



Original Article

Effectiveness of RTI in Reducing Information Asymmetry in Rural Development Administration in Maharashtra

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Abstract

The Right to Information (RTI) Act has become an important institutional tool of facilitating transparency and accountability in the internal administration. Within the rural development administration in Maharashtra, the problem of information asymmetry perpetually exists among the implementers and beneficiaries of the government and usually imposes a limitation on governance and service delivery. This paper will discuss the use of RTI to improve information asymmetry through facilitating administrative records, increasing transparency, and affecting administrative responsiveness. The study assumes a descriptive and analytical research design, with the foundation of research based on primary data of 300 respondents consisting of RTI applicants, rural beneficiaries, and local stakeholders in the selected districts of Maharashtra, and secondary data provided by the official records and the published research. In the analysis, the authors use percentage analysis and the inference statistical methods to evaluate how the RTI use and the perceived decrease in information gaps are correlated. The results show that there is statistically significant relationship between the usage of RTI, and better transparency in the administration of rural development, which shows that RTI has helped in reducing information asymmetry and enhancing accountability. Nevertheless, one of the most important issues is delays in information disclosure, as well as unequal administrative compliance. The research highlights the issue of seeking better institutional capacity and proactive disclosure to augment the governance effects of RTI in rural development.

Keywords: Right to Information, Information Asymmetry, Rural Development Administration, Transparency, Accountability, etc.

Introduction

In Maharashtra, rural development administration takes place through multi-layered institutions (line departments of the state, Zilla Parishads, Panchayat Samitis, and Gram Panchayats) in which the access to timely, full, and verifiable information by citizens can determine both the use and responsibility of services. At those, structural information asymmetry is probable: the officials have records on beneficiary selection, fund flows, work estimates, procurement, muster roll, payments and grievance actions under their control, whereas the rural citizens tend to be limited by distance and literacy and informal gatekeeping. Inequalities in the circulation of information may undermine community-level surveillance, diminish belief in programme assertions and bring about the possibility of discretion, latitude and rent-seeking. It is on this background that the RTI regime of India is regularly theorised as a form of institutional corrective, minimizing information asymmetries, making citizens able to assert their claim to ownership, and enhancing downward accountability.

The RTI movement in India is tightly connected with the demands regarding accounts and accountability in the local governance, particularly regarding the cases when the public works and welfare programmes influence the daily livelihoods. Jenkins and Goetz (1999) demonstrate that the mobilisation of grassroots on the issue of access to records and citizen verification in publicization resulted in a re-definition of information as a citizen right and not as an administrative privilege with precise consequences of limiting development expenditure leakages.

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This framing is significant to rural development administration since it does not focus disclosure of information as an end thing, but rather a tool used to encourage collective scrutiny of decisions made about the implementation (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999). Based on this argument, other empirical studies have gone on to view transparency as a feasible instrument wherein citizens are able to challenge administrative discretion, make corruption more expensive and the probability of accessing public goods more favorable.

The efficacy of the RTI in the minimisation of the information asymmetry is not a self-given effect, though. The rural governance literature underlines that information is causative when it is pertinent, practical, and grounded on circumstances where citizens are empowered and motivated to act on the information (Kosec and Wantchekon, 2020). The uneven channel of RTI may be effective in urban areas where several fundamental arrangements, including administrative capacity and distribution of voice, where different users stay unmoved by same, would be the same; the situations involving rural areas with rural Maharashtra are quite different so that some applicant would get the usable disclosures early and the other would be oppressed with much delay, refusing to listen, or incomplete record keeping would maintain the asymmetry in practice. The paper thus focuses on the efficacy of RTI in alleviating the shortage of information asymmetry in the rural development administration in Maharashtra on how the utilization of RTI alters the accessibility, reliability as well as usability of administrative information by the citizenry, and how these modifications translate (or fail to translate) into better administrative responsiveness.

Literature Review:

1. An influential branch of the scholarly field conceptualises RTI as an element of a wider accountability framework of information access having citizen supervision. The initial research on RTI movement in India emphasizes the way in which the fight over access to local spending tables and decision papers facilitated the challenge of corruption and misconsumption (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999). That view is pertinent particularly with the rural development administration in mind since the implementation of programmes is record-intensive: the transparency over the lists, sanctions, measurements, and payments directly influence the capability of citizens to identify discrepancies.
2. Similar empirical findings are also associated with the decreased petty corruption and better access to services, which are associated with transparency instruments. Based on a field-experimental design to access ration cards, Peisakhin and Pinto (2010) explain that the outcomes of the applicants could be improved by applying the idea of invoking information rights, that is, altering the behaviour of the bureaucracy, that is, it could be seen that transparency, in this specific case, is something that can replace informal payments. Although ration cards are not analogous to rural development programs, the administrative reasoning is the same: the support of the requests of the citizens by the legal enforceability may decrease the discretionary opacities, which will decrease information asymmetry at the site of service provision (Peisakhin & Pinto, 2010).
3. The second strand investigates limited achievements of RTI implementation and the institutional settings that provide significant transparency in RTI. According to Relly et al. (2020), rule-based, penalty-based, disclosure-based, and technocratic design aspects of RTI might not be adequate to change bureaucratic cultures of secrecy unless accompanied by socio-political facilitating factors, such as leadership, oversight and penalties or a strong presence of civil society. Their results suggest that the effectiveness does not only rely on the law but also on the supply side of administration: the ability and intent to deliver full, timely and intelligible records by the information officer (Relly et al., 2020). This is essential to the rural development administration, as asymmetry may be maintained in a partial or delayed disclosure in case of a compliance that exists formally.
4. In their article on rural governance, there is a consistent synthesis in which it is noted that information is not enough. Summarizing a wide range of empirical literature, Kosec and Wantchekon (2020) provide their conclusion that theory-consistent information enhances better governance when it is salient to recipients and provided citizens with the power and incentive to use it. That leads to the focus on the interaction of RTI with the rural reality: the presence of social inequality, the conquest of the elite by the locals, the lack of digital access, and fear of punishment can lower the capacity of citizens to transform the revealed information into productive action. Therefore, the success of RTI in rural development management of Maharashtra must be perceived as conditional, i.e. depending on the nature of the requested information (e.g., beneficiary eligibility vs. procurement), the administrative level where the records can be found, and the surrounding accountability level.
5. Relatedly, the research of participation and invited space also indicates that the responsibility solutions could be better due to increasing participation mechanisms that enhance the closeness between citizens and the state and increasing the reputational or political expenses of the non-compliance. Aiyar (2010) demonstrates how organized involvement can create even deeper administrative responsible approaches to service provision situations which supports the applications of information as a stronger asset when combined with participatory monitoring discussion rooms. RTI disclosures can be best practiced in rural development administration, in cases where they are processed to collective procedures (public meetings, grievance hearings, or communal verification), as opposed to staying at a personal level.
6. Lastly, the scholarly research that centers on distributional outcomes begs the question on whether

the poor gain as much of RTI. Dutta (2022), which studies the usefulness of RTI when it comes to poor households, states that the right to information can support claims-making, but it might be moderated through the reduction of errors, the local power relations, and uneven access to the process. This directly applies in the case of rural Maharashtra where marginalised populations could be more vulnerable to information asymmetry and less responsive to administrative concerns, and thus RTI might not be able to tackle the issue of asymmetry equally.

In general, the literature suggests that RTI holds plausible potential to diminish information asymmetry in the context of the public administration, yet the effectiveness of it is conditioned by (i) enforceability and bureaucratic incentives, (ii) citizen capacity and collective action, as well as, institutional context of the rural governance. This paper makes the rural development administration of Maharashtra an empirically significant location to experiment these mechanisms, i.e. whether the use of RTI has a measurably positive effect on the access to information, and whether the observed administrative responsiveness indicates responsiveness, and perceived transparency.

Objectives:

The study objective is to investigate the efficacy of Right to Information mechanism in mitigating information asymmetry in rural development administration in Maharashtra by evaluating its purpose in better access to

official records, increase in transparency, accountability, and responsibility in the administration, and ability to make informed claims by the citizens on the rural development programme and service delivery.

Research Methodology:

The research design of the study is descriptive and analytical with primary data being gathered by use of a structured questionnaire which was administered to the applicants of RTI, rural beneficiaries and local stakeholders in the administration of the rural development in the select districts of Maharashtra, a sample of 300 respondents will be used in the study with data being gathered using a multi-stage stratified random sampling factor and the data will be supplemented with secondary sources like RTI applications, government reports and published studies and analyzed using a percentage analysis, cross-tabulation and the relevant inferential

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The analysis of the information obtained on 300 respondents who included RTI applicants, beneficiaries of rural development schemes, and local stakeholders in sampled districts of Maharashtra was done to determine the success of RTI in alleviating information asymmetry in the administration of rural development schemes. The analysis is based on the ability to access information, the openness of the administrative procedures, and the perceived responsibility among the officials.

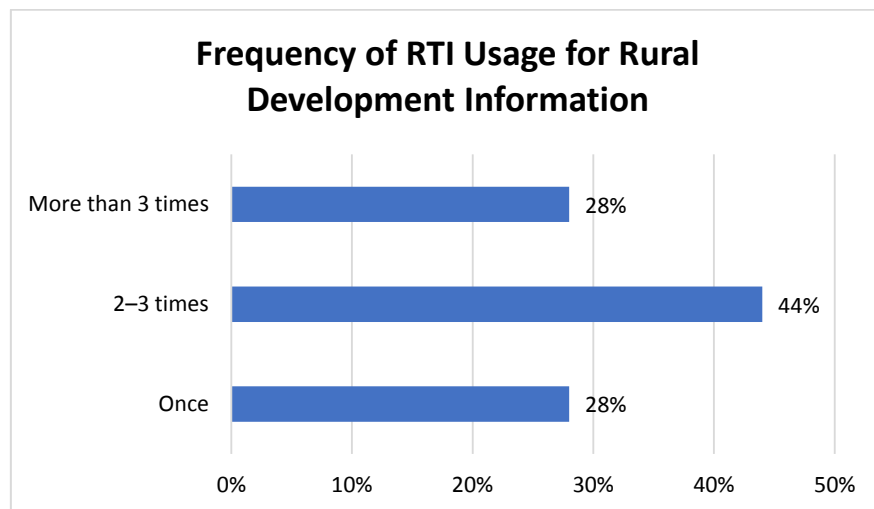


Fig. 1 Frequency of RTI Usage

The table shows that 72 percent of the respondents have used RTI more than once which implies that RTI is not viewed as a one-time grievance tool but a repeat application tool in order to obtain information concerning rural

development schemes. The repetitive use shows the increasing consciousness and dependence on RTI to create a larger information gap.

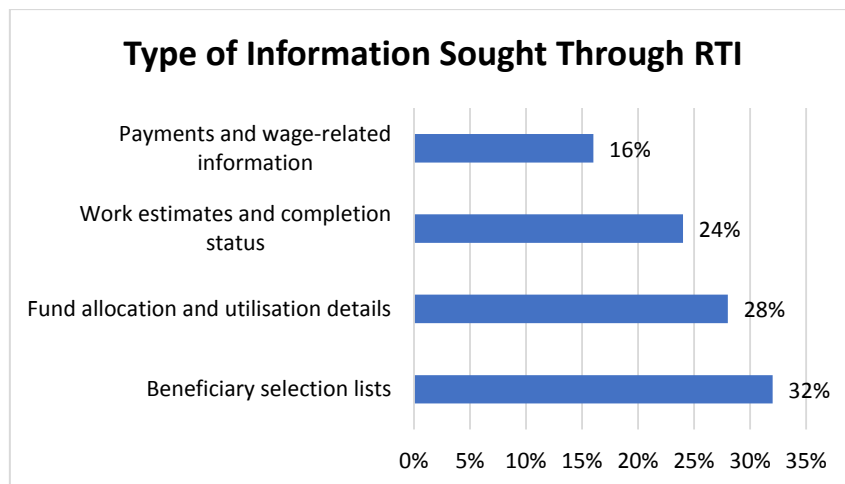


Fig. 2 Type of Information Sought

Most of the respondents requested information associated with people who would receive benefits and the use of funds they received, which means that these are areas where the information asymmetry is the most intense. The

need to have such records points to the interest of the citizens on transparency and equity in rural development administration.

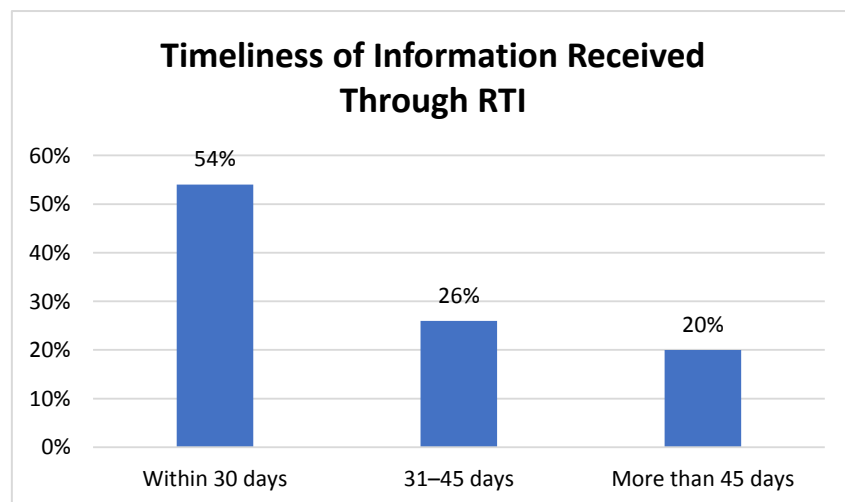


Fig. 3 Timeliness of Information Received

Although 54 percent of surveyed people were informed in the required period one significant number 46 percent took over 30 days before being informed. These delays

undermine the efficiency of RTI in alleviating information asymmetry since delays decrease the usefulness of information to effect actions in a timely manner.

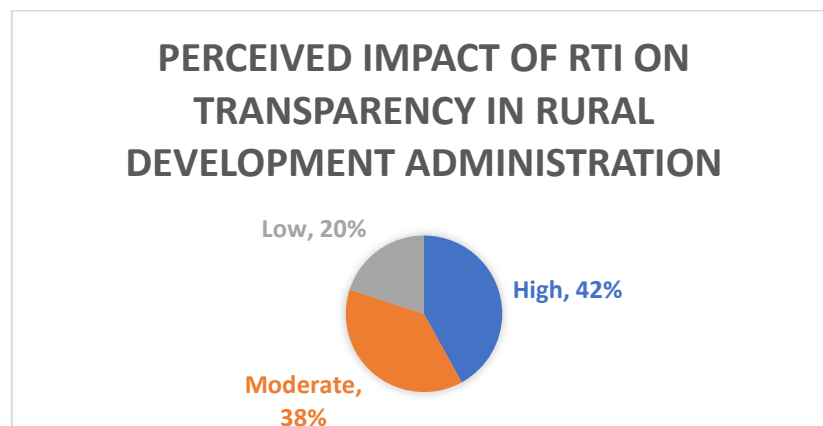


Fig. 4 Impact of RTI on Transparency

Combined 80 percent of the respondents indicated moderate to high improvement in transparency after using RTI. This points to the fact that RTI has helped significantly in

minimizing the level of information obscurity in terms of the availability of administrative records to the rural citizens.

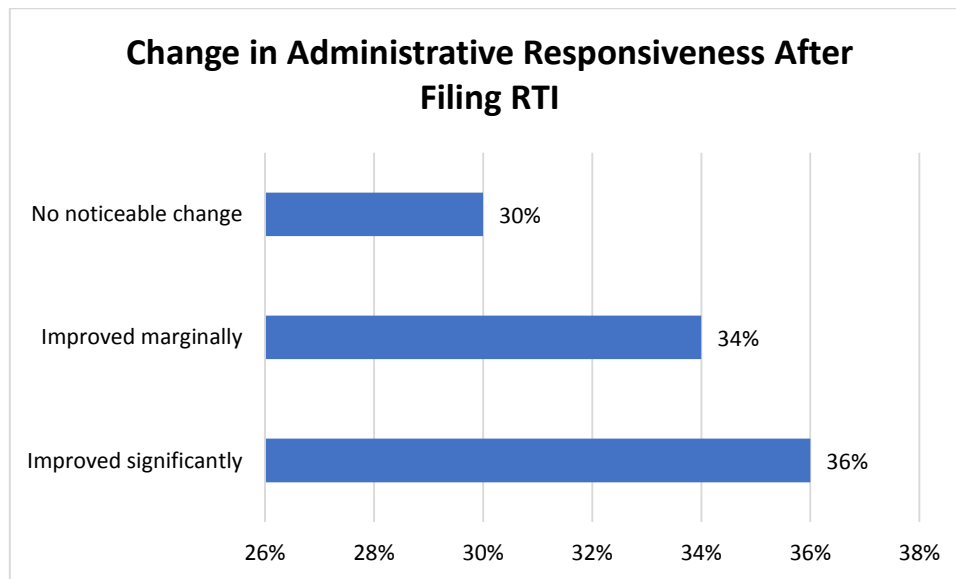


Fig. 5 Administrative Responsiveness

With the results, 70 percent of the respondents have found themselves to have improved the administrative responsiveness after submitting RTI applications. This indicates that besides alleviating information asymmetry RTI also triggers behavioural changes in the rural development management by placing higher accountability pressures.

As the analysis shows, RTI has positively contributed to the elimination of information asymmetry in the administration of rural development in Maharashtra through the excessive availability of vital records, transparency, and administrative responsiveness. Nevertheless, the slowness of delivering information and

inconsistency between cases in responsiveness implies that institutional and procedural bottlenecks still limit the full implementation of RTI as a governance reform initiative.

Hypothesis:

H₀: The use of the Right to Information does not significantly reduce information asymmetry in rural development administration in Maharashtra.

In testing the hypothesis, Chi-square test was used to test the relationship between RTI use intensity and the perceived reduction of information asymmetry among the respondents. This test will be suitable because the two variables are nominal and because the aim is to determine whether there exists a significant relationship.

Table 1 Association between RTI Usage and Reduction in Information Asymmetry

Particulars	Value
Chi-square value (χ^2)	18.47
Degrees of freedom	4
Significance level (p-value)	0.001
Critical value at 5% level	9.49
Result	Significant

The Chi-square which has been calculated exceeds the critical value at the 5 percent level of significance, and the p-value is below 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is dismissed. The outcome shows that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between application of RTI and obstruction of information asymmetry of administration of rural development.

The results prove that RTI can be used to reduce information asymmetry through enhancing access to administrative information to enhance transparency and

accountability in the administration of rural developments in Maharashtra.

Discussion:

The research results show that the device of the Right to Information has had a significant role in the alleviation of the Ashad of information regarding the administration of rural development in the state of Maharashtra. The high rate of RTI among the rural citizens is an indication that there is increased awareness and dependence on formal means of information to obtain

beneficiary lists, fund utilisation details, and implementation records. The significant relationship between the use of RTI and the perceived decrease in the information gap is statistically significant and indicates that the disclosure of information has increased the transparency and restricted the discretion of the administration. Nevertheless, the slow information delivery speed and differences in responsiveness between departments point to the fact that institutional capacity and compliance with procedures still determine how successfully RTI will be able to remove the information imbalances.

Conclusions:

The paper concludes that RTI has become a powerful governance tool that is being used in enhancing access to administrative information and making administration of rural development more accountable. RTI has minimized informational benefits enjoyed by administrative authorities by providing the citizens with the ability to check official data sets and challenge the implementation processes. However, the nature of delays, unfinished disclosures and unequal application indicate that even though RTI has reduced the information asymmetry, it has not completely removed the structural and operational barriers of the rural governance systems.

Recommendations:

1. As a supplement to make RTI more effective, it is also advised that the rural development departments should strengthen the record management systems, make sure that there is a strict compliance to the statutory timelines, as well as to augment the capacity of information officers by conducting specific training.
2. Ensuring proactive disclosure of essential documents on the rural development at the village level should be increased to minimize repetitive RTI submissions.
3. Also, awareness campaigns and macro support systems need to be strengthened to allow the marginalised rural citizens to avail RTI more efficiently and convert access to information into better administrative responsibility.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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