be filed.

Sumit Kumar asked – What the government was doing to generate awareness about the RTI act in the rural areas.

Commission Answered – It is the duty of the government to generate awareness about the Act, however, the commission had stepped in to generate awareness about the Act. The OB Van was one such step. Apart from this the print media and electronic media were being used to generate awareness as well.



Devvrat Sharma asked – Once an application was filed could the department, insist that the applicant had to visit the office in person on a working day to collect the information?

Commission Answered – There was an added facility that the applicant could go in person and view the information at the office concerned but no one could force the applicant to visit the concerned department to collect their information. It was the duty of the PIO officer to send the information to the applicant.

Kaushlaish asked – If an application was transferred by the department, in how many days should the response reach the applicant?

Commission Answered– The reply should come within 30 days only 5 days could be added in case of transfer of the application. If the application was transferred though section 6 (3) the applicant should also be informed of the said transfer. If the applicant is not informed it could result in a penalty.

Sudhir Bhatt asked– How would the public know that the second appeal had to be sent in a particular format. He had sent his second appeal self attested and in 3 copies and it was returned to him.

Commission Answered– If the second appeal was in 3 copies it should not be returned. (Rajesh Naithani from the information commission said that the government had created a format but the commission was still accepting applications sent without the format and if the second appeal had been returned then it was cause for a complaint – Sudhir was told by the commission support staff to resend the second appeal)

Monika asked – If data of the whole state was requested often the application was transferred to several district level departments. In that case how many days would the reply be received in?

Commission Answered – The time limit was 30 days. The state office should have the information. The information could come separately also and could be collated and sent.

Om Prakash Singh Asked – More than 6 deaths of RTI activist had been reported. What was the commission doing to prevent it?

Commission Answered - In case of harassment a written complaint should be sent to the SSP and the DIG of that district. Also since the case would be “an attempt on life” an appeal should be filed which would be addressed within 48 hours.

Deepika Asked– On filing an application if the office had shifted and the PIO officer had been transferred, what should the procedure be? Would it be necessary for the applicant to visit the office to collect the information?

Commission Answered– The applicant cannot be forced to go to any office. The PIO is an officers position in the government and is not dependent on any person. So if a person was transferred some-one would replace him and therefore be the PIO. In Deepika’s case a complaint was to be filed. (The Officer from the commission, Saurabh, looked at Deepika’s papers there itself and helped her write a complaint. He also noted down the issue). This ended the question answer session.

The MLA Vikas Nagar Mr Kuldeep Kumar congratulated the people of Horawalla and particularly the children for having been a part of such a momentous occasion. He also thanked the Information Commission for having chosen Horrawalla to launch this important program. He said it was very important that information be generated about the Right to Information Act and the OB Van is a very important tool that would help strengthen the act. He also suggested that before the OB Van went into the villages, information should be sent to the village so that maximum people could benefit. It would help if officers from the departments were present. He also congratulated the children on a job well done and told them that he could be reached at home between 8 am and 10am and the children could meet him during these times on any day should they wish to.





The Village Pradhan Mr Mohan Lal thanked the Information commission for choosing his small village out of all the villages of Uttarakhand to be a part of this historic program. He thanked everyone for attending the program.

Mr Cyril R. Raphael (Patron,MCF) said that in 2002 the then governor H.E Surjit Singh Barnala on the foundation of the Mountain Children's Foundation told the children that they were the ambassadors of the mountains. He said that when he saw that the Information commission had partnered with the children to inaugurate the OB Van he knew that the children had indeed become ambassadors of the mountains, and Uttarakhand's future was bright.

The consultant to the Information commission Dr B.P Maithani said that the main aim of the OB Van was to help people write applications and help people solve problems they encounter using the Act. He said that there should be a toll free number so that people could call to clarify doubts. Under section 26 of the RTI act the government was supposed to be generating awareness of the act but they had done very little about it.

The State Chief Information Commissioner said that the Commission had been working in partnership with the Mountain Children's Foundation over the past year. The children had used the act to file various applications that have benefited not only themselves but also their community. He felt that as the children of today were the adults of tomorrow, the future was in good hands. Dr Toila also thanked Mahila Samakhya for partnering with the commission



to generate awareness with thousands of women. He said that the OB van was the first of its kind in Uttarakhand and in India as well. The OB Van, he promised would create a revolution.

Director Mahila Samakhya Ms Geeta Gairolla thanked the Information commission on behalf of Mahila Samakhya. She told the children that they should also encourage their mothers to file applications for information. She said that this was their right and it should be used.

Mr Om Prakash Singh thanked the commission for choosing Horrawalla for such a historic program. The program came to a close with the singing of the National Anthem, which was followed by tea.

After completion of the program two community members came forward to give their feed back

Mr Rajender Bhatt, Rajoli – Though the program the awareness of the RTI Act had increased in the village. He expressed his happiness at what the children had achieved.

Mr Tikal Singh Rawat – Said that he was happy that the children had solved a number of problems in the village by using the RTI Act. He said that after this program more people from the village would make use of the Act

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