

Case Study

# Right to Information Central Monitoring Mechanism

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## **Governance Knowledge Centre**

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## Executive Summary

The Section 4 of RTI Act, 2005, mandates the government to proactively disclose information to the citizens regarding individual department, its functions, duties and responsibilities. The awareness campaigns by the government and civil society organisations have done much to encourage citizens to seek information, the government department continue to struggle with managing information. To address this concern, the Government of Odisha, in 2009 introduced RTI Central Monitoring Mechanism (RTI CMM), accessible at [rtiorissa.gov.in](http://rtiorissa.gov.in) with a tag line – *“you are just a click away from the government”*. True to its slogan, the web portal provides a single click access to all the information on RTI including transactional services.

The objective of creating a web portal on RTI was to facilitate implementation of the Act in the state by providing necessary information in a uniform manner to all citizens, across the state and also to help government monitor the implementation progress. The portal currently caters to public authorities, citizens, information commissions and nodal departments. For the government, the portal is useful to track the applications, generate RTI annual report, maintain cash register, information registers mandated under the RTI. For the citizens, there is basic information on all the departments and a section to request for information.

In three years of its implementation the government has made progress in RTI implementation. There are 4000 government departments from the state, district and block levels under the portal, providing information through standard template. This has encouraged computerisation at all levels of government and triggered efficient information management. The RTI annual reports from the departments are available online to everyone, including the nodal departments and information commission to keep track of RTI status in the State. Citizens do not have to look for information from various government departments, instead access this website to seek information.

The Odisha experience is unique not only in its pioneering effort to introduce a comprehensive RTI portal, but also creatively converged resources to ensure execution of the project. Various government schemes were brought together to introduce basic infrastructure and Internet in government departments at block levels. Trainings were given to officers to sensitise them towards adoption of IT practices in administration. Overall, the project has been a success with great potential to be replicated in other states. This best practice intends to highlight the implementation model of the programme.

## Methodology

The Governance Knowledge Centre (GKC) research team conducts extensive research to identify initiatives that contribute towards the betterment of public service delivery in India. The RTI Central Monitoring Mechanism, with its focus on improving implementation of Right to Information Act was considered to be a unique and important initiative. The portal brings together different departments under one umbrella to disseminate information to Citizens.

With this in mind, the GKC team conducted thorough secondary research using web sources to understand the implementation model of RTI CMM. The publications reviewed include Government of Odisha case study on RTI CMM in its *Overview of eGovernance Initiative in Odisha*, case study published on Odisha Review and a detailed user manual available on the portal. In addition, all the sections in the portal were studied extensively to understand the information available.

## Background

The Right to Information Act, implemented by the Government of India in 2005, mandates timely response to citizen's request for public information held by government agencies. According to this act, a citizen can request for information by filing an application and paying the prescribed fees with the public authority. In addition, to strengthen transparency, Section 4 of the Act mandates that "it shall be a constant endeavour of every public authority to take steps in accordance with the requirements of clause (b) of sub-section (1) to provide as much information suo-motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information." Therefore, the government departments are proactively disclosing information on the functions and duties of the organization, powers and responsibilities of the officers, information on PIOs and other information relevant to the citizens regularly.

To ensure proper implementation, the government has made much effort and have allocated necessary resources. While different means have been adopted the Internet seems to be the easiest, fastest method of disseminating large-scale data among public. Typically, each government website has a RTI section that provides basic data on the department's mission, objectives, functions, duties and responsibilities of the officer and names of the PIOs. In case a citizen wants specific information, he/she has to send an application to the designated PIO through the means decided upon by the state government.

In an effort to implement the RTI effectively and efficiently, the Government of Odisha designed a comprehensive web portal that provides single click access to all information as per Section 4, 6, 7 and 25 of the RTI Act, 2005, in a uniform manner. The idea for the portal was conceived during a state level meeting held, under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary, to discuss the implementation of RTI Act. On basis of the meetings, study tours and research was conducted to understand the existing needs and gaps, and to develop a valuable solution. The result was RTI central Monitoring Mechanism that “aimed to track the progress of the RTI implementation throughout the State in a single network.”

Since its launch in 2009, the RTI CMM is linked with 4000 out of estimated 4500 public authorities that fall under the purview of the Act. The central monitoring mechanism has been proved to be instrumental in streamlining availability and access to information. Public authorities are updating proactive disclosure through Web Content Management System, and are maintaining RTI registers through the e-filling.

## Objective

The RTI Central Monitoring Mechanism is created with the intention of having a single reference point to:

- access correct information related to the Right to Information Act Section 4, 6, 7 and 25 to the citizens as well as public officials.
- submit RTI application to public authorities in India irrespective of location or department.
- access the all annual reports of any public authority in the state.

## Programme Design

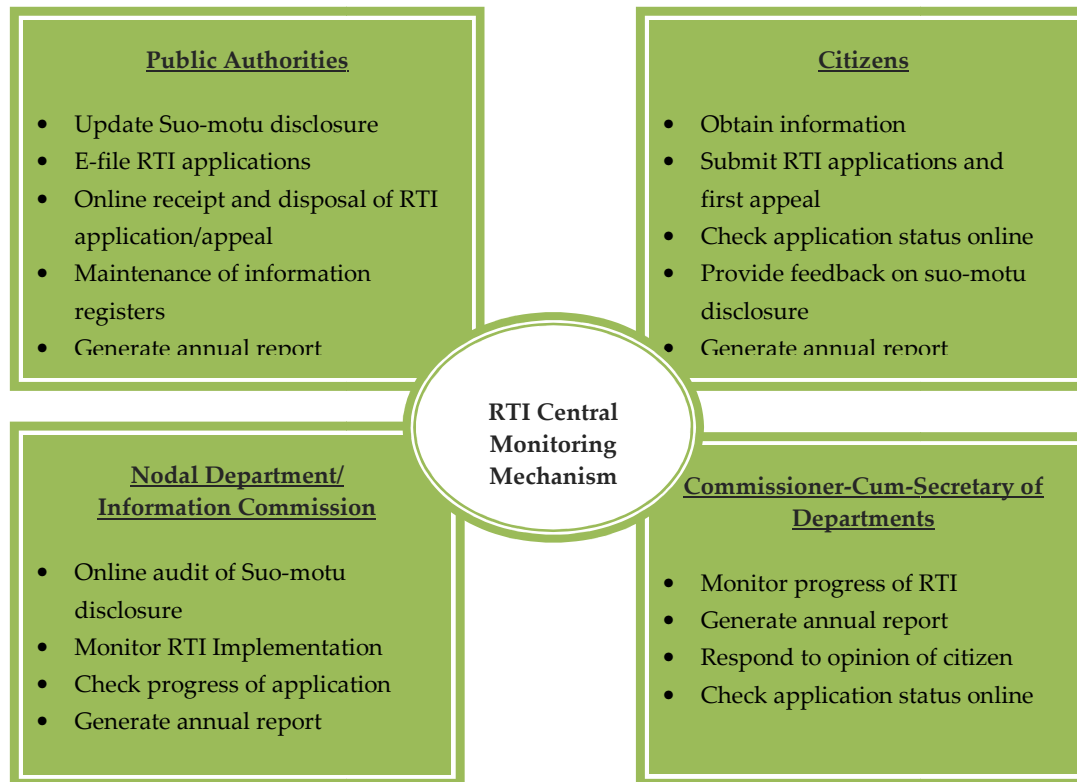
The programme has been implemented by the Government of Odisha, under the Department of Information and Public Relations as the nodal agency. The programme covers 36 government departments, and various public authorities within. Due consideration was given to the interests and needs of the citizens and government to design the web portal. As mentioned, rigorous study was conducted to review the situation, and develop solution.

## Key Stakeholders

- **Department of Information and Public Relations**, Government of Odisha is the nodal department for the project. It is responsible for overall implementation and functioning of the portal
- **Luminous Infoways** is the technology/content service provider for the project. The government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the company to develop, implement and maintain information of all public authorities within a prescribed time limit.
- **Public Authorities** are not only the information providers but also the beneficiaries of the programme as they can access annual reports online.
- **Orissa Information Commission** benefits from the programme as it allows them to track the progress of RTI implementation in the state.
- **Citizens** are the direct beneficiaries as they can access all RTI related information on one portal

## Information Flow

The web portal is the key to information management, exchange and dissemination of RTI Act.



While the portal is all encompassing, there are two levels of access on the portal.

- First, an open access website for citizens to access any information.
- Second, a password protected access for public authorities to log in to the content management system to upload the necessary information on RTI Section 4.

## Generating awareness for compliance

To make the website functional, each government department, from panchayat to secretariat, was notified about the RTI CMM, and requested to cooperate with Luminous Infoways to update the website. In an order issued by Commission-cum-Secretary, Nodal Officer for Right to Information, Odisha, it was clearly mentioned that the government departments have to take all the necessary measures to implement RTI CMM effectively. This included setting up of basic technological infrastructure, training of Public Authorities, and submission of information under the proactive disclosure of RTI Act.

## Creating and updating the portal

Luminous Infoways was responsible for developing the portal in English and Oriya, and to incorporate mechanisms to ensure exchange of information between RTI nodal office and government authorities. Therefore, a back-end content management system (CMS) was designed for the public authorities to upload information for Section 4 of RTI in a uniform manner. Each government authority, that submits information as per Section 4 is registered on the portal, and assigned a username/password to update the information on the CMS.

Apart from regularly publishing the information, the account also gives the option of maintaining and updating the request received by PIO/APIOs under Section 6 of the Act. The requests received by the authorities physically, transferred from other public authority or can come through the website. Monitoring progress of the RTI request allows the PIO to ensure on-time completion.

## Standardising template for pro-active information

As the goal of the portal is to provide information in a uniform manner, efforts have been made to develop template for proactive/suo-moto disclosure. The website displays the details of the template, and departments have to follow the same to get it published online. According to the guidelines, three manuals should be developed for information required under Section 4 (1) (b) of RTI Act:

- Manual 1 – Particulars of the Organisation, Functions and Duties
  - Objective/purpose of the public authority.
  - Mission / Vision Statement of the public authority.
  - Brief history of the public authority and context of its formation.
  - Duties of the public authority.
  - Main activities/functions of the public authority.
  - List of services being provided by the public authority with a brief write-up on them.
  - Organizational Structure Diagram at various levels namely State, directorate, region district, block etc (whichever is applicable).
  - Expectation of the public authority from the public for enhancing its effectiveness and efficiency.
  - Arrangements and methods made for seeking public participation/ contribution.
  - Mechanism available for monitoring the service delivery and public grievance resolution.



- Addresses of the main office and other offices at different levels. (Please categories the addresses district wise for facilitating the understanding by the user).
- Morning hours of the office :
- Closing hours of the office :
- 
- Manual 2 – Powers and Duties of the Officers and Employees
  - Name of the officers
  - Designation
  - Powers
    - Financial
    - Administrative
    - Others
  - Duties
- Manual 3 – Procedures followed in Decision Making
  - What is the procedure followed to take a decision for various matters ? ( A reference to Secretariat Manual and Rule of Business Manual, and other rules/ regulations etc can be made)
  - What are the documented procedures / laid down procedures/ Defined Criteria /Rules to arrive at a particular decision for important matters ? What are different levels through which a decision process moves?
  - What are the arrangements to communicate the decision to the public?
  - Who are the officers at various levels whose opinions are sought for the process of decision making?
  - Who is the final authority that waits the decision?
  - Please provide information separately in the following format for the important matters on which the decision is taken by the public authority.

## Accessing information

The main motivation behind introducing the portal is to ensure that citizens have access to relevant public information. Therefore, the website is developed with due care to make it user-friendly and helpful for citizens. The home-page design navigates the user to the following core areas of the portal:



- Government Departments – to seek specific departmental information under Section 4, available on the prescribed format
- RTI Act – to get basic information on the RTI Act and rules/guidelines in Odisha
- RTI Campaign – to provide an update on detailed proposed plan for RTI implementation in the state for the current fiscal year
- Downloads – to notify users on the orders/circulars issued by the government regarding RTI
- RTI Nodal Officer – to list names of all the PIOs in government departments
- Districts – to get district wise data/information on RTI
- Contact us – to provide contact details of the officers responsible for the portal

## Transactional Services

The web portal also offers two services for RTI implementation. First, for the citizens, it has an e-request option to submit RTI application. Second, for the government, it has an e-Filing option that tracks Information Register and Cash Register maintained by each Public Authority under the Rule 11 of the Odisha Right to Information Rules, 2005.

- E-request: Citizens can submit their request for information and First Appeal electronically through the online portal to the respective PIO or government department. For this purpose, a detailed instructions on 'How to apply for information' and 'How to apply for First Appeal' is published on the e-request section of the portal.

The submission of the application is relatively easy as all the supportive documents can be attached to the application online. Applicant can even choose the manner in which he/she desires to receive information from the government – through post or to be

received in person. Upon submission, the applicant gets a receipt with temporary registration number. This number can be used for tracking the application status online.

- **E-Filing:** This feature of the portal facilitates preparation of RTI annual report for all the department. Under this section, designated public authorities are assigned username/password to access the CMS to monitor the RTI applications. Basically, the PIO is required to submit the details of the RTI application received and First Appeal filed with the department. For this, the PIO has to use a pre-defined e-filing form (Form F and G) to enter details of the application into the account, attach scanned copy of the document (if necessary), update the final decision of the PIO (rejected, transferred or responded). Accordingly, the automated system will update the Information Register, Cash Register and Appeal Register for that particular department. Towards the end of the year, this information is used to generate the RTI Annual Report mandated as per the Act.

## Funding

The project is financially supported by the Government of Odisha.

## **Achievements**

Launched in 2009, the portal has successfully synergised efforts of bringing together the implementation of RTI Act. As of 2012, the online system has connected over 4000 government department and standardized the information available. The achievements of the programme is summarized below:

- Within two years, four thousand government offices connected to the Central Monitoring Mechanism to proactively disclose information.
- Information available in a standardized manner for all the departments in Odisha, including different administrative levels and districts
- Creation of a separate RTI Cell by the Department of Information and Public Relations to monitor the implementation of the scheme.
- Regular update of RTI information, PIO details for all the department
- One-stop shop for RTI in Odisha that serves the government and citizens with equal efficiency. Information seeker can search and obtain data on everything
- Encouraged computerization in many departments for the first time.

## Challenges in Implementation

While the implementation has been successful there were few challenges on the way. These include technological challenges, resistance to change and resource constraints.

**Technological challenges:** The design of the CMM is such that it requires government departments to use computers to create and upload content on the portal. While at the State level, the secretariat had computers, the district and block level offices suffered with poor infrastructure. However, the team responsible for implementation has recognised this challenge and took measures to converge e-Governance scheme with CMM to provide basic infrastructure at all levels. In addition, the District Informatic Centre and District Information and Public Relations Office had computers and Internet to facilitate implementation of the scheme at district, sub-division and block levels.

**Resistance to change:** The government officials, habituated to manual methods of operations, were not keen on introduction of RTI CMM. They were resistant to the idea of adopting new methods of working, and using Information Technology. Among these, ministerial staff of State Government, Public Information Officers and First Appellate Authorities were strongly against the online system. In order to gain their support, the DIPR patiently demonstrated the importance of the system, and promoted the CMM as a tool for officers benefit, as it increases transparency and allows to monitor the progress correctly.

**Resource Constraint:** Human, Financial and Infrastructural resource constraint was the biggest challenge in implementation. The government lacked skilled employees and infrastructure to initiate the process in public office. In addition, assigning dedicated resources to manage RTI CMM required thorough compliance to the laws, and sensitivity to the matter.

## Conclusion

Overall, the RTI CMM has augmented implementation of the RTI Act in Odisha in the most efficient manner. This unique programme allows the government to monitor the implementation of RTI in the state, and provide information in a uniform manner – both of which is rare in Indian administration. Often, citizens have to visit individual department website and scrounge for information. Through this user-friendly website the government has ensured that information is available faster.

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