

**A Study
on
'RTI Implementation in
Andhra Pradesh – Improving Access'**



**Project Director
Dr. C. Sheela Reddy
Indian Institute of Public Administration
New Delhi**

Sponsored by



Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

**Duration of the Project: 18 months
Date of Commencement of the Project: 2nd
January 2014
Submission of Final report: 24th July, 2015**

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1.0 Introduction..... | 4 |
| 1.1 Significance of the Study..... | 5 |
| 2.0 Review of Literature..... | 5 |
| 3.0 Scope of the Study..... | 7 |
| 3.1 Study Tools..... | 7 |
| 3.2 Profile of the selected districts..... | 8 |
| 4.0 Results – Field Survey..... | 8 |
| 4.1 Awareness of RTI act & functions as PIOs/APIOs..... | 8 |
| 4.2 Experience as PIO/APIO in number of years..... | 9 |
| 4.3 Desire to be the PIO/APIO..... | 10 |
| 4.4 Training & Impact..... | 11 |
| 4.5 Amount of time spent on replying to applications under the RTI act..... | 12 |
| 4.6 Maintenance of records as specified under Sec 25 of the RTI act..... | 13 |
| 4.7 Constraints in the implementation of the RTI act..... | 14 |
| 4.8 Proactive Disclosures under Sec 4(1)(b) and their impact..... | 15 |
| 4.9 Overall Awareness in their area & Reasons..... | 16 |
| 4.10 Overall Impact of the RTI act..... | 17 |
| 4.11 Suggestions for Applicants..... | 19 |
| 4.12 Suggestions for Improvements to the RTI act..... | 19 |
| 4.13 General Observations..... | 19 |
| 5.0 Results – Analysis of RTI Applications..... | 20 |
| 5.1 General Information Analysis | 20 |
| 5.2 Analysis of Information sought | 26 |
| 5.3 Analysis of Information sought - Geography | 28 |
| 5.4 Analysis of Type of Information sought | 29 |
| 5.5 Analysis of Form in which information is sought..... | 30 |
| 5.6 Analysis of Problematic RTI applications..... | 31 |
| 5.7 General Observations..... | 32 |
| 6.0 Recommendations..... | 32 |
| Annexures..... | 34 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| RTI | Right to Information |
| PIO | Public Information Officer |
| APIO | Assistant Public Information Officer |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| MPDO | Mandal Parishad Development Officer |
| MRO | Mandal Revenue Officer |
| CHRI | Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative |
| DoPT | Department of Personnel & Training |
| RaaG | RTI Assessment & Analysis Group |
| APSIC | Andhra Pradesh State Information Commission |

1.0 Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) Act ushered in a new wave of transparency and accountability in India. With this, the citizens have a powerful and transformative tool to hold their Governments accountable. Since 2005, people have used the RTI act for various reasons ranging from grievance redressal, service delivery and awareness to deeper and challenging issues like policy change reasons, abuse of authority, corruption scams and spending of the Government. Citizens, who have awareness of the act though still a minority, have contributed to improved performance and transparent governance.

Awareness of this new law is still low and consequently many gaps exist between provisions in the law and actual implementation and use by citizens. The law mandates and places the onus of increasing awareness of people squarely on the governments – state and union. Unfortunately, governments have spared very few resources towards awareness promotion activities. A case in example would be the government of Andhra Pradesh. It has an annual budget in average of 100 crores per year towards print and electronic media advertisements and awareness activities of various programs of the Government. Out of this a measly sum of 7.12 lakhs only was spent towards advertisements or awareness activities so far in 7+ years. Most of the awareness in people on this Act is the result of selfless work by committed individuals and non-profits organizations.

For the past 3 years many officials, politicians and in some rare cases, members of the judiciary have painted RTI Act as a tool being misused by some individuals to harass officials and burden the official machinery beyond what is necessary by filing “frivolous and vexatious” applications for information. The suggestions and resources for improvement to this situation require dedicated efforts on the part of the government. Till date, no major study was ever conducted on the performance or lack of it of proactive disclosures. Not recognizing this core problem, some high profile officials have on occasions used certain misguided applications by individuals although miniscule in number as red herrings and have pushed for modifications to the delivery process of the legislation by raising the issue of frivolous applications and high costs to government. The then Prime Minister Dr.Manmohan Singh himself on multiple occasions has raised this issue of frivolous and vexatious

applications while there is no evidence to support the claim. His comments at the annual convention of Central Information Commission reinforced this view¹. The modifications being talked about would bring in arbitrariness in disposing of applications by officials (by deciding whether an application for information is for public purpose or vexatious or not). The issues of digitization of records, better record maintenance have never been addressed.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study assumes significance at a time when there are backdoor attempts to weaken and dilute the act. There is an urgent need to counter these moves and prove beyond doubt that better implementation of Sec 4, providing better facilities/resources to officials (infrastructure, training, digitization etc) would greatly reduce the load of applications and make it easy for the Government to disseminate information.

2.0 Review of Literature

Very few studies have been conducted on RTI Act and its implementation so far in the country. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), the nodal agency for the implementation of the RTI act commissioned a study in 2009 to “Understand the Key Issues and Constraints in implementing the RTI Act”. The study was conducted by PWC and they submitted the report in June 2009. The study looked at the supply side and demand side issues of the RTI, but did not look the efficacy of proactive disclosures. This study only carried out the website audit of Section 4(1)(b) compliance in 15 departments of various states. This audit was also restricted to only the head offices at the state level. The study only looked at the quantitative aspects like how many of these departments uploaded the 4(1)(b) information and how many did not. The study did not go into details of the qualitative aspects of the information that is uploaded. It is also important to note that this study did not find anything about frivolous and vexatious applications as being one of the issues on the supply side².

¹ PM’s Address at the 7th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission. (<http://cic.gov.in/Convention-2012/Speeches/PMspeech.pdf>)

² The final report of PWC study. (<http://rti.gov.in/rticorner/studybypwc/index-study.htm>)

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) also conducted a study in 2009 titled “Compliance with The Right to Information Act: A Survey”. This study looked at the status of proactive disclosures at various levels of governance, the quantitative aspects of the Sec 4(1)(b) disclosure in terms of the level of disclosure at Taluka and District level offices and whether the said offices displayed information on their notice boards. It also looked into the aspects of access to proactive disclosure to common citizens. But the study stopped short of analyzing how better implementation of this could have resulted in decreased applications³.

RTI Assessment & Analysis Group (Raag) in collaboration with various CSOs also conducted a survey on the status of RTI in 2008. This study also looked into various aspects of the demand and supply of the RTI regime like the profile of applicants, timeframe of receiving a reply, difficulties faced while submitting applications, supply side constraints like lack of awareness, infrastructure issues etc. While the findings of the survey did talk about the lack of proactive disclosure in a large number of government offices, it did not again dwell into the question of the link between better implementation and estimated reduction in the number of applications⁴.

The Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT), the nodal agency for the implementation of the RTI act also released a set of guidelines recently for the implementation of proactive disclosure⁵. The guidelines specifically talk about reducing the need for filing individual applications if large amounts of information are placed in public domain. The Guidelines say ‘The purpose of suo motu disclosures under Section 4 is to place large amount of information in public domain on a proactive basis to make the functioning of the Public Authorities more transparent and also to reduce the need for filing individual RTI applications’.

³ CHRI survey in 2009. (http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/rti/compliance_with_rti_act_survey.pdf)

⁴ Executive Summary of the RAAG Survey 2008. (http://rti-assessment.org/exe_summ_report.pdf).

⁵ Guidelines issued by DoPT (http://ccis.nic.in/WriteReadData/CircularPortal/D2/D02rti/Suo_moto_disclosure-15042013.pdf)

3.0 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in departments that have maximum public interface namely, the Panchayat Raj, Revenue & Municipal Administration. According to the 2012 annual report of the Andhra Pradesh State Information Commission (APSIC)⁶, these three departments were in the top five in terms of number of applications received under the RTI act as well as number of appeals filed with the APSIC. Hence, the study of these departments would give us a clear picture of the status of implementation of the act in the state in general.

The study was carried out in 3 different districts of undivided Andhra Pradesh (one each from the three regions – Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema & Telangana). The districts selected are namely Adilabad, Anantapur & Srikakulam. In each district, the study was carried out in 30 Panchayats, 10 Mandal Parishad Development Office (MPDO) & 10 Mandal Revenue Office (MRO) in 10 different mandals and one Municipality.

30 different Gram Panchayats were selected in each district. The Gram Panchayat Secretary (also known as the Village Secretary) was interviewed in each of these 30 Gram Panchayats. These secretaries perform the role of the APIO (Assistant Public Information Officer). The role of the APIO as envisaged in the RTI act is to receive the applications for information or appeals under this Act for forwarding the same forthwith to the Public Information Officer (PIO). Though Section 5(2) of the RTI act envisages only this role for them, they perform the role of the deemed PIO in most cases, as according to Sec 5(5) of the RTI act, any officer, whose assistance has been sought shall be treated as a Public Information Officer (PIO). In essence, for all the RTI applications seeking information about villages, the Panchayat Secretaries end up doing the job of the PIO. They are a very important cog in the wheel. 10 mandals were selected in each of the three districts. In each of these 10 mandals, PIOs in the MPDO office and MRO office were interviewed. One municipality in each district is selected and the PIO of the municipality was interviewed.

3.1 Study Tools

The study was carried out in two ways. A questionnaire was prepared to interview the PIO/APIO and was administered on all the above mentioned officials. Apart from this, the RTI applications filed in 2012 and 2013 in each of these offices were collected. Each of these

⁶ 2012 Annual Report of the APSIC (<http://www.apic.gov.in/Documents/AR%202012%20EG.pdf>)

applications were analysed using a set of parameters. It was difficult in some cases to get the application copies as three different elections were held at the same time in Andhra Pradesh (Local, Assembly & Parliament),

3.2 Profile of Selected Districts

Adilabad is the northern most district of the state of Telangana (erstwhile Andhra Pradesh) bordering Maharashtra. The district has a large tribal population. It is also one of the most backward districts with a lower literacy rate.

Srikakulam is the eastern most district of Andhra Pradesh bordering Odisha. It is one of the most backward districts with a lower literacy rate.

Anantapur is a backward district in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh bordering Karnataka. It also has a lower literacy rate.

4.0 Study Results – Field Survey

The survey responses were digitized and analyzed. The data was checked for consistency and was analyzed for various parameters which are presented below.

4.1 Awareness of RTI act & functions as PIOs/APIOs

While everybody interviewed said that they were aware of the provisions of the RTI act and their role as the PIO/APIO, it was very interesting to note that quite a few of them did not have the copy of the RTI act with them. Srikakulam had the least percentage of those who did not have a copy of the act while Adilabad was highest.

***Finding:** It is observed that more than one fourth of all those interviewed did not have a copy of the RTI act with them. Adilabad topped the list with 37% while Srikakulam was least with 18% while Anantapur had 24% without a copy of the act. Without the copy of the act, they cannot be expected to perform their duty effectively. This partly explains the delay in replying to applications under RTI.*

| District | Percentage of PIOs/APIOs without a copy of the RTI act |
|----------------|--|
| Adilabad | 37% |
| Srikakulam | 18% |
| Anantapur | 24% |
| Overall | 26% |

Table 1: Percentage of PIOs/APIOs without a copy of the RTI act

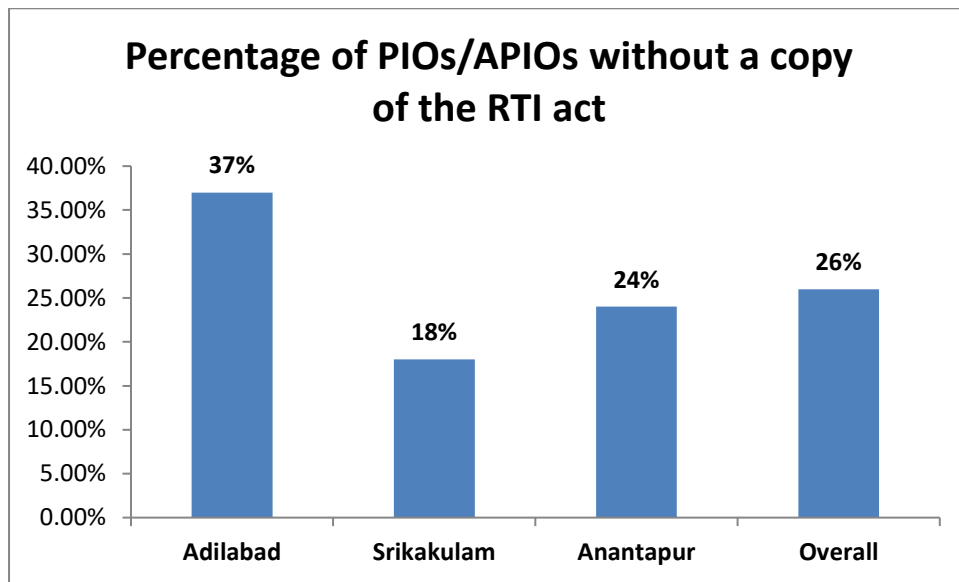


Chart 1: Percentage of PIOs/APIOs without a copy of the RTI act

4.2 Experience as PIO/APIO in number of years

The experience of the official as a PIO/APIO was also surveyed as it was interesting to note that more than two thirds of them had an experience of more than two years while 21% had an experience of less than one year. This was more or less same across districts with a high percentage of them with an experience of more than two years.

| District | Experience as PIO/APIO in Number of Years | | |
|----------------|---|------------|--------------------|
| | More than 2 years | 1-2 years | Less than one year |
| Adilabad | 68% | 18% | 14% |
| Srikakulam | 62% | 6% | 32% |
| Anantapur | 72% | 10% | 18% |
| Overall | 68% | 11% | 21% |

Table 2: Experience as PIO/APIO in Number of Years

Finding: Adilabad had 68% officials with more than 2 years experience in dealing with RTI while the numbers for Srikakulam and Anantapur were 62% and 72% respectively. Srikakulam had the highest number of officials with least experience, 32% with less than one year experience while Adilabad had 14% and Anantapur had 18% in the same category. Among those with 1-2 years of experience, Adilabad topped the list with 18% while Srikakulam had the least with 6% and Anantapur had 10%. Since all these districts are backward, it is important that the officials have experience of governance, systems and an understanding of people’s issues. It is heartening to note that more than two thirds have more than two years of experience of the dealing with requests under the RTI act.

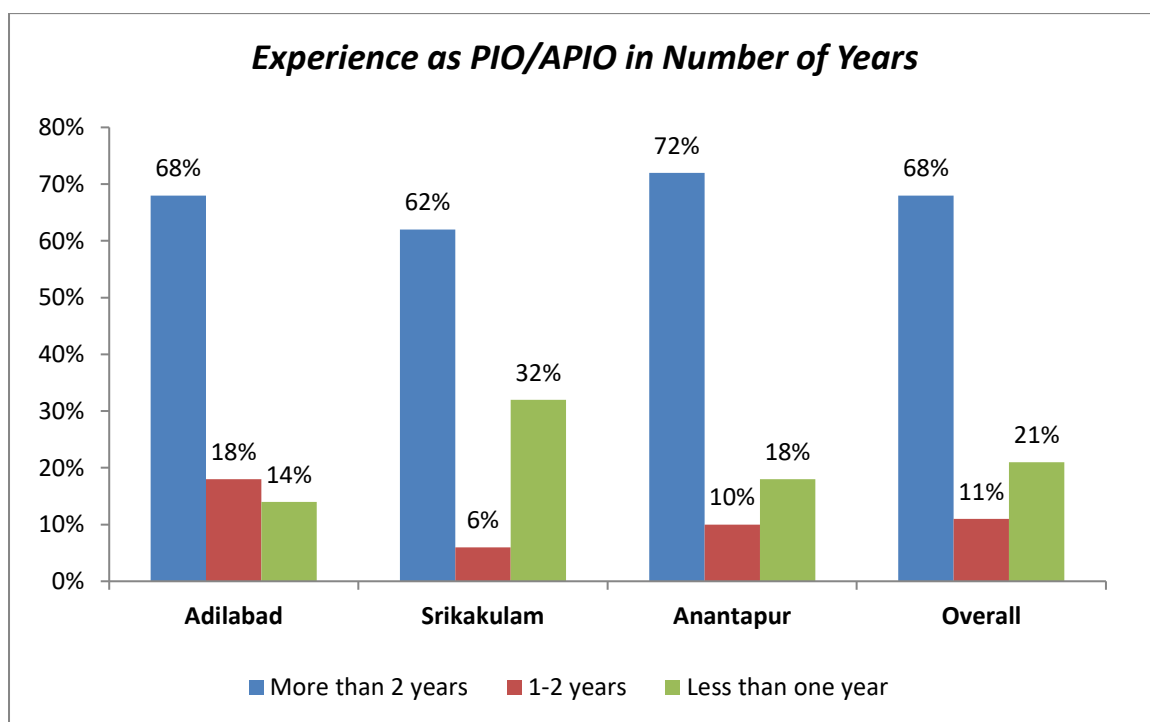


Chart 2: Experience as PIO/APIO in Number of Years

4.3 Desire to be the PIO/APIO

In the survey, it was also asked if they ever wanted to be the PIO/APIO. This response is particularly important to gauge the mindset of the officials towards the act. An overwhelming majority of them are discharging the function of PIO/APIO because they were directed by their superiors. A handful of them expressed the desire to be the PIO/APIO.

| District | Percentage of PIO/APIOs who said they are doing it because they were directed by their superiors |
|----------------|--|
| Adilabad | 88% |
| Srikakulam | 88% |
| Anantapur | 94% |
| Overall | 90% |

Table 3: Percentage of PIO/APIOs who said they are doing it because they were directed by their superiors

***Finding:** The percentage of officials who said they are discharging the role of PIO/APIO because they were directed by their superiors was uniform across districts with 88% in Adilabad, 88% in Srikakulam and 94% in Anantapur. This negative perception about the role of the PIO/APIO could be because of many reasons. The first is that they experienced the difficulties in discharging the role and second is the perception about the job being difficult. Either way, it is interesting to note that the bureaucracy responded in the same way whether it was Adilabad or Srikakulam or Anantapur. Though these districts were far apart from each other, the results were uniform indicating that the bureaucracy thinks the same way. This seemingly negative mindset of the officials often results in the improper implementation of the RTI act. This mindset is also the prime reason for the adversarial exchange between applicants and officials. The 90% figure substantiates the fact that not many officials are willing to take on the role. They are there because they were directed by their superiors.*

4.4 Training & Impact

Training of officials on a new act like RTI is essential and makes a huge difference in the way the act is implemented. In fact, this is assumed to be one of the primary reasons for effective implementation of the act. The survey results are alarming. More than half of them did not receive a single day of training on the RTI act. Overall, about two thirds of them of them did not attend a single training program on the RTI act. The impact of training can also be gauged from the fact that everybody who underwent training said that the training was extremely useful. A handful of them received training more than once.

| District | Percentage of PIO/APIOs who did not attend any training so far |
|----------------|--|
| Adilabad | 63% |
| Srikakulam | 71% |
| Anantapur | 55% |
| Overall | 63% |

Table 4: Percentage of PIO/APIOs who did not attend any training so far

Finding: The percentage of officials who did not receive any training on the RTI act in Adilabad stood at 63% while it was 71% in Srikakulam and 55% in Anantapur. Training on the practical aspects of a new act is crucial in its successful implementation. It could be also concluded that RTI was never covered even in their regular service trainings. The lack of training on the RTI act at the grass roots will have a huge bearing on the implementation. Without working knowledge of the act, the PIOs/APIOs cannot be expected to do their duty properly. It will only be unfair to expect things from them. It is alarming that close to two-thirds of the officials have not received training on the RTI act. It is also surprising to note that there is no correlation between trainings and holding a copy of the RTI act. This means that the act copies were not provided as a part of the training. Srikakulam which has about 71% officials who were not trained on the act had the least number of officials without a copy of the act.

4.5 Amount of time spent on replying to applications under the RTI act

One of the common complaints that one hears from the officials is the amount of time they spend on replying to applications under the RTI act. It was sought to know if the officials were really spending a lot of time in providing information and if they do, what could be the reasons for spending such a time. According to the survey, majority of them spend more than 10 hours on each application (more than three fourths), while most of that time goes in finding the information.

| District | Percentage of PIO/APIOs who spend more than 10 hours on each application | Percentage of PIO/APIOs who said majority time is spent in finding information |
|----------------|--|--|
| Adilabad | 70% | 74% |
| Srikakulam | 83% | 70% |
| Anantapur | 80% | 74% |
| Overall | 78% | 73% |

Table 5: Time spent on each RTI application and the reasons

Finding: The percentage of officials who said that they spend more than 10 hours on each RTI application was high in all the districts. It was 70% in Adilabad, 83% in Srikakulam & 80% in Anantapur. It is also observed that close to three fourths of the time spent in replying to applications under the RTI act is spent on finding the relevant information. 74% in

Adilabad, 70% in Srikakulam and 74% in Anantapur said they spend majority of their time in finding the information. While 10 hours per application looks like a lot of time, the fact that majority of them do not receive more than one application per month on an average should be enough assurance that providing information under the RTI act is not disproportionately diverting their time or resources. Spending a large amount of time could be due to multiple reasons. As seen in the other parts of the survey, Records Management & Information Management are the top most reasons for spending such a long time on each application. Again the percentage is more or less uniform across the districts. This corroborates the earlier finding that bureaucracy irrespective of geographical boundaries has similar systems and they all respond similarly. And also less than 5% of all the officials in each district spend more than a day in appearing before the Information Commission every month. Hence it can be safely concluded that the fear about officials spending a lot of time on RTI is unfounded.

4.6 Maintenance of records as specified under Sec 25 of the RTI act

Sec 25 of the RTI act mandates every public authority to maintain a certain register where in details like the number of applications received, number of applications where information is denied etc is to be recorded. The survey looked into five different parameters for which records have to be maintained by the relevant public authority. This record keeping is very important for assessing the progress of the RTI act and enumerate the number of applications, their rise etc.

| Parameter/District | Adilabad | Srikakulam | Anantapur | Overall |
|---|----------|------------|-----------|---------|
| Record of Applications Received | 68% | 79% | 43% | 64% |
| Date when information was sent | 67% | 79% | 43% | 63% |
| No. of applicants who were provided information | 68% | 72% | 43% | 61% |
| No. of applicants who were denied information | 65% | 13% | 43% | 38% |
| Justification of denial of information | 62% | 15% | 43% | 38% |

Table 6: Percentage of PIOs who maintain a record of the relevant parameter

Finding: The record keeping was better in Adilabad and worse in Anantapur. Srikakulam had very low percentage of compliance when it comes to maintaining data about denial of information. It could be due to lack of detailed understanding of the act or that not many applications were denied. While majority of the PIOs seem to maintain records of number of applications, number of applications where information is provided, the clarity with regards to denial of information does not seem to be there. This could be attributed to low levels of detailed understanding of the act and the lack of training. Justification of denial of information needs application of mind and it is observed that most PIOs simply deny information without justifying the same.

4.7 Constraints in the implementation of the RTI act

One of the often heard complaints from PIOs/APIOs is the constraints they face in the implementation of the RTI act. The constraints range from administrative, financial and others. The survey also focussed on the different constraints faced by the officials.

| District | Percentage of PIO/APIOs who said they have financial constraints |
|----------------|--|
| Adilabad | 23% |
| Srikakulam | 17% |
| Anantapur | 10% |
| Overall | 16% |

Table 7: Percentage of PIOs/APIOs who said they have financial constraints in discharging their duty as the PIO/APIO

The other reasons and constraints mentioned by PIOs/APIOs in various districts are mentioned below.

- Inadequate & incomplete internal record-keeping and filing system
- Lack of proper Information Management
- Compiling information from disparate sources
- Lack of awareness of provisions of law/procedures/rules
- Lack of training
- Lack of guides/manuals/materials
- Deficiencies in RTI applications

Finding: About 23% in Adilabad, 17% in Srikakulam and 10% in Anantapur said they have financial constraints in the implementation of the act. It is observed that only about 16% of the officials overall felt they faced financial constraints. The constraints they listed included issues like postage charges, photocopy charges etc. This is a low percentage compared to the other parameters of implementation. If there are no such financial constraints, the implementation should have been better. The other constraints they mentioned in implementing the RTI act ranged from training to lack of awareness to internal systems. They also mentioned deficiencies in RTI applications (not easily understood) as one of the reasons. These reasons were mentioned by the PIOs themselves without being prompted. One can safely conclude that the required infrastructure to implement the RTI act is still not in place in most places.

4.8 Proactive Disclosures under Sec 4(1)(b) and their impact

Awareness of Proactive disclosure of 17 items as mandated by Sec 4(1)(b) of the RTI act was surveyed. Along with it, the advantage of such a disclosure, training if any, and their willingness to undergo training were surveyed.

A. Whether they know about Sec 4(1)(b) of the RTI act?

Of the PIOs/APIOs surveyed, only 27% in Adilabad, 50% in Srikakulam and 33% in Anantapur know about the provisions under Sec 4(1)(b) of the RTI act.

B. What are the reasons for not implementing Sec 4(1)(b) of the RTI act?

Of the PIOs/APIOs who did not implement the provisions under Sec 4(1)(b), 96% in Adilabad, 100% in Srikakulam and 100% in Anantapur cited either lack of awareness or no one telling them about as the reasons.

C. Have they received any RTI application/request for the 4(1)(b) manual?

Of the PIOs/APIOs surveyed, 25% in Adilabad, 5% in Srikakulam and 14% in Anantapur said they did receive applications requesting the 4(1)(b) manual.

D. Do they think publishing information like beneficiary data, details of schemes, budgets and how they are spent will reduce the number of applications?

Of the PIOs/APIOs surveyed, 58% in Adilabad, 84% in Srikakulam and 49% in Anantapur said this will reduce the number of applications while the rest felt it would not make any difference.

E. Was any training given on how to prepare 4(1)(b) manual?

Of the PIOs/APIOs surveyed, 86% in Adilabad, 82% in Srikakulam and 90% in Anantapur said that they did not receive any training on the preparation of the 4(1)(b) manual.

F. Would they be willing to undergo a training on Sec 4(1)(b)?

Of the PIOs/APIOs surveyed, 98% in Adilabad, 84% in Srikakulam and 94% in Anantapur said that they are willing to undergo training on Sec 4(1)(b).

***Finding:** It is observed that there is a very low level of awareness on the provisions of Sec 4(1)(b) across districts. Sec 4(1)(b) is the bedrock of the RTI act. This again is a direct reflection of the lack of training. They also identify lack of awareness and lack of information as the primary reasons for non compliance. Once they were explained the provisions under this section, many of them felt that it would help in reducing the load of applications. It is also found that majority did not receive any kind of training in preparation of the manual. Majority of them are willing to undergo training if one is provided.*

4.9 Overall Awareness in their area & Reasons

The perception of the PIOs/APIOs in terms of awareness in their area was also gauged in the interview. According to their understanding, what part of the population in their area was aware of the RTI act, the reasons for awareness or the lack of it were also asked.

***Finding:** It is observed that about 22% in Adilabad, 75% in Srikakulam & 16% in Anantapur felt that people were largely aware of the RTI act. There were only a handful of PIOs/APIOs who said nobody in their area were aware of it. The findings also clearly establish that*

wherever there is greater level of awareness, it is due to Media & CSOs while the lack of awareness is attributed to lack of publicity by the Government. Literacy rate was also cited as one of the reasons for greater awareness. Literates read newspapers and possibly come across articles related to RTI.

The major reasons cited by them for the large level of awareness are

- Campaigns by Media(Like Eenadu Mundhadugu & Civil Society Organizations(CSOs))
- Higher literacy rate
- Proximity to district head quarters
- Understanding the advantages of using the act

The major reasons cited by them for low levels of awareness are

- Illiteracy
- No publicity by the Government
- Interior areas with a large tribal population

4.10 Overall Impact of the RTI act

What the PIOs/APIOs felt about the overall impact of the implementation of the RTI act was also found. This was to give an idea of the level of acceptance of the impact RTI can make.

| District | Percentage of PIO/APIOs who felt that RTI act changed the way of functioning, decision-making, information management |
|----------------|---|
| Adilabad | 57% |
| Srikakulam | 65% |
| Anantapur | 43% |
| Overall | 55% |

Table 8: Percentage of PIO/APIOs who felt that RTI act changed the way of functioning, decision-making, information management

Among the impacts mentioned by them, ‘Improving Record Maintenance’ stood out as almost all of them who acknowledged the impact of RTI mentioned improvement in record Maintenance.

When asked about result of providing information under the RTI act, the following were mentioned.

Positive Fallout

- Increased Transparency & Accountability
- Corruption has reduced
- People can now demand
- It is useful to the poor
- People are able to know more about Government schemes and processes
- Empowered the common man to verify the working of the government
- Government employees are more careful while making decisions
- People are able to get things done with this act
- Checks misuse of funds

Negative Fallout

- It has become a tool of blackmailing
- It has increased harassment of officials

Finding: About 57% in Adilabad, 65% in Srikakulam & 43% in Anantapur felt that RTI act has changed the way they function. It is observed more than half of the officials interviewed acknowledged the role of RTI in changing the way things are done in the government. An overwhelming majority acknowledge the good it has done for the reasons listed above. While a good number of officials felt that it was being used as a tool for blackmail and in turn increased harassment of officials. This could be borne out of personal experience or by hearing stories of blackmail.

4.11 Suggestions for Applicants

The officials were also asked if they had any suggestions for the applicants under the RTI act. The suggestions made by a majority of officials are listed below

- Application should be clear and legible
- They should use it only for public purpose
- They should not use it for blackmailing
- They should be very clear about the information they are seeking

4.12 Suggestions for Improvements to the RTI act

The officials were asked if they had any suggestions to improve the RTI law. The following are some of the suggestions put forth by them.

- There should be a special record keeper
- Proper and adequate training should be provided
- Government should publicize the act
- Time limit for responding to application should be increased
- Dedicated staff should be provided for dealing with RTI requests.

4.13 General Observations

During the course of the study, there were some general observations about the functioning of the government and their attitude towards the RTI act. They are listed below.

- Government offices in tribal areas were largely out of public reach. The officials reach very late.
- Some PIOs in the rank of MROs did not know the details of the act.
- The awareness was high where CSOs have been doing good work.

5.0 Study Results – Analysis of RTI Applications

Proactive Disclosures are mandated by the RTI act. Public authorities at various levels are supposed to disclose 17 items proactively and update them regularly. These disclosures should be made in ways that are easily accessible by the citizens. A majority of public authorities are not implementing this provision in the act. Public authorities complain that a lot of time is being spent in answering applications under the RTI act. Hence this part of the study is undertaken to understand what percentage of RTI applications can be avoided if proactive disclosures were properly implemented.

Applications filed under the RTI act in the years 2012 & 2013 from various MPDO, MRO & Municipalities were collected. But due to various constraints like local body elections, bifurcation of the state etc., we could collect only 80% of the total applications filed. The number of applications analyzed is as follows,

| S No | District | MPDO | MRO | Municipality | Total |
|------|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Adilabad | 70 | 270 | 36 | 376 |
| 2 | Anantapur | 54 | 219 | 33 | 306 |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 124 | 128 | 0 | 252 |
| | Total | 248 | 617 | 69 | 934 |

Table 9: Number of RTI applications Analysed district wise

Each RTI application thus collected was analyzed for various parameters. The broad parameters included General Information, Information sought about, Type of Information sought, Form in which the Information was sought and if the application was problematic.

5.1 General Information Analysis

Various factors like gender of the applicant, Language of the application, Length of the application, Whether the application is in some format, Mode of payment, geography of the applicant were analysed as a part of this section

5.1.1 Gender of the applicant

It has often been the case that women participation in large numbers has led to the success of any legislation. RTI is no exception. Hence it is important to understand how many women are utilizing the act.

| S No | District | Total Number of applications analysed | Number of applications filed by Men | Number of applications filed by Women | Percentage of Women applicants |
|------|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 343 | 33 | 8.8% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 274 | 32 | 10.5% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 229 | 23 | 9.1% |
| | Total | 934 | 846 | 88 | 9.4% |

Table 10: Analysis of RTI applications – Gender wise

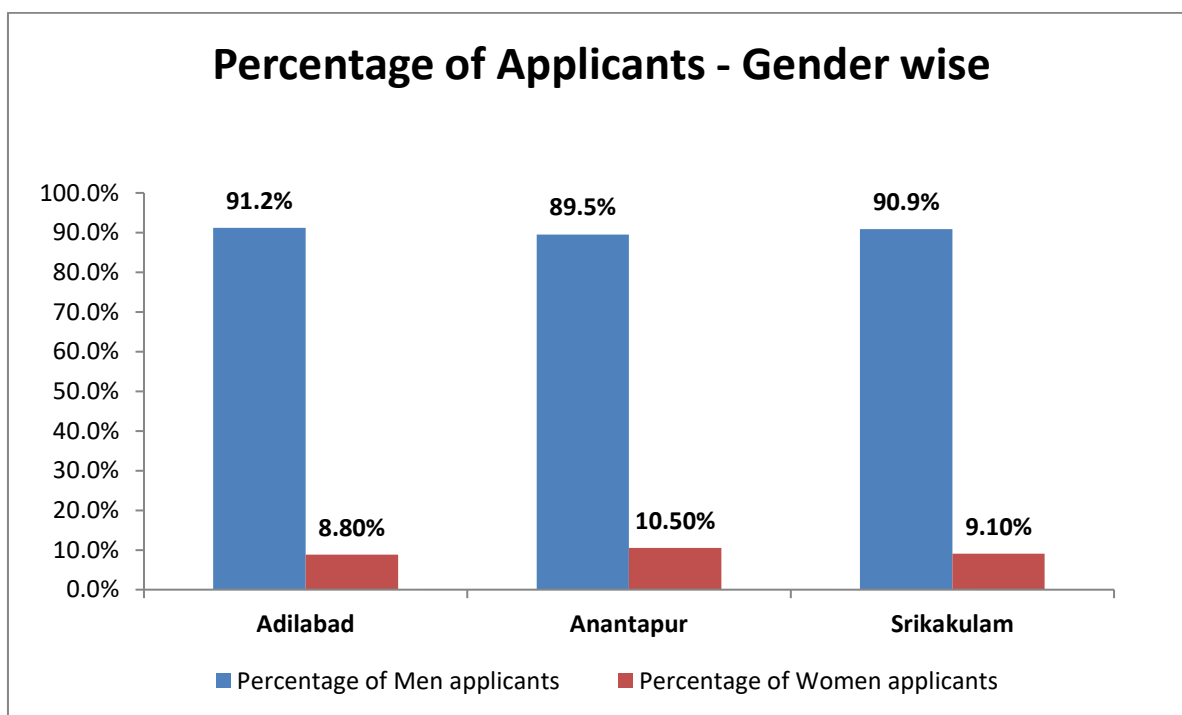


Chart 3: Analysis of RTI applications – Gender wise

Finding: *The percentage of women applicants was about 10% in all the districts. It is slightly more in Anantapur than in the other two districts. But on the whole, the percentage of women applicants is very low. This goes to show the greater lack of awareness in women than in men.*

5.1.2 Language & Length of the application

One of the goals of the RTI act is to disseminate information in the local language so that majority of the population can access the same. Section 4(4) of the RTI act says, '*All materials shall be disseminated taking into consideration the cost effectiveness, local language and the most effective method of communication in that local area and the information should be easily accessible.*'. The applications directly may not be able to give us an exact picture of the language of information dissemination. But they are an important medium to understand the use of RTI at the grass roots as to what kind of the population is making use of the act.

The length of the application has become a contentious issue in the last few years. The constant complaint from the official quarters has been that applications filed under the RTI act are often very lengthy and answering those applications takes away a lot of their time. Though the State Government of Andhra Pradesh did not put any restriction on the length of the application, Government of India modified the RTI act rules ⁷to put a restriction on the number of words in an application. It put a restriction of 500 words for the application excluding annexure, containing address of the Central Public Information Officer and that of the applicant.

⁷ RTI act rules notified by the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) on 31st July, 2012. (http://persmin.gov.in/DOPT/Acts_Rules/RTI/RTIRules_2012_English.pdf)

| S No | District | Total number of applications analysed | Percentage of Applications in Telugu (Local Language) | Average Length of each application in number of words | Percentage of applications with a length of more than 500 words |
|------|--------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 58% | 84 | 0% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 75% | 72 | 0.7% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 83% | 89 | 1.2% |
| | Total | 934 | 70% | 82 | 0.5% |

Table 11: Analysis of RTI applications – Language & length

Finding: Considerable numbers of applications were filed in the local language (Telugu). Srikakulam had the highest percentage of applications filed in Telugu (83%) followed by Anantapur (75%) and Adilabad (58%). It is heartening to note that close to 70% of the total applications filed were in the local language.

The average length of the application across the state was 82 words. The average was highest in Srikakulam (89 words), followed by Adilabad (84 words) and Anantapur (72 words). On the whole only 5 applications (a mere 0.5% of the total) were above 500 words. Almost all the applications were within 500 words and the average length was just 82 words. This clearly disproves the fears of the officials about the length of the applications.

5.1.3 Other Details

Other details such as the Mode of payment, geography of the applicant and if the applicant was in some format were analysed. The Mode of Payment is an important issue. The RTI rules of Andhra Pradesh allow applicants to make the payment towards the application fee in various modes like Cash, Cheque, Demand Draft(DD), Indian Postal Order (IPO), Treasury Chalan and a Court Fee Stamp. Mode of payment is often cited as one of the important hurdles for applicants. Hence it is important to understand what modes of payment are used most. Several CSOs have been working towards spreading awareness of the RTI act. Most of them have distributed format of RTI application to make it easy for the applicant. The information on the format will help in understanding the impact of the work of various CSOs. The geography of the applicant is another important parameter that will help understand the extent of RTI usage by the population at the grassroots.

| S No | District | Total number of applications analysed | Percentage of applications filed in a format | Percentage of Applicants from Villages |
|------|--------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 41% | 48% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 35% | 50% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 66% | 47% |
| | Total | 934 | 46% | 48% |

Table 12: Analysis of RTI applications – Profile of applicants

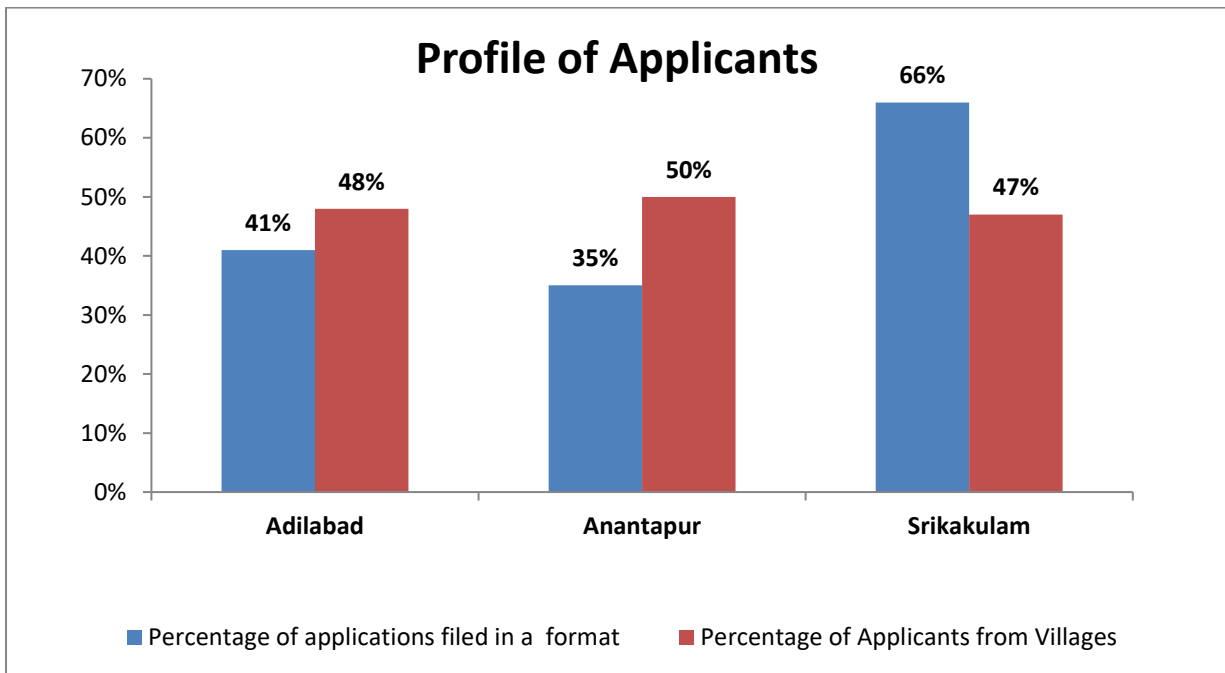


Chart 4: Analysis of RTI applications – profile of Applicants

Finding: The percentage of applications filed in a format usually is a good indication of the extent of work undertaken by CSOs on spreading the RTI act awareness. It is interesting to note that close to 46% of all the applications were filed in a format. Srikakulam leads the pack with 66% of the applications in a format followed by Adilabad with 41% followed by Anantapur with 35%. It can be concluded that the impact of the CSOs work has been dominant in Srikakulam. It is heartening to note that close to 48% of the applications on the whole were filed by people from the villages. Anantapur leads the pack with 50% closely followed by Adilabad with 48% and Srikakulam with 47%. People from the villages form almost half of all the applicants.

| S No | District | Total number of applications analysed | Percentage of applications where mode of payment is | | |
|------|--------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------|
| | | | IPO | Court Fee stamp | Others |
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 29% | 48% | 23% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 47% | 21% | 32% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 6% | 71% | 23% |
| | Total | 934 | 29% | 46% | 26% |

Table 13: Analysis of RTI applications – Mode of payment

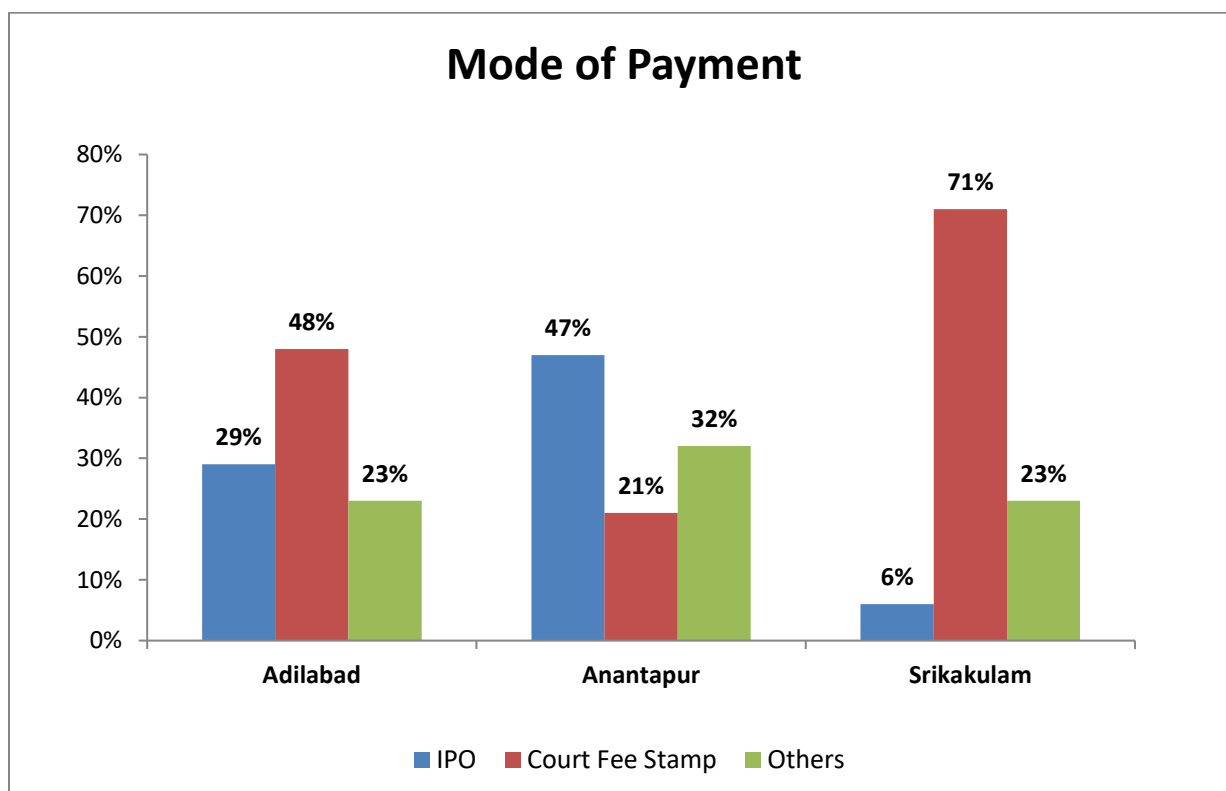


Chart 5: Analysis of RTI applications – Mode of payment

Finding: The mode of payment followed by applicants could point to two conclusions. The first one is the availability of IPOs, Court Fee Stamps etc. The second one is the impact of awareness campaigns undertaken by the CSOs. In Adilabad, 29% of the applicants used IPO, 48% used court fee stamp and 23% used other modes of payment. In Anantapur, 47% of the applicants used IPO, 21% used court fee stamp and 32% used other modes of payment. In Srikakulam, only 6% of the applicants used IPO, 71% used court fee stamp and 23% used other modes of payment. It is interesting to note that usage of court fee stamp as a mode of payment was highest in Srikakulam where the highest numbers of applications were filed in a

format. It can be concluded that CSOs have been more successful in Srikakulam compared to the other districts. IPO & Court Fee stamp account for almost three fourths of the modes of payment. It again goes to show that applicants prefer to use that mode of payment that is easily available as well as easy to use.

5.2 Analysis of Information sought

It is critical to look at the utility of the RTI legislation and kind of information sought. Through this, the information needs of citizens can be ascertained. This part of the analysis looked at the purpose of information sought for by the applicants.

| S No | District | Total number of applications analysed | Sought Information about Applicant's own personal matters | Sought Information about Applicant's own service matters |
|-------------|-----------------|--|--|---|
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 15% | 0.8% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 15% | 0.3% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 20% | 0.4% |
| | Total | 934 | 16% | 0.5% |

Table 14: Analysis of RTI applications – Information sought about

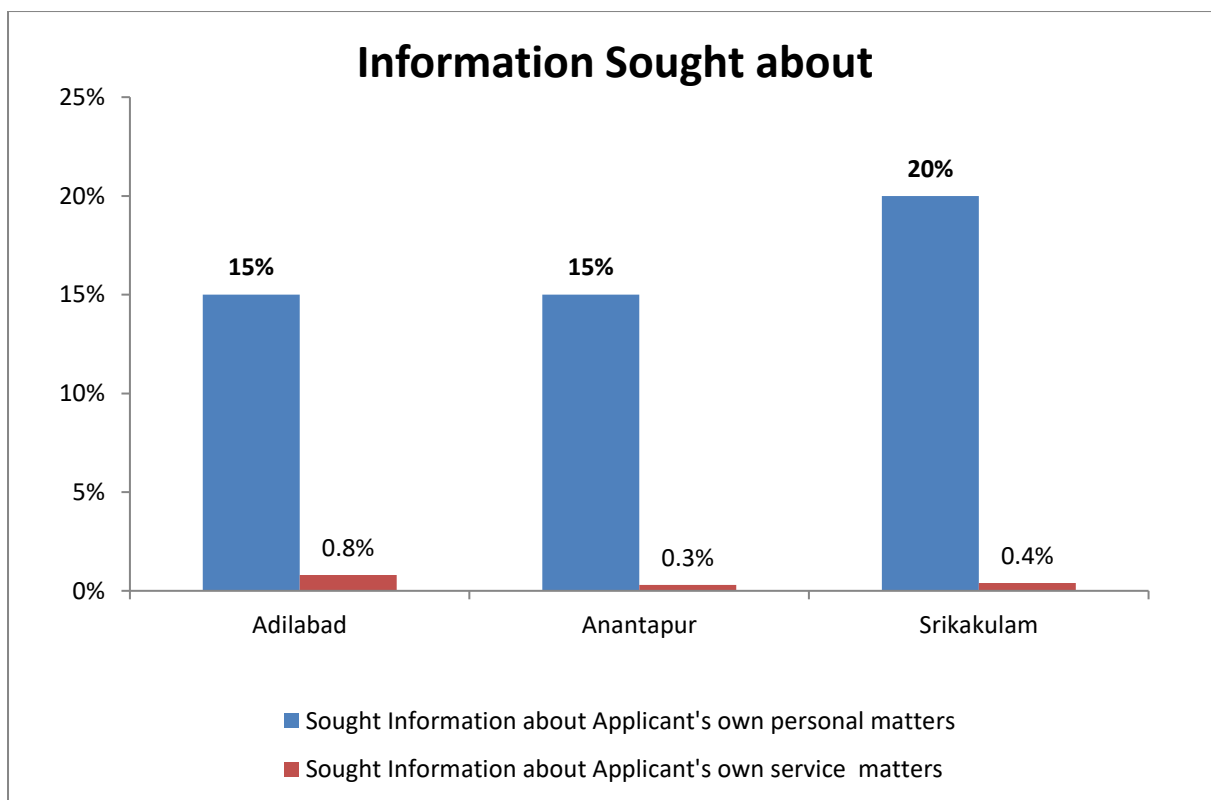


Chart 6: Analysis of RTI applications – Information sought about

Finding: The purpose of information sought could lead us to some very important conclusions. As can be seen, about 20% of all the applicants sought information about their own personal matters while the same for Adilabad stands at 15% and for Anantapur stands at 15%. Only a miniscule number of applicants sought information about their service matters. This percentage stood at 0.8% in Adilabad while the same in Anantapur was 0.3% and in Srikakulam was 0.4%. It is clear that only a small percentage (16% overall) have filed applications to get information relating to their own personal matters. Contrary to popular belief that a large number of applicants use the RTI act for their personal benefit, it is clear that this number is only 1/6th of the total number of applications. A miniscule 0.5% overall sought information about their service matters. The low percentage of service matter issues could also be due to the fact that most service matters are dealt at a higher level and not at the grass roots.

5.3 Analysis of Information sought - Geography

It is also important to understand the kind of information sought and the geographical extent. This will help analyse the volume of information being sought for by applicants.

| | District | Total number of applications analysed | Information sought about a village or multiple villages | Information sought about a district or multiple districts | Information sought about a specific location/project |
|---|--------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 11% | 8% | 3% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 10% | 2% | 13% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 10% | 5% | 20% |
| | Total | 934 | 11% | 5% | 11% |

Table 15: Analysis of RTI applications – Geography of Information sought

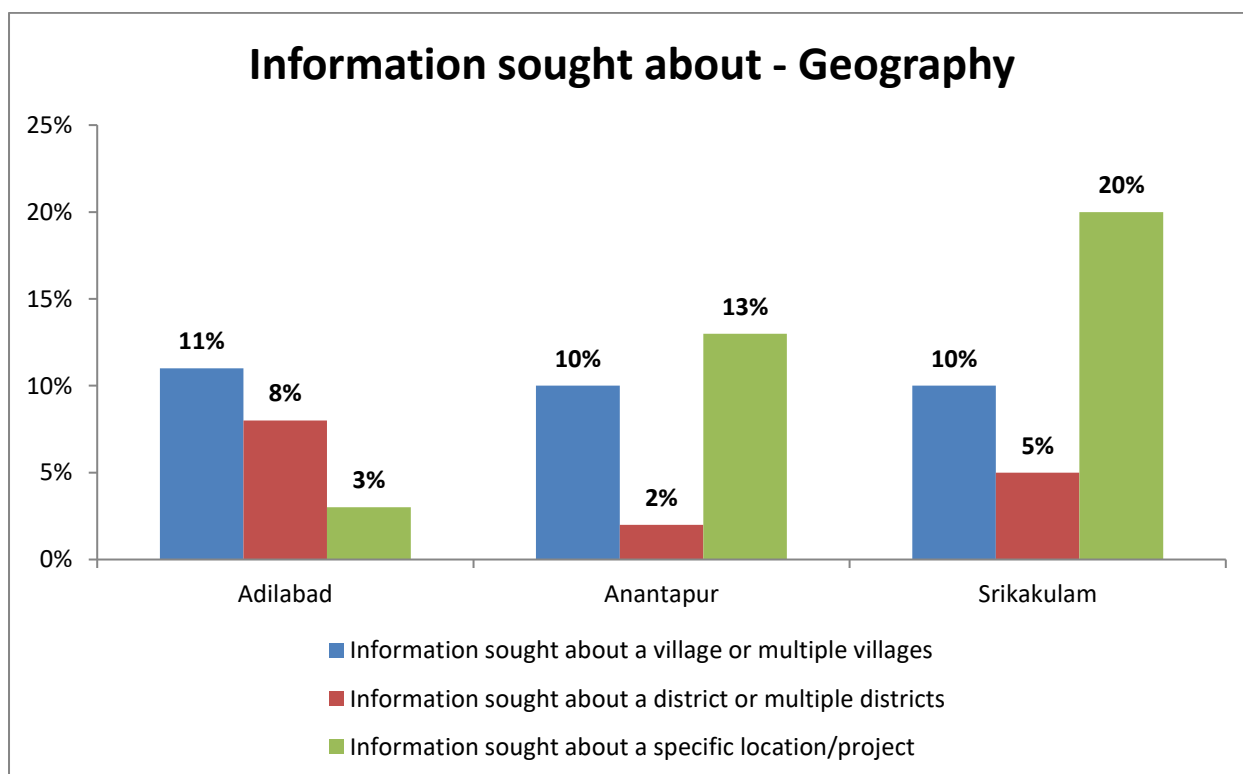


Chart 7: Analysis of RTI applications – Geography of Information sought

Finding: The geography or the extent of information sought is important in understanding information needs specific to a location. While the information sought about a village or multiple villages was 11% in Adilabad, it was 10% in Anantapur and 10% in Srikakulam. About 1/10th of the total applicants sought information about a village. A lesser number of applicants sought information about a district which stood at 8% in Adilabad, 2% in Anantapur and 5% in Srikakulam. The interesting observation from this analysis is the percentage of applicants who sought information about a specific location or project. While this percentage stood at 3% in Adilabad, it is 13% in Anantapur and 20% in Srikakulam. The high percentages in Anantapur and Srikakulam could be due to local issues where people affected by projects could have asked for information. This clearly underscores the need for proactive disclosure of all the information while implementing projects that affect public.

5.4 Analysis of Type of Information sought

As said earlier, the type of information is the most important indicator of the information needs at the grass roots. This would also give the correct picture about the information that should have been part of proactive disclosure and various other sets of information in demand.

Note: The same application might have asked for multiple sets of information. Hence the percentages won't add up to 100. They should be looked at individually.

| S No | Type of Information | Adilabad | Anantapur | Srikakulam |
|------|--|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Public information/Section 4 information | 67% | 69% | 59% |
| 2 | Information about material/physical resources/objects/infrastructure | 54% | 56% | 58% |
| 3 | Information about financial and economic matters and use of public resources | 9% | 15% | 17% |
| 4 | Information about decisions/basis of a decision | 25% | 17% | 10% |
| 5 | Information about the existence of facilities or opportunities | 42% | 45% | 39% |

Table 16: Analysis of RTI applications – Type of Information Sought

Finding: About 67% of the applicants in Adilabad, 69% in Anantapur and 59% in Srikakulam sought information that should have been public information or information to be disclosed under Section 4(1)(b) of the RTI act. In other words, close to two thirds of the applications at the grass roots are about information that should have been in the public domain without the need to file applications. This clearly establishes that proactive disclosures under Section 4 are the most important in RTI implementation. Close to two thirds of the applications could have been avoided if these disclosures were done properly and in a manner accessible by most of the citizens. That would in turn reduce the burden on the public authorities.

About 54% of the applicants in Adilabad, 56% in Anantapur and 58% in Srikakulam sought information related to physical material or infrastructure. About 9% of the applicants in Adilabad, 15% in Anantapur and 17% in Srikakulam sought information related to financial and economic matters and the use of public resources. It is interesting to note that this percentage is high in Srikakulam and almost double that of in Adilabad. This could point to possible large amounts of public spending on projects.

About 25% of the applicants in Adilabad, 17% in Anantapur and 10% in Srikakulam sought information related to decisions or the basis of decisions. This is high in Adilabad compared to other districts. About 42% of the applicants in Adilabad, 45% in Anantapur and 39% in Srikakulam sought information related to the existence of facilities or opportunities. This is more or less uniform across the districts.

5.5 Analysis of Form in which information is sought

The RTI act provides for seeking information in the form of certified documents, inspection of documents, file noting, physical samples etc. This part of the analysis is to understand the most common form in which the information is sought.

| S No | Form in which the information is sought | Adilabad | Anantapur | Srikakulam |
|------|---|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Response/reply | 15% | 14% | 10% |
| 2 | Copy of Documents | 53% | 51% | 52% |
| 3 | Inspection of Documents/sites | 1% | 0.3% | 2% |
| 4 | File Noting | 3% | 2% | 0% |
| 5 | Statistics & Data | 22% | 26% | 31% |

Table 17: Analysis of RTI applications – Form in which Information is sought

Finding: The form in which maximum applicants sought information is in the form of copies of documents. This percentage is more or less uniform across the districts. About 53% of the applicants in Adilabad, 51% in Anantapur and 52% in Srikakulam sought information in the form of documents. Another form in which quite a few applicants sought information is statistics and data. About 22% of the applicants in Adilabad, 26% in Anantapur and 31% in Srikakulam sought information in the form of statistics and data. The interesting observation is the percentage of applicants who asked for inspection of documents/sites. While this percentage is as low as 1% in Adilabad, it is 0.3% in Anantapur and 2% in Srikakulam. This clearly points to a lack of awareness about this provision in the RTI act. It also points to the reluctance of applicants to physically inspect documents/sites.

5.6 Analysis of Problematic RTI applications

A common complaint from PIOs and Public authorities relates to the vexatious and frivolous applications. From conversations with PIOs, it is understood that the applications that seek voluminous data, for long time span and those that do not have any apparent purpose are being termed as vexatious and frivolous. This analysis looks at the percentage of applications that seek information that is voluminous in nature and that relates to a long time span.

| S No | District | Total number of applications analysed | Voluminous Information Sought | Information sought relates to a Long time span (Over 10 years) |
|------|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Adilabad | 376 | 8% | 7% |
| 2 | Anantapur | 306 | 6% | 6% |
| 3 | Srikakulam | 252 | 5% | 8% |
| | Total | 934 | 7% | 7% |

Table 18: Analysis of RTI applications – Voluminous applications

Finding: About 8% of the applicants in Adilabad, 6% in Anantapur and 5% in Srikakulam sought information that is voluminous in nature. About 7% of the applicants in Adilabad, 6% in Anantapur and 8% in Srikakulam sought information that relates to a long time span (over 10 years). The percentage of applications in both these categories is less than 10%.

5.7 General Observations

It is observed that a large number of applications filed in the revenue department sought copies of Adangal/Pahani. This is a very important revenue record, as it contains details of land such as owner's details, area, assessment, water rate, soil type, nature of possession liabilities, Tenancy, Crops grown, etc.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and observations, the following measures could be implemented to improve the implementation regime.

- Dedicated budget should be allocated by the government for training & publicity of the act. It must be ensured that every official who is discharging the role of a PIO/APIO should undergo a comprehensive training. They should also be provided with a copy of the act and a note on best practises.
- Apart from training the officials, the government should make special efforts to spread the awareness among common people, especially Women. Special awareness drives should also be conducted in tribal areas and in areas where the rate of literacy is low.
- Special emphasis should be laid on implementation of Sec 4(1)(b). It is clear that majority applications can be reduced if this provision of the RTI act is properly implemented. It will in turn reduce the burden on the PIO. Templates released by Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Government of India should be used and every government office must be directed to come up with a manual in a specified time frame. They should also be directed to update the same at regular intervals. Cataloguing and Indexing of records should also be taken up.

- Commonly sought information should be disclosed proactively and such sets of information should be updated regularly. These could include
 - Information about financial and economic matters and use of public resources
 - Information about decisions/basis of a decision made by a public functionary
 - Information about the existence of facilities or opportunities in the Government
- The training should also include modules to change the seemingly negative perception of the act.
- Training should also be extended to all the officials since they will also play a role in providing information. Training should be made a mandatory part of their routine trainings.
- The training should be followed by a test on the RTI act and those scoring above a certain threshold should be awarded certificate and some incentive on the same lines as Government of Delhi.
- Special budgets should be allocated for digitization of records in a time bound manner. All government offices should be networked and technology should be used extensively.
- Record Management & Information Management in public offices should be given high priority and be completed in a time bound manner.
- The APIOs should be instructed to help the applicants draft their applications so that the information being asked is clear.
- Civil Society in general and RTI activists in particular should be involved in oversight committees looking into the implementation of the RTI act at both the state and district level.
- Inspection of documents or records could be encouraged by PIOs as per Sec 7(9) whenever the information sought is voluminous in nature.

ANNEXURES

(Reports of the Field study)

Adilabad Field Study Report

The field survey on Right to Information Act in Adilabad had many interesting things to teach. As part of a survey team working on the research project, we, as research assistants, were administered a firsthand experience of governance and bureaucracy and the complicated machinery of people that keeps it in running.

Adilabad is a district with low literacy rate and with real estate market booming. These two factors are reflected throughout the district. Mandals with high number of welding and cement shops are the ones with relatively high number of RTI applications asking for photocopies of land records in the MRO office. The Mandals with hilly areas and more tribal population like Utnoor and Narnoor, received fewer applications on the whole, at the MRO office.

Our field surveys included over 50 interviews with officials from the Revenue and Panchayat Raj department. Our first trip to the District Collectorate, to inform the Collector of our survey, was where we met our first gram Panchayat secretary and Extension Officer of Mavala village, Adilabad Mandal. Despite all the valid documentation, it took us nearly an hour to coax him to be interviewed and when we began, we realized through the course of the questioning, that he had very little clarity on the Right to Information Act. Forget the nitty gritty of the Act, this man who in his capacity as the Public Information Officer was in charge of dealing with RTI applications, had only a vague idea about his responsibilities or the procedures of the Act. “RTI Act is very good, very helpful, but it is being misused. I have nothing more to say,” he said. He confessed to providing information to applicants only on a “basis of friendship” and that the Act must make it necessary for people to state their reasons or motives for asking information. This among other complaints would be heard very frequently as we progressed through our schedule across the district.

Baseless applications, voluminous data, repeated applications, blackmailing, extortion, and burdening duty - all of these were the apparent results of providing information under the RTI Act according to the government officials. It is no surprise therefore, given this kind of ignorant lackey attitude, that people have paid enormous amounts of money to photocopy the entire data records of a revenue department office in Adilabad. Almost all the officers interviewed, complained of blackmails received from applicants for not providing the voluminous information they asked for. Only a handful of officers did not complain on the lack of staff and infrastructure to implement RTI.

Regarding maintenance of the RTI register and filing of the received applications and the replies sent, MRO offices are doing better than MPDO offices. However, none from the office visited during the survey, maintained the records to the standards of minimal

satisfaction. It is observed that, few are better than rest. In this criterion, as well, geographical factors and tribal population in the Mandal played a role. Register maintenance is at lowest levels of standards. PIO and First Appellate authority is the same person. (Mandals: Bela and Boath) .

Analysis of the 400 odd RTI applications that we had collected, it was evident that though our government needs to seriously put in measures towards an implementation or awareness drive on the Act among its officials, there was no ignorance among the common public about the Act. The effective usage of the RTI Act by the common public, including in agency and scheduled areas, points towards its strong popularity as a tool for redressal and information seeking. While a majority of this has been the result of active media campaigns or the presence of voluntary organisations, there have been very few or no campaigns taken up by the government itself in teaching or promoting the Act among its own machinery.

Regarding the training for RTI, most of the officials who have been serving in the Government for more than ten years, were not the ones to get RTI training, if they did get some training, it appears that not much attention was paid to the training. It is observed that the subordinates to such persons have better knowledge on RTI and are the ones who draft reply to the applicants.

Take for instance the examples of certain officials from both revenue and Panchayat raj departments we had interviewed. None of them knew about the basic provisions of the Act, have zero guidance or training and are averse to dealing with it as a responsibility even before they have any idea of the Act itself. One Superintendent of the Adilabad MPDO, being a PIO for 8 years and having been in government service for 19 years asked us, after our interview, quite innocently, “Can we cash in the postal orders people send us as part of the application? Or the demand drafts? Because we don't know what to do with it and have been considering the idea of disposing them.”

None of officials complained on financial constraints to implement the Act, but all of them agreed that they lack minimum infrastructure like Photocopying machines or Printers.

This must give us a basic idea of the personnel in charge of providing information. The active public interest that was visible from the number of applications we had gone through, points towards more awareness among the public than the government officials dealing with the Act. Also, there has been no system of information management setup among any of the departments we had visited even as they continue to accumulate humongous amounts of data records every day. Files continue to be piled up in store rooms as there is no infrastructure or personnel ready to digitize the information. It is a clear signal to the policy makers to pay attention to these problems ailing those who work with the Right to Information Act every day before they consider making any amendments.

Srikakulam Field Trip Report

The field survey on Right to Information Act taken up in Srikakulam has many interesting things to share, although most of the observations gleaned were no different from Adilabad where the previous survey was undertaken. Among the government officials appointed responsible for implementation and dealing with the RTI Act on a day to day basis, very few, a startling minority seemed knowledgeable or enthusiastic about dealing with it or willing to be educated.

The survey covered 10 mandal headquarters, 30 gram panchayats and 1 municipality. Revenue and Panchayat Raj departments and officials in the above said categories were surveyed and a total of 51 interviews were conducted. For a detailed analysis and backend study on the kind of information being sought from the general public, photocopies and photographs of RTI applications and registers of the year 2012 and 2013 were collected.

In retrospect, high levels of awareness about the Act and its usage to seek information by the public was noticed in the Srikakulam municipality and district headquarters. However it was surprising to find the officials (responsible as Public Information Officers and Assistant Public Information Officers), barely aware about the Act and had little or no working knowledge about it. In one case, the Mandal Revenue Officer of Amudalavalasa mandal claimed that he has no idea of the Act because he never had to deal with it.

As the survey progressed into the more interior parts of Srikakulam, the usage of the Act in terms of applications filed, decreased considerably. There has been little or no training given to the officers in charge on how to work with the RTI Act. As for any improvements in record maintenance or digitizing records to help smoothen out the implementation of the Act, very little changes have been observed.

From our survey, it was noticed that a majority of the officials interviewed, were disinterested, and sometimes even disapproved of the Act. A popular consensus among them was this - "The Act is excellent and has no flaws but people are misusing it to blackmail and settle personal scores." How seeking information can lead to blackmail was answered by many colorful stories and personal accounts of woes while dealing with people determined to use the RTI.

The idea of information management and improvement in decision making to make information more easily available to the public has not sunk in yet. Proactive disclosures, made mandatory under Section 4 (1) (b) of the RTI Act has very few takers. Officials are still of the belief that they would rather dispense information "if people kindly request us verbally or in person. There is no need to file RTI applications."

The finances required to implement or work with the RTI Act are very little, but many of the departmental heads agreed that it was a “burden” to provide information without paying for the photocopies or postage out of their pockets. Justification for seeking information and the need to increase the fee for RTI applications were among the list of popular concerns and suggestions.

They very strongly believe that the RTI is a burden added to the immense tasks and responsibilities they shoulder while working with the Revenue and Panchayat Raj departmental works, so there is a unanimous consensus for making a provision in the Act that would allow record keepers and officials specially designated to deal with the RTI.

In summary, while the Act is being exercised to seek information and keep a tight watch on the activities of the government officials by the general public, the government must seriously consider training and educating all departmental personnel in dealing with the RTI Act.

The fact that an overwhelming majority of them would rather do away with it than work towards its complete implementation, poses many questions about the functioning of our government machinery and why there is an urgent need to look inwards.

Anantapur Field Trip Report

The purpose of the survey is to understand the level of implementation of RTI Act in Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh. The survey conducted covered PIOs & APIOs across 10 Mandals, 30 villages and 1 Municipality.

Mandal Revenue office (MRO) and Mandal Parishad Development Office (MPDO) were covered in each Mandal. Panchayat office at village level and Municipal office at Municipality were also covered. The survey is conducted and data is collected with the help of a questionnaire.

Owing to poor economic condition and illiteracy in the district, there are fewer applications than expected in each office. Maintenance of register for RTI, is not observed in many cases. Many officials lack understanding on RTI act.

It is observed that many Panchayat secretaries did not receive training on RTI Act. However, the percentage is less in Mandal offices. The new appointees have undergone training on the RTI act as part of their job training, but such training is missing in the case of seniors.

Almost all the officers interviewed, complained of blackmail by applicants for not providing the voluminous information they asked for. Only a handful of officers did not complain on the lack of staff and infrastructure to implement RTI.

Few officers complained on not providing Travel allowance when they summoned for hearing at Information commission, Hyderabad.

In my opinion, the person who is the PIO is playing a key role. The officer holding highest position in that particular office should be made First appellate authority, like in the case of MPDO office, where MPDO is the first appellate and Superintendent is the PIO. This didn't reflect in the case of MRO, where MRO is the PIO.

In my opinion, one major reason for improper implementation of RTI is the structure of bureaucracy. The structure is developed by British, where major role of bureaucracy is to collect taxes. And the person who is collecting taxes was bestowed with judiciary powers. Decades of independence, the structure did not change much. Decentralization of judicial and executive powers is much needed at Mandal level.

Except in few Mandals, all MRO offices are age old buildings constructed in British era, which fail to accommodate the relative increase in staff and records.

To conclude, RTI Act implantation in Anantapur, could not reach the minimal standards, be it knowledge of officials on the subject or maintenance of records. Training and infrastructure must be provided to improve the situation.

List of Mandals & Villages Surveyed in each district

Adilabad District

| Name of the Mandal | Name of the Gram Panchayat | Name of the Municipality |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Talamadugu | Waghapur | Nirmal |
| Tamsi | Yapalguda | |
| Adilabad | Ankoli | |
| Jainad | Anukunta | |
| Bela | Boranpur | |
| Narnoor | Umri | |
| Indervelly | Lingi | |
| Gudihathnoor | Khodad | |
| Utnoor | Antargaon | |
| Boath | Mavala | |
| | Gona | |
| | Khaparla | |
| | Ponnari | |
| | Sitagondi | |
| | Kolahari | |
| | Machapur | |
| | Kamalapur | |
| | Muthnoor | |
| | Bahadurpur | |
| | Sangvi | |
| | Mangurla | |
| | Ghanpur | |
| | Yenda | |
| | Sonala | |
| | Mannoor | |
| | Shantapoor | |
| | Khaapur | |
| | Tosham | |
| | Sunkidi | |
| | Tamsi | |

Srikakulam District

| Name of the Mandal | Name of the Gram Panchayat | Name of the Municipality |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Srikakulam | V N Puram | Srikakulam |
| Gara | Komathi | |
| Etcherla | Devadi | |
| Ponduru | Ravulavalasa | |
| Amadalavalasa | Cheguruvalasa | |
| Narasannapeta | Kallata | |
| Polaki | Gonti | |
| Hiramandalam | Kalingapatnam | |
| Sarubujjili | Gara | |
| Burja | Buravelli | |
| | Ponduru | |
| | Banam | |
| | Ampalam | |
| | Kuppili | |
| | Etcherla | |
| | Ibrahimbad | |
| | A A Valasa | |
| | Padali | |
| | Komanapalle | |
| | Chorlangi | |
| | Vedullavalasa | |
| | Chittivalasa | |
| | Akkulapeta | |
| | Thurakapeta | |
| | Belamam | |
| | Lankam | |
| | Gudem | |
| | Kajipeta | |
| | Ragolu | |
| | Batteru | |

Anantapur District

| Name of the Mandal | Name of the Gram Panchayat | Name of the Municipality |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Anantapur | Chennapalli | Tadipatri |
| Atmakur | Korrapadu | |
| Raptadu | K K Agraharam | |
| B K Samudram | B K Samudram | |
| Kudair | Cheddula | |
| Garladinne | Timmapuram | |
| Narpala | Aravakur | |
| Putlur | Korakodu | |
| Peddapappur | Kalagalla | |
| Singanamala | Udiripi Konda | |
| | Krishnapuram | |
| | Panchakarla | |
| | Koppalakonda | |
| | Garladinne | |
| | Padamatiyeleru | |
| | Athamakur | |
| | Madigubba | |
| | Narsamainakunta | |
| | Anantapur Rural | |
| | Rudrampet | |
| | Kakkalpalli | |
| | Bondalawada | |
| | Keshepalli | |
| | Nayanapalli | |
| | Gaganapalli | |
| | Kundirettipalle | |
| | Maroor | |
| | Prannayapalli | |
| | Bandameedapalli | |
| Puttur | | |

